

**THE “THLIPSIS” (PERSECUTION) IN ACTS 14:22 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE CONTEMPORARY BELIEVER IN CHRIST**

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Abstract

In Acts 14: 22 Paul teaches that God's people would go through much tribulation to enter God's kingdom. The Greek word, “**Thipsis**” is translated as tribulation. This seems to negate and contradict the promises of Jesus Christ in Matt 11:28-30: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden light*”. However, Jesus also relates to suffering in Christianity in Matt 7:13-14 (the narrow gate and difficult way) and self-denial and carrying one's cross in Matt 16:24-26, as He Himself did. Jesus meant that Christians would still be enjoying the peace of God that is beyond human understanding (Phil 4:7) despite tribulations. Tribulation connotes suffering, pains, trouble, trials, afflictions, and hardships that a child of God passes through as a result of his or her faith in Christ. Tribulations, by implication, have a crushing and squeezing effect on the child of God, so that the chaff is removed from his/her life to make him/her useful to God. Paul gives a list of some of the tribulations, such as troubles, hardships, persecutions, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword (Rom 8:35-36). He also states that Christians are not only to believe in Christ but to also suffer persecutions for His sake (Phil 1:29). This paper aims at looking at the place of tribulations in the life of a Christian, his response, benefits and how other members of God's household should respond to the tribulations of other members, as revealed in Church history.

Keywords: Church, Christianity, Suffering, Tribulation, Cross, Peace

I. Introduction

The sovereignty of God implies that no man or Satan has the power to do anything in this world without God's approval. Tribulations are necessary and an inevitable evil allowed by God in the life of His Child for His glory and the benefit of His children. God's children are not meant to pray for tribulations to come, but to be delivered from them (Matt 6:13). The Old Testament, even the most godly among them, underwent suffering, namely, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, the prophets, etc.

According to Amaowoh (2022:373), Satan is the major sponsor of afflictions being experienced by any child of God, as in the case of Job. These include all he does to separate Believers from God, discourage commitment to God's service, depopulate the Church of Christ, and cause the Believer to curse or blaspheme God or to backslide and return to Satan. Paul and Barnabas did

not hesitate to let the young Believers at Lystra and Iconium know that tribulations were a part of the normal in the Christian race. Jesus Christ refers to tribulation as “the cross”. Even our Lord Jesus was persecuted, hated, and killed, not because He sinned. He remarked that he was hated without cause and that Believers would be persecuted the same way He Himself was hated and persecuted (John 15:18-25). The Apostles went through tribulations and rejoiced for the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ (Acts 5:41).

II. Definition:

Tribulation: Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines “tribulation” as “distress or suffering resulting from oppression or persecution”. Its synonyms are affliction, agony, anguish, distress, excruciation, hurt, misery, pain, torture, woe, pain, rack, torment, and strait.

III. History of Persecution of the Church:

- 1.0. **Acts of the Apostles:** The early Church started to experience persecution shortly after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3). The religious leaders were greatly disturbed by the preaching of Peter about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and so they arrested Peter and John and put them in prison, but later released them the next day and threatened them not to preach about Jesus again. They were released because they could not find any reason to punish them, since the people were happy about the healing of the lame man who was over forty years old (Acts 4:1-22).
- 1.1 The second persecution followed the growth and miraculous works of the Church after the death of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, when the apostles were arrested and imprisoned by the religious leaders, but at night, the angel of the Lord released them to go and “speak to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). Being arrested again in the temple, they were charged for not obeying the command to stop preaching Jesus. However, following the brilliant speech of Gamaliel, the apostles were beaten and let go, warning them again not to preach Christ. Amazingly, the apostles rejoiced for the privilege of suffering for Christ, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41). They were not deterred in preaching Christ by the actions of the religious leaders (Acts 5:42).
- 1.2 Acts chapter 7 records the first Martyr of the early church, Stephen, one of the seven deacons. The religious leaders had false witnesses who accused him of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God (Acts 6:11-15). The death of Stephen led

to the scattering of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8). Saul is mentioned as the arrowhead of the persecution of the church (Acts 8:1-3). Scholars, however, see this persecution and the scattering of the church at Jerusalem as an act of God for the gospel to reach the Gentile world.

