

# A Short Note on Paul's “thorn in the flesh.” What is it?

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## Introduction

Many seem to believe that the ‘thorn in the flesh’ was a trial that Paul was going through, such as a sickness or disease. Is that the case?

In this very short study I attempt to ascertain what this ‘thorn’ was – at least acquire a broad idea of what such is from the Scriptures.

First of all, here is the statement by Paul:

“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. 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. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 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. 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. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.” (II Cor 12:5-11)

From the above we can see that the *thorn* was a "messenger from Satan" – not a disease or other weakness. *Thorn* is used typologically of someone or something that is continuing to 'bug' or 'harass' one.

Further information is contained in the appendices at the rear of this article.

## Old & New Testament Revelation

Before we continue with the New Testament on this issue, let us take a look at what the Old Testament has to say. For so many concepts one reads throughout the New Testament are just based on the Old Testament – the former is based on the latter and enriches it. It in no way replaces it.

"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. Moreover it shall come to pass, *that* I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them." (Num 33:54-56)

"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." (Josh 23:12-14)

"And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as **thorns** in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Judges 2:2-4)

"And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory. For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among **thorns**. (Jer 4:2-4)

"For *they are* impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD. {impudent: Heb. hard of face} And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they *are* a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and **thorns** be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house. {briars...: or, rebels}

And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they *are* most rebellious. {most...: Heb. rebellion}" (Ezek 2:4-9)

"And there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor *any* grieving **thorn** of all *that are* round about them, that despised them; and they shall know that I *am* the Lord GOD.

Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob." (Ezek 28:21-25)

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

And some fell among **thorns**; and the **thorns** sprung up, and choked them:

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matt 13:3-9)

"For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: {by: or, for}

But that which beareth **thorns** and briers *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned." (Heb 6:4-8)

The aforementioned scriptures reveal that *thorns* are real people – used by Satan.

I could also add the many wailings of David in the Psalms about how he was harassed and turned upon even by folk he thought were good men:

"To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, *A Psalm* of David.>

Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication.

Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise;

Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me.

My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.

Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me.

{overwhelmed: Heb. covered}

And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! *for then* would I fly away, and be at rest.

Lo, *then* would I wander far off, *and* remain in the wilderness. Selah.  
I would hasten my escape from the windy storm *and* tempest.  
Destroy, O Lord, *and* divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city.  
Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow *are* in the midst of it.  
Wickedness *is* in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets.  
For *it was* not an enemy *that* reproached me; then I could have borne *it*: neither *was it* he that hated me *that* did magnify *himself* against me; then I would have hid myself from him:  
But *it was* thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. {mine equal: Heb. according to my rank}  
We took sweet counsel together, *and* **walked unto the house of God in company**. {We...: Heb. Who sweetened counsel}  
He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant. {broken: Heb. profaned}  
*The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war *was* in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet *were* they drawn swords." (Ps 55:1-14, 20-21)

Here is a horrible situation that David experienced – being ‘stabbed in the back’ by someone he thought could be trusted. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

He, like Christ, was buffeted by demons.

“Be not far from me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help. {none...: Heb. not a helper}  
Many **bulls** have compassed me: strong **bulls** of Bashan have beset me round.  
They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, *as* a ravening and a roaring lion. {gaped...: Heb. opened their mouths against me}” (Ps 22:11-13)

Bull demons are very powerful, senior ranking demons which influence princes and senior political leaders. Refer to my article titled *The ‘Lord of Hosts and the ‘Elemental Spirits of the Universe’* for further information on these strange, demented creatures.

There are many other such examples in the book of Psalms, but the above will suffice.

So what are these thorns – according to the Scriptures?

Clearly they are other human beings! These are people who are agents of Satan – being used by him to annoy Christians; slander them; get them pushed out of the assembly; not utilising their spiritual gifts and talents.

Some of them could be false ministers (wolves), false members or non-Church of God folk. Anyone whom Satan can use to his evil ends.

