

7 years Tribulation & Those who endured 1260 years of trial

There is increasing discussion of 7 years of Tribulation for the Church. But there is no reference whatsoever to a seven year tribulation period in the Bible. Not once.

Where might 7 years have come from?

There is reference in Revelation 11 to 42 months and 1260 days. In Revelation 12 there is reference to 1260 days and a time, times & half a time. Each expression equates to 3.5 years, the same length as the Lord's ministry.

Revelation 11.

- 42 months: the holy city shall they tread under their feet
- 1260 days: my two witnesses shall prophesy clothed in sackcloth

Nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves....after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. (Rev. 11:8-11)

This ends that prophecy and the chapter then describes the French Revolution.

Revelation 12 goes back in history to the time of Pagan Rome, which is 'the Dragon'.

- 1260 days: the woman in the wilderness has a place prepared of God, that they should feed her.
- Time, times & half: the woman is nourished from the face of the serpent.

There is no justification for adding any of the times together, as they expressed in a way to show they relate to different events. The context implies they are overlapping events, as the two are paralleled. The 'treading down' is paralleled to the 'prophecy', and 'to feed' is equated 'to nourish'. It is logical that very soon after the 'holy city' is trodden on, that the witnesses speak.

Remembering that Revelation was written to the servants of all ages (and was quoted extensively in the early ecclesiastical writings) and the book specifically says,

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: (Rev 1:1)

and that the earthquake of Revelation 11 has been understood to refer to the French Revolution.

What does history say of the tribulation of the servants of Christ before 1789?

There was a time when so called Christians dis-obeyed the spirit of Christ's direction to not kill or hate, and oppressed and killed, ignoring Christ's words in Revelation,

He that leads into captivity shall go into captivity: he that kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. (Rev 13:10)

Despite a paucity of written material from the Dark Ages of the 5th to the 10th century, evidence survives that refers to a Council of bishops at Carthage where Flavius Augustus Honorius in 410AD made an edict imposing death for heresy. This is the first time in the history of the world that a supposedly Christian regime, in the name of Christ, would kill other Christians. Honorius followed this up with another edict in 415. These applied to the African

part of the empire. Justinian, the Byzantine Emperor (527-565), for heresy ordered death by fire and confiscation of possessions by the State in his Codex Iustiniani (CJ 1.5.), ratifying and extending the impact of the decrees of his predecessors the Emperors Arcadius and Flavius Augustus Honorius.

The action of the Byzantine Church was followed by the Western Church. In 1184, the Roman Catholic Synod of Verona made burning the official punishment for heresy, to technically not spill blood, though in fact it was no different. This decree was reaffirmed by the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215 and the Synod of Toulouse in 1229.

From 1100AD there is documentary evidence of a minority struggle that may have gone back to the 5th century.

A poem of 1100AD has the line, "He that will not swear, or speak evil, or lie....is called Vaudois and the cry is 'death to him'". This poem celebrates the Vaudois who by that time were widespread throughout the Swiss Alps. They were Christians who were persecuted to death by supposed Christians to such an extent that by the 14th Century they only existed in remote mountain valleys. Their statement of faith was simple, beginning, "We believe there is one God alone who is Spirit creator of all things, Father of all, who is over all, who we adore in spirit and in truth". They even had a seminary at Pra del Tor where they hand wrote copies of the New Testament to learn by heart. Their leaders devoted themselves to the study of the Bible. Such people one would have thought would be valuable. But such was the perversion of the age that the so called 'Christian' religious power of the day granted 'remission of sins' for killing any of the Vaudois! Yet the Vaudois behaved just as Christ did, and accepted the tribulation he predicted,

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. (Revelation 12:11)

Even their so called 'Christian' enemies knew they loved the Bible. The religious authority of the day called in the state troops to aid them in eradicating the Vaudois. In 1393 Val Louise was depopulated completely and hundreds of infants were suffocated in their cradles. The adherents were scattered from Geneva to Venice, but by the fifteenth century most had retreated to the high Alps. But small pockets persisted in the lowlands. Like Christ those who would not kill or hate or lie survived through over 400 harrowing years of tribulation, until they allied themselves with the Swiss national reformers, and then merged into the reformation.