Fuller (1988:31-32) opined that God forced the first believers through persecution to reach out to the Gentiles and beyond Palestine. Halley (1965:567) posited that this was the first persecution of the church when the Church was about a year or two old. Halley sees the providence of God in the persecution which led to the fulfillment of (Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8). The persecution led to the founding of the church at Antioch.

1.3. Acts 12 records the killing of James, the brother of John, by Herod. Halley (1965:571) stated that James was the first of the Twelve to die. The same Herod was about to kill Peter, whom he put in prison, but God miraculously delivered him because the Church prayed earnestly.

1.4. Paul who was formerly called Saul later became the central figure in the story of persecution, according to God's word, that he would suffer many things for the sake of God's name (Acts 9:16), having many occasions of a "close to death experience" some of which he listed in (2 Cor 11:22-23; 12:7-10).

2.0. **Persecutions by Roman Empire:** Ajah (1989:25-29) listed the persecutions of the Church by the Roman Empire, stating that the persecutions were according to what Jesus envisaged when He talked about the gates of hell not prevailing against the Church (Matt 16:18). To Ajah, the gates of hell referred to the battles of persecution, namely:

- 2.1. **Nero (AD 54-68):** According to Ajah, this was the first and worst of the persecutions of the Church by Rome. Emperor Nero blamed the Church for the great conflagration, which devastated the Empire. This persecution claimed the lives of Peter and Paul.
- 2.2. **Domitian (AD 81-96):** Emperor Domitian wanted to be worshipped as "Lord and God," and so he hated Christians because they would not accept that. Under this persecution, Andrew, Mark, Onesimus, and Dionysius the Areopagite were slain, while John was banished to the island of Patmos.

- 2.3. **Trajan (AD 98-117):** Although he did not support the killing of Christians based on vague allegations, he was the Emperor who proscribed Christianity as a “secret society” and a “religious illicita”. Under him, Ignatius of Antioch and Symeon of Jerusalem were martyred.
- 2.4. **Hadrian (AD 117-138):** He upheld Trajan’s proscription of the religion and gave the Christian faith a criminal status worthy of death. Christians were allegedly accused of atheism, incest, and cannibalism, and blamed for any natural disaster in the Empire. Several Christian leaders were killed.
- 2.5. **Antonius Pius (AD 137-161):** He tried to protect Christians, but under him, Polycarp of Smyrna was killed.
- 2.6. **Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180):** This Emperor is said to have considered the Christian doctrine of immortality of the soul with its grave moral consequences, as vicious and dangerous to the welfare of the State, countless numbers of Christians were killed despite their several apologetics which they wrote him in defense of their faith. During his time, Justin Martyr was killed, a famous virgin by name Bladinda, and a boy of fifteen years, Ponticus, were also martyred. Bladinda is quoted as exclaiming, “I am a Christian, among us no evil is done”.
- 2.7. **From Commodius to Gallienus (AD 180-260):** Christians continued to be persecuted during this period of eighty years, under different Emperors. Notable virgins such as Potamiaena and Ursula, and Cyprian of Carthage gave their lives for the sake of their faith.
- 2.8. **Period of respite (AD 260-303):** Emperor Gallienus cancelled Trajan’s law, which proscribed Christianity, and promulgated another law in favour of it “a religio lecita”. Christians enjoyed peace, freedom, and appearances in public places under the regime of Gallienus.
- 2.9. **Diocletian (AD 303-311):** History records this period as the worst in terms of persecution of Christians. Christians were killed regardless of sex or age, and sacred books were burned.
- 2.10. **End of persecution (AD 311):** The conversion of Emperor Constantine marked the end of persecution in AD 311 when, according to Fuller (1988:41), the Emperor, in his edict of Milan (a decree), made Christianity a Legal (State) religion of Rome.

Christians remained courageous and resilient all through the persecutions. According to Ajah, one of the Church fathers, Tertullian, said, “The blood of the Christians is the seed of the Church”. According to Meta AI, before he was killed, Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 69-155) said, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?” According to Halley (1965:763) Christians used an underground building, well-constructed for the burial of slain brethren as place of worship during the persecutions. This was known as the catacombs.