In other words, they do everything to try and undermine the salvation of the Christian – because they are consumed by the way of GET, rather than the way of GIVE. As Herbert W Armstrong once wrote:

"Human nature is vanity. It is self-centered. It is lust, greed, envy, reacting in resentment and hatred. God's law is love! And true love is outgoing concern, with desire to give, to share, to help, to serve—as much concerned about others' welfare as its own." (*Plain Truth*, April 1968)

## The Messenger of Satan

Such a messenger – led by the way of GET – which came against Paul could have been a demon - or a human used by a demonic spirit to undermine and adversely affect Paul and his good works. Jealousy would have been an excellent motivating force that Satan's demons could have used for this purpose. Was it not jealousy – the spirit of competition – that drove Lucifer to try to undermine God?

Notice what happened to Herbert Armstrong in his former association:

"From the very first, in my association with these Sardis brethren, I was treated by their ministers as a greenhorn tail-ender. The Sardis brethren all loved me. But their **jealous** ministers used every device constantly to humiliate me and persecute. God blessed my efforts to produce 'fruit,' but their efforts produced none!" ("History of the Beginning and Growth of the Worldwide Church of God," *Good News*, May 1980).

"Always the brethren ... had been more than friendly to me – they really did love me and my wife. It was their **jealous** ministers, who were fruitless in the work, who persecuted me" (*Good News*, August 1980 page 4).

But why did they persecute Herbert Armstrong?

People compare themselves with others. They then see the other person as a threat to themselves or to their son or daughter. You may have experience in certain areas or possess skillsets that they are jealous of (eg public speaking, research, writing, policy development, project management etc, etc).

They therefore campaign against you and offer opportunities to people that will make themselves look good, emulating what goes on in the world. This ensures that you have no part to play in your own congregation. This is an attempt to force the true Christian out or at least to the fringes of the church. They and their allies can then trumpet that so-and-so is not attending regularly and should not participate in the church.

This is commonly known as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' and a commonly used ploy in the world. It is Satanic and reveals what spirit is working through such a one.

They do this without ever having a regular performance assessment and get paid for doing it! How cunning Satan is!

Working on the mind of the person filled with jealousy would not have taken much effort from Satan or his demons! With a little prodding, the jealousy would have turned into slander, lies, hatred and undermining the good works of Herbert Armstrong, Paul or any one of us.

Let us return to Paul:

"I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from **envy and rivalry**, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice." (Phil 1:12-18, RSV)

The *Life Application Bible* explains Philippians as follows:

"Paul had an amazingly selfless attitude. He knew that some were preaching to build their own reputations, taking advantage of Paul's imprisonment to try to make a name **for themselves** [the way of GET – Craig]. Regardless of the motives of these preachers, Paul rejoiced that the gospel was being preached. Some Christians serve for the wrong reasons. Paul wouldn't condone, nor does God excuse, their motives, but we should be glad if God uses their message regardless of their motives."

The *Nelson Study Bible* adds:

"Those preaching from envy and strife were not heretics ... But apparently they were **jealous** of the attention Paul received, and they determined to sow seeds of dissension in order to cause him trouble."

Note, too, the following comments from John Gill's *Exposition of the Entire Bible*:

"... [These ministers did not act because] of '**envy**' to Christ, whom they preached, but of **envy** to the apostle; they envied his gifts, his usefulness and success in the ministry; and he being now in bonds, they thought it a proper opportunity to exert themselves... hoping they should meet with the same success, and gain great honour and applause in the church ..."

Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Bible* elaborates:

"It would seem ... there was a party which was **jealous** of the influence of Paul, and which supposed that this was a good opportunity to diminish his influence, and to strengthen their own cause..."

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* agrees, stating:

"Some indeed [were] preaching Christ even for **envy**, that is, to carry out the **envy** which they felt towards Paul ... they wished through **envy** to transfer the credit of its progress from him to themselves."

Does the above sound familiar?

Sure does! Many of us have experienced this GET behaviour.

So how did the Satanic messenger strike at Paul? Was it via causing him a sickness – the infirmity of verses 5 and 10?

Infirmity may mean disease or sickness of cause (see 1Tim 5:23 for instance). Strong's tells us:

“**769** ἀσθένεια *astheneia* {as-then'-i-ah}

**Meaning:** 1) want of strength, weakness, infirmity 1a) of the body 1a1) its native weakness and frailty 1a2) feebleness of health or sickness 1b) of the soul 1b1) want of strength and capacity requisite 1b1a) to understand a thing 1b1b) to do things great and glorious 1b1c) to restrain corrupt desires 1b1d) to bear trials and troubles

**Origin:** from 772; TDNT - 1:490,83; n f

**Usage:** AV - infirmity 17, weakness 5, disease 1, sickness 1, 24.”

The same Greek word is used in Rom 8:26:

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our **infirmities**: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. {because: or, that}

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.”