There may have been others such as these, because in 1523 Switzerland became a Protestant state, even before Luther's work in Germany. And from 1522-1532 there was a Europe-wide outbreak of protestant reformation. Such a widespread movement could only arise if there had been suppressed Christian protest everywhere in Europe.

In 1525 the Brethren in Christ emerged in Zurich with just 20 men to take up the mantle of the Vaudois (some surnames carry through both). All were to be burned, drowned or beheaded within 5 years in places far across Europe. But before they were killed they made impressive converts who carried on their work. Many of these also were burnt alive, drowned or in other ways executed. But by 1526 there were at least 100 organised groups who had been influenced by the 20 men, who called for Christianity to be solely based on the Bible.



From this time the record of the court trials and the defences of those who chose death rather than recant their heresy have been kept by the perpetrators. Generally the leaders and preachers were targeted, so the death toll does not reflect the impact of the executions or the extent of the congregations.

A famous example was a former priest Michael Sattler, who having been trained as a scholar had come to read the Bible for himself. He and his wife were tried publicly in Rottenburg on a series of quasi-religious political charges based on mis-applied legality in 1527. His public answer was recorded, as was his calmness, and the pair's meek acceptance of insult. If there was a trial like Christ's this was the one. He was hastily killed after a clearly botched trial, and had his tongue cut out and was burnt. His wife, who refused to recant despite being offered a place in the castle, was drowned. If anything the outward legality and the clear miscarriage of justice worked in the accused' favour, in the long run, as the execution shocked the town. It had such an impact that 430 years later a plaque was placed to remember his death.

But this was only the tip. From 1527 in the Tyrol groups of dissenting Christians formed, and had such success that the authorities in 1529 made a Mandate of the death penalty for dissent. One visitor saw "stakes burning all along the inn valley". By 1530 in that region over 1000 people had been killed, many burnt. Many more were made homeless. These noted how similar their fate was to the faithful,

Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (Hebrew 11:35-40)

Some of the homeless found refuge in Moravia and Poland. But Moravia came under the control of the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand, and the Jesuits in 1535 encouraged him to issue an edict to extinguish dissent. Despite a petition which ran, "We brethren, who love God and his word, banished from many countries for the Name of God... that have forsaken the world and all iniquity..we have occupied ourselves with heavy toil...We may not overthrow God's law to observe man's law, although it may cost gold and body and life". They were methodically massacred. A single contemporary counted and recorded the death of 2,173 of his friends and family. This was only a fraction of the real number killed, as the depopulation of Moravia was so great that Vienna passed a special law allowing men to take 2 wives. A few hid in the forests and trekked out where ever they could go, from Hungary to Romania some going far into Russia.

In parallel between 1526-1530 at least 3,000 *protestant* dissenters were killed by Lutherans. William Tyndale, a man now honoured, was hounded from country to country and met his death for heresy at the stake in Brussels in 1536.

In Italy there was a growth of dissent, but it was quickly broken up in 1542 with arrests of the leaders and the Inquisition sending most into exile all over Europe, mostly in Slavic lands but some ending up in London. In London as early as 1535, 10 were burnt at the stake for preaching their heresy, and thereafter there were regular burnings at the stake through the 1500s. A small inoffensive group called the Brethren, who spoke of the love of God in giving Christ also suffered for their pacifism. In England they even had a Parliamentary Commission appointed to hunt them out.

From 1546 the numbers of dissenters grew in Poland until 1569 they could found a settlement at Krakow and a college. This however was closed by the Jesuits in 1638. In 1660 a decree was passed of expulsion and a great migration of thousands of people began to Prussia, Silesia, Moravia and Russia. At least 400 went to Ottoman Transylvania. Some went to England. The reason they went to England was possibly due to a famous long running case in Parliament that began in 1646 over the dissident beliefs of John Biddle that resulted in his imprisonment. He was released in 1652, imprisoned in 1654 and on the brink of a death penalty he was released by Oliver Cromwell in 1655. In 1662 Biddle was arrested again while holding a Bible class and died of fever in prison.