Boyd (n.d) posited that Christian suffering is inseparable from following Christ, that it is divinely ordained, and no Christian should think that it is alien or foreign to him. He sees fiery trials as a furnace where gold and silver are refined, and that God uses suffering to purify His children.

IV. Persecution of Christians in the contemporary period: Meta AI gives the following on this topic that the persecution of Christians continues in various forms around the world in the contemporary period. According to Pew Research Center (2020), Christians face harassment in 145 countries; the persecution is in the form of physical violence, intimidation, imprisonment, torture, and even death for their faith. Some of these are government-sponsored persecution or religious extremism leading to death or displacement as refugees in some countries.

Wurmbrand (1084:32) narrated how Christians were tortured and gruesomely killed in Communist Russia. A Pastor was tortured with red-hot iron pokers and with knives, forced to stand for two weeks, asking him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly. Christians were hanged upside down and beaten so severely that their bodies swung back and forth under the blows. They were put in ice-box “refrigerator cells” which were so cold that they froze to death.

In an attempt to exterminate Christianity, Churches have been burned in some countries, and the preaching of the gospel has been either banned or restricted. All these constitute the “*thlipsis*” which Christians must undergo on earth according to (John 6:33). Like those in history, contemporary Christians are to remain steadfast in their confession, and not recant when their faith is being tried by persecution, hardships, etc.

V. Theology of suffering, Prosperity Gospel, and Theodicy:

Paul exhorted Believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to stand firm in the faith despite persecution, that through “**Thlipsis**” they would enter God’s kingdom. This has become a complex issue to Theologians and Bible Scholars, especially when Christianity is supposed to be “a bed of roses” according to (Matt 11:28-30). This matter has led to serious theological postulations, such as the Theology of suffering, Prosperity Gospel, and Theodicy.

1. **Theology of suffering:** According to Meta AI, Theology of suffering explores the biblical and Theological perspectives on suffering, pain, and evil. It seeks to understand why God allows suffering, how it relates to His sovereignty and goodness, and how Believers can respond to it. The basic themes in Theology of suffering are:-
 1. The problem of evil: The question of why God allows evil and suffering to exist in the world.
 2. The sovereignty of God: The understanding that God is in control of all things, including suffering.
 3. The purpose of suffering: The idea that suffering produces a greater purpose, such as spiritual growth, refinement, or witness.
 4. The role of sin: The recognition that sin is the primary cause of suffering in the world.
 5. The Hope of Redemption: The promise that God will ultimately redeem and restore all things, including those who suffer.

Biblical perspectives:

1. **Job:** The Book of Job explores the question of why the righteous suffer.
2. **Psalms:** Many Psalms express the pain and struggles of the Psalmist, while also affirming His goodness and sovereignty.
3. (Rom 5:3-5): Paul writes that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope.
4. (2 Cor 1:3-7): Paul describes God as the Father of all comfort and compassion, who comforts Believers in their afflictions or tribulations.
2. **Prosperity Gospel:** According to Meta AI, Prosperity Gospel, also known as Health and Wealth Gospel, is a Christian doctrine that emphasizes the idea that God rewards faithful Believers with material prosperity, good health, and success. It has been argued that the prosperity Gospel overemphasizes material and financial prosperity, over spiritual growth, and

with no emphasis on suffering, which the Bible unequivocally teaches. It misinterprets and takes biblical verses out of context to support its teachings, places no emphasis on holiness, and its preachers are known for the exploitation of vulnerable individuals to enrich themselves. They ought to balance their teaching based on God's word, which includes "Thlipsis" in the believer's walk with God, although they are blessed people of God.

Speaking on the Theology of suffering, (the) New Dictionary of Theology opined as follows: "While scripture says very little about the suffering of humanity generally, it speaks extensively about the suffering of God's people" (p 667). It gives two reasons why Christians suffer, namely, as a result of God's grace in their lives, and the consequence of fallen humanity in a fallen world (p 668).

3. Theodicy:

The concept of "Thlipsis" has bearing on the Theodicy, which is the branch of Theology, according to Meta AI, that deals with the problem of evil, suffering and injustice in the world, and attempts to justify or defend God's goodness, power, and wisdom in the face of these realities.