So, it can refer to something spiritual that troubles one – not necessarily a sickness. It is something or someone sent by Satan to stir up persecution. You can almost 'feel' the vibes exuded by such ones. It is a sickening, negative energy. Definitely demonic.

This does not mean that this was the only occasion that Paul was buffeted by demons or demon-influence people. It does infer, however, that it was one of the worst situations he experienced in relation to demon issues.

Earlier in chapter eleven Paul writes:

"Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;  
*In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;  
In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.  
Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.  
Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?  
If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." (II Cor 11:25-30)

The above explains many of his infirmities, weaknesses and pain – it was continual harassment. What an ordeal!

But nothing has changed. Satan still harasses God's people. That harassment can – and does – emanate even from within the Church of God. It is something that God allows.

Just read Job 1:1-12 where God permitted Satan to harass righteous Job, although in this situation it was not a human *thorn*, but the most powerful of evil spirits.

## Conclusion

One may search the scriptures from beginning to end and one will not find anything that relates sickness to a messenger of Satan. Nothing in principle or in typology may be found anywhere in the Bible for such an interpretation.

For weakness of the flesh can result in sickness and disease – alas, this just happens to all of us – it is merely a part of life.

But having a Satanic messenger come against one is not normal.

It is only when one considers the Old Testament and bases one's New Testament readings upon the Old Testament, does one fully understand the meaning of this Scripture.

The lesson is this:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may **be of God, and not of us.**" (II Cor 4:7)

"**Not boasting** of things without *our* measure, *that is*, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, {enlarged...: or, magnified in you}

To preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you, *and not to boast* in another man's line of things made ready to our hand. {line: or, rule}

**But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.**

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." (II Cor 10:15-18)

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. **In the world ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world". (John 16:33)

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our **infirmities:** for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom 8:26)

"Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, **out of weakness, were made strong,** waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." (Heb 11:34)

"My brethren, **count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;**

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing". (James 1:2-4)

Can we resist Satan's agents set to buffer us?

Can we learn the lesson?

For it is a simple lesson in the way of GIVE versus GET.

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## Appendix: Easton's Bible Dictionary

(1.) Hebrews *hedek* (Proverbs 15:19), rendered "brier" in Micah 7:4. Some thorny plant, of the Solanum family, suitable for hedges. This is probably the so-called "apple of Sodom," which grows very abundantly in the Jordan valley. "It is a shrubby plant, from 3 to 5 feet high, with very branching stems, thickly clad with spines, like those of the English brier, with leaves very large and woolly on the under side, and thorny on the midriff."

(2.) Hebrews kotz (Genesis 3:18; Hosea 10:8), rendered akantha by the LXX. In the New Testament this word akantha is also rendered "thorns" (Matthew 7:16; 13:7; Hebrews 6:8). The word seems to denote any thorny or prickly plant (Jeremiah 12:13). It has been identified with the *Ononis spinosa* by some.

(3.) Hebrews na'atzutz (Isaiah 7:19; 55:13). This word has been interpreted as denoting the *Zizyphus spina Christi*, or the jujube-tree. It is supposed by some that the crown of thorns placed in wanton cruelty by the Roman soldiers on our Saviour's brow before his crucifixion was plaited of branches of this tree. It overruns a great part of the Jordan valley. It is sometimes called the lotus-tree. "The thorns are long and sharp and recurved, and often create a festering wound." It often grows to a great size. (see CROWN OF THORNS.)

(4.) Hebrews atad (Psalms 58:9) is rendered in the LXX. and Vulgate by *Rhamnus*, or *Lycium Europoeum*, a thorny shrub, which is common all over Palestine. From its resemblance to the box it is frequently called the box-thorn.

Thorn in the flesh

(2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Many interpretations have been given of this passage.

(1.) Roman Catholic writers think that it denotes suggestions to impiety.

(2.) Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers interpret the expression as denoting temptation to unbelief.