A Bible Class held for safety in mid-river

Cromwell and Biddle mark the turning point where Christian dissent might mean imprisonment but not death. Before that in 1612 Bartholomew Legate had been famously burnt at the stake. The last person to be burnt at the stake for heresy in England in Staffordshire on 11 April 1612, was Edward Wightman, a Baptist who after intense study of the Bible had publicly argued for reform of doctrine. These executions if 1612 perhaps had begun to disgust a new sensitivity that was arising, brought by the very people who they targeted. In any case literacy in Britain and Europe was rising and had been since 1499 due to the output of increasing numbers of printing presses, and despite laws banning books on specific doctrines and confiscation and burning of books, by this time there was no way to keep the lid on dissent.

Clearly this period of 'tribulation' was much longer than 3.5 years or even 7 years. From 410AD, when the first political edict due to religious interference caused people to be put to death for religious heresy, it is nearly a full 1260 years until the 1662 death of Biddle.

It is a full 1260 years from 410 Edict to the 1670 publication of Baruch de Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. (Spinoza shows that the Bible gives no support to intolerance of religious authorities or their interference in civil or political affairs). This text helped break the power of coercive state religion. In that time countless people died, and were, like Christ, treated as criminals, for their adherence to a simple understanding of the Bible.

For those who propose that these passages in Revelation relate to a *future* 7 years of tribulation, how can they ignore such suffering in the past? Was not that era of tribulation important to Christ? Then also those proposing a future 7 years have to give good reasons that deal with 3 serious objections:

1. They need to prove the error of past exposition of sincere Bible students, who lived in an era of tribulation, such as Joseph Mede (1586-1639) and Isaac Newton(1643-1727). Both applied the 1260 days to the 1260 years of history since the time of Constantine. Newton in his Observations, published in 1733, details the source documents and implies the period of tribulation begins some time after the reign of Theodosius, which ends in 395AD and could be dated from 410AD. Adding 1260 to 395-410AD is 1655-1670AD (the years which Newton was 12 -27 years old) shows Newton believed he lived in the era of 'sackcloth & down-treading' and it explains why Newton kept his writings on the Bible secret, but was confident that there would be an opening for them after his lifetime, after the end of his 1260 year era. He was right, as Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) owned a copy, and Thomas Jefferson was behind the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1779, 1786), prefiguring the the French Revolution of 1789.
2. It needs to be proved that 1260 days cannot be 1260 years, for no serious Bible expositor today would predict a *future* tribulation of 1260 years! Yet nearly every time period in the Bible is based on the day for a year principle including the one predicting the coming of Christ (Messiah) where a 'week', or 7 days, is equated to 7 years. This is set out as a clear principle by no less that God in Ezekiel, “For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shall thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year” (Ezekiel 4:5-6)
3. It needs to be established that the two periods of 1260 days (3.5 yeas) are not parallel and can be added together to make 7 years. If they were to be added, why is it not clearly written as it is in Daniel 9 when speaking of the times to Messiah?

The Revelation passage also does not mention the word 'tribulation', there is oppression, there is mourning and there is a witness. But there is a future time of tribulation.

The time of Tribulation such as there never was

Daniel speaks of an end-time period of tribulation,

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time:

and at that time thy (Daniel's) people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1-2)

Whereas the passage in The Revelation is only understood by the *servants* and only relates to the *servants*, the passage in Daniel is speaking of a *nation*, specifically in the context, the nation of Israel. Israel would experience a time of trouble. Considering that they have been carried to captivity a few times, and that the last time of trouble for Israel from 66-70AD Christ described as their worst to date, the time of trouble before the resurrection will be even more severe. Daniel's prophecy conforms to Christ's,

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Luke 21:25-27)

It is to be noted again that the distress is not among the *servants* of Christ- but rather among the *nations*. Nowhere is there any duration given for the international distress. However, the implication is in both Daniel and Christ's prophecy that Christ's return will follow it.