The key questions in Theodicy are:

1. Why does God allow evil and suffering?
2. How can a good and all-powerful God permit injustice and pain?
3. Is God's existence compatible with the presence of evil in the world?

Types of Theodicy:

1. Augustinian Theodicy: St. Augustine attributed evil to human sin and rebellion.
2. Irenaean Theodicy: St. Irenaeus saw evil as a necessary part of the soul-making process, allowing humans to develop and mature.
3. Process Theodicy: This view, which was developed by Philosophers like Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hart, emphasizes God's relational and dynamic nature, and sees evil as a result of human freedom and creativity.

Met AI observes that Theodicy is a complex and ongoing debate about God's goodness, sovereignty, and evil in the world. However, this article believes that God created a beautiful and pleasant world, but the sin of Adam and his descendants brought evil with it, including

diseases, poverty, hatred against one another, and death. Believers in Christ will either suffer for righteousness' sake (Matt 5:10-12; 24:9-10); their own mistakes that bring divine chastisement or discipline (2 Chronicles 7:12-14), or as a result of their being in the world of evil (John 16:33; Rom 8:18-24). Ultimately, both good and evil will work out good for the Believer, as in the case of Joseph (Gen 50:20 and Job 42:7-17. The supreme example of this fact is the suffering of Jesus Christ, which led to His exaltation as "LORD" (Phil 2:5-11). This is why Peter admonishes Believers to emulate Christ and His suffering for the benefits thereof (1 Peter 3:18-22; 4:12-19).

VI. The Benefits Of Tribulations

Amaowoh (2022) gave the following as the benefits of tribulations to Christians.

a. Purification

See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48:10).

But he knows the way that I take, when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold (Job 10:23).

The purest fuel in fractional distillation is the one with the highest boiling point. Christians who have passed through the hottest crucible are highly inflammable, that is, spiritual, to be the most highly anointed and used by God.

b. As part of a Believer's identity with Christ:

"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him" (Philippians 1:29-30). To illustrate Believers identity with Christ, He said, *"Remember the words that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).* The implication is that whatever happens to the Master will happen to the disciples.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:41).

c. As a cross to carry:

And Jesus Christ said, “*And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27)*. The cross is a symbol of suffering and self-denial in the Christian faith.

d. To draw the Believer closer to God and foster spiritual growth:

This is illustrated when God punishes His children for their sin to bring them back and closer to Him (Heb 12:3-11). Refer also to (2 Chron 7: 12-14). Some tribulations require that Believers confess and repent of their sins and return to God.

e. To test faith:

Some very good Christians have remained childless in legitimate marriage, some have lost their loved ones to untimely death, some have had to put up with certain chronic diseases, some are poor, some are unemployed, yet with good academic qualifications, and serving the Lord fervently. Job passed through it although he was righteous, and God and Satan knew this (Job 1:8-12). This is clearly stated by James “*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience*” (James 1:3) and Peter “*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise ad honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” (1Peter 1:7). Faith must be tested to prove its genuineness.

f. To give experience to Believers:

Paul declared, “*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope*” (Romans 5:3-4).

Believers will use their own experience to comfort, advise, and counsel others in their tribulations.

g. To balance lives as human beings in the world:

Job replied to his wife, who asked him to curse God and die, “*You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not also trouble?*” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:10).

Scientifically, it takes the positive and negative poles of electricity to generate power. This is the indisputable law of success, fruitfulness, and power in the universe. If good is female, evil

is male. If good is day, evil is night. If good is rainy season, evil is dry season. All for the good of the world and humanity (Rom 8:28). Good and evil are sovereignly allowed by God in the world for the good of humanity.

Life is based on the law of opposites. Great men and great women in all spheres of life, including preaching and Christian life, are those who have gone through beds of roses and crucibles of afflictions. Are we surprised that God asked the Israelites to eat the Passover meat/meals with bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8)? The godliest persons in the world have had their celebrations and sorrows, songs and tears, prosperity and losses. Yet, they still say and preach that GOD is GOOD.

h. To humble His children:

Paul said, “*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me*” (2 Corinthians 12:17).

