

Thorn in the Flesh



Oriental people are largely agricultural, therefore there are many figures of speech relating to life on the land, which may be found in the Scriptures.

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (II Corinthians 12:7) also has an agricultural origin. The plowman walks across the land with bare feet, and occasionally he will get a thorn in his foot. Lacking modern sterilization methods, it is far safer to leave the thorn in his foot than it is to pull it out. He must limp about for a couple of weeks until a thick layer of skin is formed over and around it, and then he may take his knife and cut it out safely.

When used as a figure of speech, however, a thorn in the flesh always refers to irritating or bothersome people. I know that some wild guesses have been published about Paul's thorn: bad eyesight, a speech impediment, etc. But as this saying is used in the East, it always refers to people and in fact is so used in the Bible itself. For instance:

Numbers 33:55

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

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 you perish off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

Judges 2:3

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.

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