(3.) Others suppose the expression refers to "a pain in the ear or head," epileptic fits, or, in general, to some severe physical infirmity, which was a hindrance to the apostle in his work (Comp. 1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:30; Galatians 4:13, 14; 6:17). With a great amount of probability, it has been alleged that his malady was defect of sight, consequent on the dazzling light which shone around him at his conversion, acute ophthalmia. This would account for the statements in Galatians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 10:10; also Acts 23:5, and for his generally making use of the help of an amanuensis (Comp. Romans 16:22, etc.).

(4.) Another view which has been maintained is that this "thorn" consisted in an infirmity of temper, to which he occasionally gave way, and which interfered with his success (Comp. Acts 15:39; 23:2-5). If we consider the fact, "which the experience of God's saints in all ages has conclusively established, of the difficulty of subduing an infirmity of temper, as well as the pain, remorse, and humiliation such an infirmity is wont to cause to those who groan under it, we may be inclined to believe that not the least probable hypothesis concerning the 'thorn' or 'stake' in the flesh is that the loving heart of the apostle bewailed as his sorest trial the misfortune that, by impatience in word, he had often wounded those for whom he would willingly have given his life" (Lias's *Second Corinthians*, Introd.).

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## **Appendix: Noah Webster's Dictionary**

1. (*n.*) A hard and sharp-pointed projection from a woody stem; usually, a branch so transformed; a spine.
2. (*n.*) Any shrub or small tree which bears thorns; especially, any species of the genus *Crataegus*, as the hawthorn, whitethorn, cockspur thorn.
3. (*n.*) Fig.: That which pricks or annoys as a thorn; anything troublesome; trouble; care.

4. (*n.*) The name of the Anglo-Saxon letter /, capital form /. It was used to represent both of the sounds of English th, as in thin, then. So called because it was the initial letter of thorn, a spine.
  5. (*v. t.*) To prick, as with a thorn.
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## Appendix: International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

### THORN IN THE FLESH

thorn (*skolops te sarki*): Paul thus characterizes some bodily ailment which afflicted him and impaired his usefulness (2 Corinthians 12:7). The data are insufficient to enable us to ascertain its real nature, and all the speculations on the point are therefore inconclusive. All that we are told is that it was a messenger of Satan; that thereby he was beaten as with a fist, which might be figurative or actual; that it rendered his bodily presence unattractive. It appears that the infirmity recurred, for thrice he sought deliverance; but, by the help of God, he was able to glory in it. Sir W. Ramsay sees in it some form of recurring malarial fever. It was something that disabled him (Galatians 4:12-15); hence, Farrar supposes that it was ophthalmia, from the reference to his eyes, from his inability to recognize the high priest (Acts 23:5), from his employing amanuenses to write his epistles, and his writing the Galatian letter in large characters with his own hand (Galatians 6:11). Krenkel has at great length argued that it was epilepsy, and thereby endeavors to account for his trances and his falling to the earth on his way to Damascus, but his work is essentially a special pleading for a foregone conclusion, and Paul would not have called his visions "a messenger of Satan." It is also beside the question to heap up instances of other distinguished epileptics. On the whole Farrar's theory is the most probable.

It is probably only a coincidence that "pricks in your eyes" (Septuagint *skolopes*) are mentioned in Numbers 33:55. Any pedestrian in Palestine must be familiar with the ubiquitous and troublesome thorny shrubs and thistles which abound there.

Alexander Macalister

THORNS, THISTLES, etc.

thornz: There are very many references to various thorny plants in the Bible, and of the Hebrew words employed great uncertainty exists regarding their exact meaning. The alternative translations given in the text of English Versions of the Bible and in the margin show how divided are the views of the translators. In the following list the suggestions given of possible species indicated, usually by comparison with the Arabic, are those of the late Professor Post, who spent the best years of his life in study of the botany of Palestine. In the great majority of instances, however, it is quite impossible to make any reasonable suggestion as to any particular species being indicated.

(1) 'aTadh (Judges 9:14, English Versions of the Bible "bramble," the King James Version margin "thistle," the Revised Version margin "thorn"; Psalm 58:9, English Versions of the

Bible "thorns"): Probably the buckthorn (*Rhamnus Palestina Post*). Atad occurs as a proper name in Genesis 50:10, 11.

(2) barqanim (Judges 8:7, 16, English Versions of the Bible "briers"): Some thorny plant. The Egyptian-Arabic bargan is, according to Moore (*Commentary on Judges*), the same as *Centaurea scoparius* (Natural Order, Compositae), a common Palestinian thistle.