This was Paul's understanding of “**Thlipsis**”. The thorn may have been sickness, which God refused to heal in answer to his prayers. Rejection by a church congregation despite a Pastor's enigmatic profile and fame can be allowed by God to humble him and prepare him for a lifting in due course. Hardship can make a person humble enough to fit into God's plan for his life to condescend to minister to low-profile people, according to God's purpose. Rejection can be humiliating to any man of God. Yet, great people like Moses, Samuel, David and Jesus experienced it. It takes humility to handle humiliation and prepare for exaltation.

i. As pruning

In the allegory of the vine, Jesus said,

“*He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful*” (John 15:2).

Tribulations come as a sharp knife used by the vine dresser or horticulturist to prune the tree or flower for more fruitfulness and beauty. The church worker may cry because of a bad or demotional transfer. But God is taking him to another level of fruitfulness, cutting off old branches for new ones to emerge. One cannot, however, ignore or deny the pains and

discomfort of the pruning. This is where patience and endurance are required in negative experiences of life.

j. To disgrace and prove Satan wrong

Satan was disgraced and proved wrong in Job's case, when he insinuated that Job worshipped God because he was blessed by God, that he would deny God in suffering. Job stood firm for God, and Satan was proved wrong (Job 1:6; 2; 1-9).

k. To be blessed:

The Bible says, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5: 10-12).

The child of God is blessed through persecution, even as he is also blessed through serving God. This is what Jesus taught in the Beatitudes. Vine (1996:69) defines “blessed” from the Greek word “eulogeo” as “to cause to prosper, to make happy or to bestow blessings on”.

l.. To prepare His people for heaven:

In the Beatitudes, Jesus taught the disciples that their reward for perseverance was heaven, “*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Tribulations can make the world loathsome to Believers, so that they long for the one where tribulations are absent. (2 Peter 3:13; Rev 21:1-7).

m. To prepare Believers for crowns:

Paul said, “*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:8).

n. To do Believers good, to bring about good:

Amaowoh (2012:44) opined that problems are meant to escort people into their destiny

Paul said, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28).

Joseph told his brothers in Egypt, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about as it is this day (Gen 50:20).

o. To reveal Himself to Believers:

Then Job replied to the Lord, *"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. (You asked,) Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know (You said.) Listen now and I will speak, I will question you, and you shall answer me. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:1-6).*

Most people have gained a deeper knowledge of God through tribulations, as in the case of Job.

p. Believers are warned not to suffer as evildoers

Peter exhorted the brethren, *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed, If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you, if you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:12-17).*

VII. What God Does In Tribulations

Amaowoh (2022) gave the following as what God will do when His children are going through “thlipsis”:-

God comforts Believers in their tribulations:

God does not abandon His children in their tribulations, but he comforts them. The Scripture says *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).*

God supplies sufficient grace:

He also gives sufficient grace to go through our tribulations. According to Paul, God told him "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God will be with them: Joseph went through tough times in his early life, but God was with him, according to the Bible, "*The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did. The Lord was with him, he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden*" (Genesis 39:2-3,21).

God will deliver them: According to the Psalmist, "*A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all*" (Psalms 34:19).

God causes them to triumph: Paul's testimony reveals this, "*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him*" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

God will bless those who are faithful in tribulation: Job was lavishly rewarded and blessed by God for standing firm in tribulation.

"And the LORD turned the captivity of job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also, gave him a piece of money, and everyone an earring of gold. So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job! more than his beginning for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima, and the name of the second, Kezia, and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, und saw his sons and his sons' sons even, four generations. So Job died being old and full of days". (Job 42.10-17)

Viii. Implications For Contemporary Believers

The Scripture cannot be broken concerning the inevitability of “**thlipsis**” in the contemporary period, “ *But thou has fully known y doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (1 Tim 10-12).

It matters so much how God’s children react to sufferings in this life, especially when they know they are relating well with the Lord, doing the best they can for Him. It should be noted that Satan does not attack those who are not profitable to God. He does not attack those who are not a threat to him. He is all out against those that are branded "DANGEROUS TO SATAN'S KINGDOM". In order to overcome the devil as God has promised, the child of God has to adopt a scriptural view and disposition towards “**Thlipsis**” (tribulations), as follows:-

a. Worship God

Vine (1996:687) gives the Greek word “proskuneo” for worship, which means “to make obeisance or do reverence.

