

the **BIBLE**
secret of
DIVINE
HEALTH



by Gordon Lindsay

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Introduction

This book reveals one of the most practical secrets for daily living found in the Bible. It recognizes divine healing as God's promise for the believer but—and this is important—it goes further. It teaches the profound truth that God does not intend for His children to be sick at all. As their souls prosper, they should "prosper... and be in health" (III Jn. 2).

The following pages show that just as the Bible promises salvation and healing for the sinner, it promises health for the believer!

This book explains that:

1. Sickness is not the will of God, but the will of the devil.
2. Some people in Bible days preserved their youth into old age.
3. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not sickness.
4. With one or two exceptions, there are few accounts of any godly Bible characters being sick.
5. There are solid biblical grounds for enjoying continuous health.

Chapter One

The Bible Secret of Divine Health

Having more than thirty years of experience in divine healing ministry, I have observed one circumstance which I believe is the main hindrance to receiving permanent deliverance from sickness. Christians, even those who believe in divine healing, tend to accept occasional sickness and getting healed as normal—as God's order for life. But it has been made clear in the Word of God that it is not divine healing but divine health which is God's intended plan for His children.

A careful study of both the Old and New Testaments reveals that divine healing is more or less an emergency measure provided by the Lord for believers when they, through neglect of health laws or for some other reason, become ill. In this case, deliverance may be obtained from the Great Physician, Who is always "the LORD who heals you" (Ex. 15:26). But repeated illnesses should not be the norm for the New Testament believer. The will of God for him is clearly expressed by the Apostle John:

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers (III Jn. 2).

It is obvious from the above Scripture that health is not an unconditional blessing. It is inseparably associated with wellness of the soul, as indicated by the words "just as your soul prospers."

Divine health is God's plan; healing is God's second best for His people. As long as we think sickness is inevitable, it will continue to harass us unless we take dominion and refuse to tolerate it. We must recognize sickness as a curse, the work of Satan and something to be banished from our lives, or we will succumb to it.

Chapter Two

Divine Health in the Garden of Eden

God's will that the human race be healthy was revealed in the Garden of Eden. Man was made in the image of God, possessing a perfect physical body that was free from sickness. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). If Adam and Eve had obeyed God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit, they would have lived indefinitely in the Garden, enjoying the gracious bounty without sickness, disease, pain or death.

Though man was created mortal, God intended that he should ultimately be immortal. The Tree of Life was planted in the midst of the Garden. If our first parents had resisted the temptation to disobey God's command, eventually they would have partaken of the Tree of Life and, as a result, lived forever. In fact, after they sinned, they were banned from the Garden to guard against that possibility.

Until the fall, Adam and Eve had enjoyed the glory and vigor of Edenic youth, without worry or care. But afterwards, life changed. There was generation after generation of sorrow, sickness and suffering. Man eventually turned back into dust from which he came. And, in the process, he experienced pain and suffering, incapacitating disease, the physical deterioration of old age and finally death.

FACT ONE: *Adam and Eve experienced divine health in the Garden of Eden before their fall. Sickness came as a result of sin. We are redeemed not only from sin, but also from sickness—the curse that follows sin—a double cure for a double curse.*

Chapter Three

The Covenant of Health

If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you (Ex. 15:26).

Before the covenant of healing was given, divine healing was mentioned only once in the Bible: the healing of Abimelech and his family (Gen. 20). God had made provision for healing before the law was given. Apparently there never has been a time when God in His mercy has been unwilling to heal those who call upon Him.

The first thing God did after redeeming Israel through the offering of the Paschal Lamb was give them the covenant of healing. *Actually, it was more than a covenant of healing; it was a covenant of health! It was a promise that none of the diseases which had come upon the Egyptians would come upon the Israelites if they were obedient to the Lord.* Let us carefully study this covenant of health, for it is of paramount importance.

To prepare the children of Israel to receive that covenant, God deliberately led them into a burning desert, a parched wasteland. Soon they were out of water. It was terrifying to be lost in the desert without an adequate water supply. These two million people who had escaped from Pharaoh found themselves up against the stark possibility of death.

But water had been sighted at Marah! The great congregation was encouraged by the prospect of cool drinks from the springs. However, they discovered that the water was bitter and probably alkaline. Fear began to grip the hearts of the people. Without a miracle, they would soon die of thirst. The burden of this tremendous responsibility fell upon Moses, who heard the ominous murmurings of people frightened by their predicament. It is little wonder that Moses cried out to the Lord (Ex. 15:25).

This is important. If you are in desperate need of deliverance, do not hesitate to cry to the Lord. He hears those who wholeheartedly search for Him:

Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jer. 29:12,13).

Many people do not receive deliverance because they are too casual in seeking God. God wants the believer to seek Him with all his heart. When Moses cried to the Lord, the Lord answered him.

HEALING AND HEALTH IN THE ATONEMENT

We have already noted that Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect health in the Garden. But as a result of sin, they and their descendants became prey to sickness and disease. On the night the children of Israel left Egypt, God revealed His great redemptive plan to save man from the curse. God required that a lamb be killed for each household and its blood sprinkled over the doorway of the home. This was a foreshadow of the atonement through Christ for sin.

The atonement also provides healing and health for the physical body. When Moses called upon the Lord during the crisis of bitter water at the springs of Marah, God showed him a "tree," which he was to cast into the waters to make them sweet. Most evangelical expositors agree that this tree is a type of the cross of Christ.