(3) dardar (Genesis 3:18 Hosea 10:8, English Versions of the Bible "thistle"; Septuagint *tribolos*): In Arabic, shauket ed-dardar is a general name for the thistles known as *Centaureae* or star-thistles (Natural Order, Compositae), of which Palestine produces nearly 50 species. The purple-flowered *C. calcitrapa* and the yellow *C. verutum* are among the commonest and most striking.

(4) chedheq (Proverbs 15:19, English Versions of the Bible "thorns"; Septuagint *akantha*; Micah 7:4, English Versions of the Bible "brier"): From former passages this should be some thorny plant suitable for making a hedge (compare Arabic *chadaq*, "to enclose," "wall in"). Lane states that Arabic *chadaq* is *Solanum sanctum*. Post suggests the oleaster, *Eleagnus hortensis*.

(5) choach; Septuagint *knide*, and *akantha* (2 Kings 14:9 Job 31:40, English Versions of the Bible, "thistle," margin "thorn"; 2 Chronicles 25:18, English Versions of the Bible "thistle," the King James Version margin "furze bush," the Revised Version margin "thorn"; Hosea 9:6 Songs 2:2, English Versions of the Bible "thorns"; Isaiah 34:13 the King James Version "brambles" the Revised Version (British and American) "thistles"; Proverbs 26:9, English Versions of the Bible "a thorn"; 1 Samuel 13:6, "thickets"; *chawachim*, is, however, according to Driver and others a corruption for *horim*, "holes"; Job 41:2, the King James Version "thorn" the Revised Version (British and American) "hook"; 2 Chronicles 33:11, the King James Version "thorns," the Revised Version (British and American) "in chains," margin "with hooks"): Clearly choach stands for some plant with very strong thorns, but it is quite impossible to say what species is intended; indeed, probably the word was used in a general way.

See HOOK.

(6) mecukhah, occurs only in Micah 7:4, where it means a "thorn hedge."

(7) na`atsuts (Isaiah 7:19, the King James Version "thorns," the Revised Version (British and American) "thorn hedges"; Isaiah 55:13, English Versions of the Bible "thorn"): The word is derived from the root na`ats, "to prick," or "pierce," and probably applies to any prickly plant. The Septuagint translation has *stoibe* (Isaiah 55:13), suggesting the thorny burnet, *Poterium spinosum*, so common in Palestine (see BOTANY). Post says, "It may be one of the thorny acacias" (HDB, IV, 752).

(8) cirim (Ecclesiastes 7:6, "the crackling of thorns (cirim) under a pot" (cir); Isaiah 34:13, "Thorns shall come up in its palaces"; Hosea 2:6, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns"; Nahum 1:10, "Entangled like thorns (King James Version "folden together as thorns").... they are consumed utterly as dry stubble"): The thorny burner, *Poterium spinosum*, is

today so extensively used for burning in ovens and lime-kilns in Palestine that it is tempting to suppose this is the plant especially indicated here. In Amos 4:2 ciroth, is translated "fish-hooks."

See HOOK.

(9) cillon (Ezekiel 28:24, English Versions of the Bible, "brier"); callonim (Ezekiel 2:6, English Versions of the Bible, "thorns"): Arabic, sallu = "thorn."

(10) carabhim (Ezekiel 2:6, English Versions of the Bible, "briers;" the King James Version margin "rebels"): The translation as a plant name is very doubtful.

(11) cirpadh (Isaiah 55:13, "Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree"): The Septuagint has konuza, which is (Post) the elecampane, *Inula viscosa* (Natural Order Compositae), a plant 2 or 3 ft. high, growing on the bare hillsides of Palestine, not infrequently in close association with the myrtle.

(12) tsinnim (Job 5:5 Proverbs 22:5, English Versions of the Bible, "thorns"); tseninim (Numbers 33:55 Joshua 23:13, English Versions of the Bible, "thorns"): The words apparently have a very general meaning.

(13) qots; the Septuagint akantha: A general name for thorny and prickly plants, the commonest in the Old Testament (Genesis 3:18 Exodus 22:6 Judges 8:7, 16 2 Samuel 23:6 Psalms 118:12 Isaiah 32:13; Isaiah 33:12 Jeremiah 4:3; Jeremiah 12:13 Ezekiel 28:24 Hosea 10:8).