David and Job showed a good example of this, after losing their children,

“*But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said. He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat*” (2 Sam:12-20). Job 1:20-22 records Job’s reaction to the death of his children, and how he also worshipped God..

Paul and Silas praised and prayed to God throughout the night when they were in prison, and God miraculously delivered them (Acts 16:16-27).

b. Patience: Tribulation requires patience, according to the Scripture, “*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance*” (Romans 5:3).

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12-13). “Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:3-4).

“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (James 5:10-11). To be patient is to trust God to have the final say. Vine (1996:462) gives “hupomone” as the Greek word for “patience” to mean “endurance as in trial, under undeserved affliction”.

c. Rejoice: The apostles did not mourn or murmur against God in persecution but they were happy for it; *“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41).* Peter wrote to Believers, saying *“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13).* Vine (1996:519) translates the Greek word “Chairo” to mean “rejoice” to be glad on so many grounds including afflictions, trials and persecutions.

The believer has to rejoice in **“Thipsis”** (tribulations) because it will redound to his/her blessing and prosperity of God's work as Paul testified; “Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ” (Philippians 1:12-13).

d. Stand firm in the faith:

Some tribulations can be so excruciating that the affected child of God may wish to deny his or her faith in God, especially when he or she feels that such an affliction is undeserving. There are Christians who married as virgins, yet they became childless. Paul was moved to write the Thessalonian brethren thus: *“So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer; I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts*

might have been useless. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:1-7).

Job said: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face" (Job 13:15).

e. Not be terrified: Paul encouraged the Philippians brethren; "Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved and that by God" (Philippians 1:28-29).

He or she should not be terrified because God is faithful.

f. Be confident in the existence, love and sovereignty of God:

Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end He will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25)

Tribulation can cause a Christian to deny God or doubt His existence. As mighty as John the Baptist was, he doubted whether Christ was the messiah he was preaching about when he was imprisoned by Herod (Matt 11:2-3).

g. Glory in tribulations

Vine (1996:268) translates the Greek word "kauchamai" to mean "to glory or glorying or to boast".

"Not only so, but we also rejoice (glory) in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance (Romans 5:3). He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

h. Take pleasure in tribulations: Paul said, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). Paul had no issues with suffering because he would suffer many things for the sake of His name (Acts 9:16).

i. Remain faithful: This was God's message to the Church at Smyrna, which suffered serious persecution, "I know your afflictions and your poverty yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer: I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:9-10). Vine (1996:223) gives the Greek word "pistos" to mean "faithful" used of God or Believers to mean "reliable or to be trusted".

j. Prayer: Prayer is a stabilizer in **thipsis**. James said, "*Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise*" (James 5:13).

Those going through afflictions should pray for deliverance. Prayer will not allow Satan to have a certificate of occupancy or permanent residency in the life of the Believer through problems, except God allows him, as in the case of Paul's thorn in the flesh.

k. Forgiveness: Like Jesus, Paul stressed the need to forgive persecutors,

"*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse*" (Romans 12:14). On the contrary: "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head*" (Romans 12:20). Jesus taught this in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:38-48). Job did this when he prayed for his friends, and it opened the doors for his prosperity (Job 42:10).

l. Self-examination to determine the real cause of the suffering, whether chastisement for sin or an attack from Satan: To do this, the Bible says, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith*" (2 Corinthians 13:5-6).

m. Remain in the ministry (Pastors): Jesus told His disciples they would suffer (Matt 10:16-26). They suffered many things, but they did not deny Christ or abandon their ministry.

Paul said, "*And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However; I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace*" (Acts 20:22-24).

n. Study God's Word: Like prayer, God's word is a pivot of stability in “**thlipsis**”. It provides comfort, (Rom 15:4) encouragement, and how to behave in” **thlipsis**”.

The Psalmist said, “*When I thought how to understand this. It was too painful for me - until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their end*” (*Psalms 73:16-17*).

0. Praise Him: David, Paul and Silas proved a good example of this, David said, “*I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth*” (*Psalms 34:1*). Paul and Silas praised God while being unjustly imprisoned (Acts 16).

p. Seek counsel from experienced men of God/professionals for solution as allowed by God. This may help to know the cause or source of the affliction or “**thlipsis**”, and the needed response.

