

## **Roadblocks to Healing: Traditional Understanding of Paul's 'Thorn'**

(Notes from "Is A Life of Wellness Possible & How Do You Achieve it?"

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By Ann Windsor ©



### **What was Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'?**

There has been a lot of speculation about this, but Paul tells us exactly what it was....a "messenger of Satan"/Young's Literal: "the Adversary. (2 Corinthians 12:7).

I would encourage you to read 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul is defending his apostleship due to false teachers that had come in to undermine his work and his list of credentials proving his work in Vs. 22-30. Here you will see what he calls, 'infirmities'.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was **given** to me a **thorn** in the flesh, the **messenger** of Satan to **buffet me**, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart(leave me alone/go) from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (For words highlighted, see definitions below.)

Nowhere in the New Testament does this word messenger or angel (angelos in the Greek) ever refer to sickness or disease. It always refers to sentient, living beings (usually angels, but sometimes humans).

Paul did not use a Greek word for sickness or disease in this verse. He specifically used the Greek word for 'angel', and he told us that it was a demonic angel, a messenger of Satan.

Notice in the passage above that Paul did not ask God to heal him, he asked God to take away (aphistemi) the 'thorn'. There is a big difference.

This is the same Greek word that is used in Acts 12:10 when the angel 'departed' (aphistemi), from Peter.

In all of the 15 other occurrences of this word in the Greek New Testament it is never used in reference to sickness or healing (see Luke 2:37, 4:13, 8:13, 13:27, Acts 5:37, 38, 15:38, 19:9, 22:29, 1 Timothy 4:1, 6:5, 2 Timothy 2:19, and Hebrews 3:12).

Paul wasn't asking for a sickness to be healed, he was asking God to take away this demonic harassment. Nowhere in the New Testament is there even a single example of anyone pleading with God to heal them.

Jesus never plead with God to heal anyone.

The apostles never did.

No one ever plead with Jesus to heal them.

This is not how healing works....pleading for God to come and heal, and this is never how Paul healed anyone in the New Testament.

Paul was not pleading for a healing!

He was pleading to be delivered from persecutions and hardships.

Demons are personalities just as people are, except that they do not have their own physical bodies.

Paul specifically said that his 'thorn' was a demon which was bringing suffering upon him everywhere he went, which is exactly the same way that a 'thorn' in the flesh is used everywhere else in Scripture. It has nothing to do with sickness or disease.

When we read the book of Acts and all of Paul's letters, it is easy to see that it was never a part of Paul's doctrine or teachings that sickness is a 'thorn in the flesh' to be patiently endured.

God strengthened Paul to complete his ministry in spite of this demonic harassment. Paul grew in grace and understanding of how to deal with demonic spirits. This can be seen in comparing 2 Corinthians to Ephesians 6:10-19. Second Corinthians was written 5 years before Ephesians. At that time Paul had not received his understanding recorded in Ephesians 6 about the levels of demonic powers and how to deal with them: "For we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities, with powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with wicked spirits in heavenly places, therefore take unto you the whole armor of God.....".

Paul's conversion: 33/34 AD

Paul's vision: 41 AD

Corinthians written: 55 AD

Ephesians written: 62 AD

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Word Definitions:

**Infirmities:** Strong's G769            Gk astheneia

Lacking strength (this is not a lack of strength caused by sickness but by labors in the Gospel with the accompanying hardships.)

**Given:** Strong's G1325 Gk didomi

This word has various meanings according to context. One: Paul wanting to give himself to the mob at Ephesus, Acts 19:31.

Some versions:

The Living Bible: "I was given a PHYSICAL condition to prick my pride." (We can see where the idea of a physical infirmity comes from when reading various versions)

Message: "I was given a handicap to keep me in touch with my limitations." (The intent here could mean a physical infirmity or opposition/persecution.)

NIV: "To keep me from being conceited, to torment me."

Amplified: "To rack, buffet, harass"

Bible versions contribute greatly to a 'physical ailment' interpretation.

**Thorn:** Strong's G4647 Gk skolops

A point to prick with; a splinter; a sharp stake; to pierce my flesh - a constant bodily ailment or infirmity. (Again, this meaning has been applied primarily to a 'bodily ailment or infirmity rather than persecutions, harassment etc.)