(14) qimmosh (Proverbs 24:31, "thorns"; Isaiah 34:13; Ho 9:6, "nettles").

See NETTLES.

(15) sikkim, plural of sekh, same as Arabic shauk, "a thorn" (Numbers 33:55, "pricks").

(16) shayith: A word peculiar to Isaiah (5:6; 7:23; 9:18; 10:17; 27:4) and always associated with shamir (See (17)), always translated "thorns."

(17) shamir: References as above (16), and in Isaiah 32:13, where it is with qots (see (13)) always translated "briers." The Arabic samur is the thorny acacia *A. seyyal* and *A. tortilis* (Post).

(18) akanthos: The equivalent of qots (see (13)) (Matthew 7:16; Matthew 13:7, 22; 27:29, etc.). Always translated "thorns."

(19) rhamnos (Baruch 6:71, "white thorn"): The *Rhamnus Palaestina*.

(20) skolops (2 Corinthians 12:7, English Versions of the Bible "thorn," margin "stake").

See THORN IN THE FLESH.

(21) tribolos (Matthew 7:16, "thistle"; Heb 6:8, the King James Version "briers" the Revised Version (British and American) "thistles").

The extraordinary plentifulness of various prickly plants in Palestine-in its present condition-is evident to any traveler during the summer months. Many of the trees and shrubs are thorny and the ground is everywhere covered thick with thistles, many of which are very handsome and some of which attain a height of 6 or 8 ft. Before the peasant can plow, he must clear these away by burning (compare Isaiah 10:17). The early autumn winds often drive before them in revolving mass some of the star-thistles-a sight so characteristic that it may be the "thistle down" (the King James Version margin, the Revised Version (British and American) "whirling dust") of Isaiah 17:13. Thorns and thistles are described (Genesis 3:18) as God's curse on the ground for sin. The Talmud suggests that these must be edible and are therefore artichokes. The removal of them and the replacement by more useful plants is a sign of God's blessing (Isaiah 55:13 Ezekiel 28:24).

Genesis 3:18 uses the words qots and dardar for "thorns" and "thistles." Midrash Rabba' to Genesis (Midr. Gen. Rabba' 20 10) says that qots ("thorn") is the same as ('akkabhith), which means an edible thistle (compare Levy, Dictionary, 645), and that (dardar, "thistle") is the same as (qinrac; Greek kunara, "artichoke") (compare Levy, Dictionary, 298). "But," adds the Midrash, "some reverse it, and say that (dardar) is ('akkabhith) and that (qots) is (qinrats)."

The neglected vineyard of the sluggard "was all grown over with thorns the face thereof was covered with nettles" (Proverbs 24:31), and in God's symbolic vineyard "there shall come up briers and thorns" (Isaiah 5:6); "They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they have put themselves to pain, and profit nothing" (Jeremiah 12:13).

Jotham compares the usurper Abimelech to a bramble (Rhamnus Palaestina) (Judges 9:14 f), and Jehoash king of Israel, taunted Amaziah, king of Judah, by comparing him slightly to a thistle (margin "thorn"), readily trodden down by a wild beast (2 Kings 14:9).

Nevertheless, thorns and thistles have their uses. On them the goats and camels browse; scarcely any thorns seem to be too sharp for their hardened palates. The thorny burnier (Poterium spinosum), Arabic ballan, which covers countless acres of bare hillside, is used all over Palestine for ovens (Ecclesiastes 7:6) and lime-kilns. Before kindling one of these latter the fellahin gather enormous piles of this plant-carried on their heads in masses much larger than the bearers-around the kiln mouth.

Thorny hedges around dwellings and fields are very common. The most characteristic plant for the purpose today is the "prickly pear" (Opuntia ficus Indica), but this is a comparatively late introduction. Hedges of brambles oleasters, etc., are common, especially where there is some water In the Jordan valley masses of broken branches of the Zizyphus and other thorny trees are piled in a circle round tents or cultivated fields or flocks as a protection against man and beast (Proverbs 15:19 Micah 7:4, etc.).

The Saviour's "crown of thorns" (Matthew 27:29) was according to Palestinian tradition constructed from the twisted branches of a species of Rhamnaceae either the Zizyphus lotus or the Z. spina.

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