IX. Proper Attitudes Expected of Co-Laborers/ Fellow Believers Towards Those That Are Suffering.

Amaowoh (2022) cited as follows:

a. They should weep with those who are weeping: “*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn*” (*Romans 12:15*).

Laughing or mocking while a colleague, brother or sister is suffering is unscriptural.

b. They should pray and intercede for them: The early Church did this, “*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him*” (*Acts 12:5*).

It is unfortunate that some Christians do not understand the importance and relevance of other members of the Body of Christ in the fellowship. Had the Church not prayed, Peter would have been killed like James.

c. Give Materials, financial and emotional support: The parable of the sheep and goats nation applies here, “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory, All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father,' take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world, For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I*

was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me," "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me". (Matthew 25:31-40).

d. Act as people who do not have adequate knowledge of cosmic phenomena: Avoid a "holier than thou" attitude, knowing that all humans are vulnerable to suffering. This was the mistake of Job's friends who accused him of wrong doing and was suffering the consequences of such actions.

e. Encourage them with the word of God

The Bible says, "*Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18).*

f. Show love and compassion: Jesus showed compassion to all who suffer, "*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*" (Matthew 9:35-36).

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14).

Job said, "*To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friends*" (Job 6:14).

g. Attack the devil behind the tribulation and not the victim (your colleague): This was the content and focus of the ministry of Jesus. He declared, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*" (Luke 4: 18-19).

h. Develop the spirit of comradeship and one Body approach: The Bible says that Believers are one body in Christ, like the human body, relates with one another in pain or joy.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though all its parts are many, they form one Body. So it is with Christ, If one part suffers, every part suffers with it, if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 26).

No spirit-filled child of God will speak exasperatingly or sarcastically like Peninnah did to Hannah, who was going through the trauma of childlessness (1 Sam 1:6). Wicked Jews did the same to Jesus when he was being crucified. They taunted him with harsh words and gave Him vinegar when he needed water to assuage His thirst. Job referred to these people as “miserable comforters” (Job 16:1-3).

Taunting exacerbates affliction. As God comforts those going through trouble, Believers should do the same (2 Cor 1:3-7).

In any case, like Joseph, Job, David, the Lord Jesus and Stephen, let those who are being persecuted or taunted in tribulation forgive and treat their assailants with kindness. Jesus was not only a Tupocrat (one who leads by example, according to Wikipedia, Meta AI and Amaowoh 2022) in compassion, righteousness, etc, but also a Tupocrat in suffering to be emulated by His followers.

According to Meta AI, “Tupocracy is a system of government or leadership style where leaders set positive and inspiring precedents through their own actions and behaviours. Is essentially leadership by example, where leaders demonstrate desired values, work ethic, and integrity consistently, inspiring and motivating others to follow suit. This is why Peter asked Believers to emulate the example of Jesus Christ in suffering, *“For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving an example, that ye should follow his steps; who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”* (1 Peter 2:21-22).

Conclusion:

Although no one should pray for “**Thlipsis**” (tribulations), they will come in various ways, whether one is righteous or not, in this world. While the ungodly will suffer because of their ungodly lifestyle both in this life and in the life to come, except they repent, the righteous will only suffer in this life, though not without due benefits of suffering as enumerated in this article. God does not expect His child or servant to backslide but to emerge victorious. This formed the message of encouragement which Paul gave the young converts in Lystra, Leconium and Antioch and the message is relevant for contemporary Believers. “**Thlipsis**” does not negate

or contradict (Matt 11:28-30). God gives peace in “**thlipsis**”, the “Shalom” in trouble that brings joy in sorrow. The understanding of “**thlipsis**” is that it refines the Believer and prepares him for eternal life and rewards as it did for Jesus who was given the title “LORD”, after He suffered up to the point of dying ignominiously, although vicariously, on the cross. Happily, God will not abandon the Believer in “**thlipsis**”, albeit, the Believer is warned not to suffer for sins he committed. Believers need to encourage those who are undergoing “**thlipsis**” as the early Church brethren did. Though Christians may be persecuted for their faith, Matt 16:18 remains valid. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church.

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