Old Testament use of 'thorn':

Numbers 33:25

but if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Joshua 23:13

Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

**Messenger:** Strong's G32 Gk angelos

An angel, an envoy sent by God, man or Satan.

(For some reason this is automatically interpreted to be a messenger from Satan sent by God! Compare this with James 1: God is light and in Him is no darkness

at all. Let no man say when he is tempted that he is tempted of God, for God tempts no man with evil.)

**Buffet:** Strong's G2852 Gk kolaphiza

To strike with the fist; maltreat with violence; insults; insolent language

Here is a list of Paul's persecutions:

Paul's persecutions::

Paul's first persecution is described in Acts 9:

Act 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Act 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

Antioch of Pisidia:

Act 13:45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes (that came to hear Paul's message), they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

Act 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coast.

Iconium:

Act 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

Act 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

Paul moves on to Lystra where he heals a lame man.

Act 14:19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

(The city of Lystra is noteworthy for being the probable home of Timothy, Paul's young protégé (Acts 16:1). Lystra was located in Asia Minor in the area now known as Turkey. Lystra was about a day's journey (20 miles) from Iconium, another city Paul visited. 2 Cor. 1:8-9: 8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead. (STRONGS G610: apokrima, an answer - akin to No. 1, denotes a judicial "sentence," 2Cr 1:9, AV, and RV, margin, or an "answer" (RV, text), an answer of God to the Apostle's appeal, giving him strong confidence. In an ancient inscription it is used of an official decision.) Acts 14:19b&20: having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city supposing he had been dead. However, as the disciples stood around about him, he rose up, and came into the city; and the NEXT DAY he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Return trip:

Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved Act 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Jerusalem:

Act 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Act 16:20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, Act 16:21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. Act 16:22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. (Paul & Silas in prison)

Thessalonica:

Act 17:5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Berea:

Act 17:13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Corinth: after preaching 1 ½ yrs., Judaizers appear:

Act 18:12 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat,

Ephesus:

Paul goes on preaching and eventually winds up at Ephesus. At first he preaches in the synagogues but eventually is forced out and disputes instead in the school of Tyrannus. Eventually everyone in Asia has heard of his message, so much so that the idol crafters begin fearing for their jobs and decided to start a riot. Act 19:29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

Greece and there again religious Jews wish him harm:

Act 20:3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria,

Jerusalem:

Act 21:27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Act 21:28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. Act 21:29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) Act 21:30 And all the city

was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

Act 21:31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Here religious Jews from Asia (they had heard his preaching abroad although he was not preaching in Jerusalem) are leading a mob to kill Paul due to past teachings against the law. Paul is saved by the Roman authorities, but the Jews keep plotting to kill him. They form pacts (Acts 23:12). They draw up plans (Acts 23:15). They influence the Romans to keep Paul imprisoned (Acts 24:27). They attempt to get Roman authorities to go along with murder (Acts 25:2-3).

Paul is bound by the Romans for 4 years, not due to Roman law, but because the Jews wished him bound. Unwritten in Acts is Paul's subsequent meeting with Nero, Nero's plan to scapegoat the Christians for a fire in Rome, and Paul's execution on false charges.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8, he said that 'in Asia he despaired of life'. He is referring to the time that he was stoned and left for dead. He goes on to say that he 'had a sentence of death', Vs 9.

"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God Who raises the dead."

The phrase, 'sentence of death' doesn't seem to be compatible with the phrase, 'we trust in the God Who raises the dead'. A sentence of death seems a finality.

Another word you find in Vine's Dictionary for this word, 'sentence' is ANSWER. Let's read this verse again and insert 'answer':

"We had the ANSWER to death within ourselves....."

Paul did rise up, went into the city and was found on the road traveling the next day. It appears the 'ANSWER' answered! Even though he was stoned, Paul knew within himself that he had not yet finished his race/course and he trusted that God would raise him up.



You have the ANSWER in you also!

The ANSWER to demonic harassment.

The ANSWER to persecution.

The ANSWER to anything that comes out of the kingdom of darkness.