Although this passage was written 1,500 years before Christ, it teaches that the truths of divine healing and divine health are associated with the atonement.

Here is a tremendous truth: Just as Christ bore our sins, He also bore our sicknesses. This is made very clear by Matthew:

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:16,17).

If Christ paid for our sins, then we do not need to carry them. If He paid for our sicknesses, then we do not have to be sick. The Lord did not allow Israel to drink the bitter waters. A miracle took place and the waters became sweet.

FACT TWO: Divine healing and divine health are associated with the atonement of Christ. He paid for our sins and sicknesses, therefore we do

not need to carry them.

Chapter Four

The Covenant of Healing and Health

With every divine promise there are of necessity certain conditions. Some covenants and promises in the Bible are unconditional, such as the Davidic Covenant, but most are conditional. The covenant of healing and health is conditional. In Exodus 15:26 God lays down four conditions:

1. Listen carefully to the voice of the Lord.
2. Do what is right in God's eyes.
3. Pay attention to God's commandments.
4. Keep all God's decrees.

These conditions are clear. Many people are ignorant of the will of God—some because they make little effort to find it. The best way to attain knowledge of God's will is to regularly read the Scriptures. "For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6).

Some people fear that the will of God will be unacceptable to them. Like Jonah, they run away from the Lord. Many people who do not obtain their healing are failing to obey some obvious Scriptural requirement.

One condition to divine health is to do what is right in God's sight. The Bible declares: "There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 16:25). It is remarkable how many people there are who openly dispute direct commands of the Scriptures simply because they are distasteful to them. The chaotic period of the Judges, marked by extreme lawlessness and indifference to divine Law, was the result of every man doing "what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). To have divine health, one must do things which are pleasing in the sight of the Lord. "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (I Jn. 3:22).

For emphasis, the Lord not only says, "Give ear to His commandments," but He adds, "and keep all His statutes." God obviously is wanting to

communicate something very important: Divine health and healing are only obtainable through commitment to His will.

Unfortunately, many seek healing on their own terms rather than God's. This is a great mistake! The consecration of such people is open to serious question. This attitude may prevent them from receiving the deliverance from their afflictions they so desperately need.

DIVINE HEALTH—GOD'S PLAN!

Now we come to the crucial truth of God's promise of healing and health. It is here that many people read Scripture incorrectly. They suppose that the covenant of healing was given to assure them of deliverance when they become ill—a sort of "sickness insurance." True, the promise includes healing if that becomes necessary. But if we read the passage in Exodus 15 carefully, we can see it teaches more: It implies that those who are obedient to the Lord will not experience sickness in the first place! And people who are not sick do not need healing!

The promise of divine health is a serious matter for every Christian to consider. Is it possible that looking to the Lord for healing every time we become sick is the wrong approach? Have we failed to take the promise of divine health seriously?

A new Christian who frequently backslides finds it much harder every time he tries to make a new start. Likewise, he who habitually allows himself to be a victim of his feelings and symptoms may find it much more difficult to obtain deliverance the next time. Divine health is God's plan for the Christian. A fresh emphasis on this truth is necessary if we are to solve the problem of sickness as it exists in the Church today.

FACT THREE: God has given us a strong promise that if we will obey His commandments, He will put (permit) none of the diseases to come on us that He brought (permitted to be brought) on the Egyptians.

Chapter Five

The Promise of Divine Health in Exodus

23:25

So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you (Ex. 23:25).

When the Lord desires to get across an important truth, He often repeats it in slightly different words. It is as if He were saying, "Now if you are not sure I mean what I say, or if you are not absolutely certain that My promise is true, then I will say it again." And so God repeats His promise of divine health again and again.

God tells the people He will go with them in their journey to the Promised Land. He will send His angel before them (vs. 20), and He will give them victory over the inhabitants of the land (vs. 23). He then pictures them settled in the land, serving Him with His blessing upon their bread and upon their water. As a crowning blessing, they will be free from the curse of sickness and disease that they had known in Egypt. "I will take sickness away from the midst of you."

FACT FOUR: God promises that if we truly serve Him, He will send His angel before us. He will bless our bread and our water, and take sickness from our midst.

Chapter Six

God Repeats the Promise for the Third Time

The Lord repeats His great promise of divine health a third time. In the book of Deuteronomy, God sums up the divine law that He has given Israel. And in that summary He again includes His promise of deliverance from sickness:

And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you (Deut. 7:15).

HEALTH IS A BLESSING, SICKNESS IS A CURSE

This verse clearly teaches that divine healing is a blessing. It also teaches that sickness is a curse. This is in direct opposition to the idea that the Lord sends sickness as a blessing in disguise —a teaching that aptly illustrates how the traditions of men can become substitutes for the Word of God.

Just as clearly as the Word of God shows that healing and health are blessings of the Lord, so sickness and disease are shown to be curses. In Deuteronomy 28 God lists various diseases that will come upon the Israelites if they do not obey the voice of the LORD. It is not difficult to recognize many of them as those we see inflicting people today:

1. Blindness (vs. 28)
2. Boils (vs. 27)
3. Consumption (vs. 22)
4. Tumors (vs. 27)
5. Severe burning fever (vs. 22)
6. Fever (vs. 22)
7. Inflammation (vs. 22)
8. Itch (vs. 27)
9. Madness (vs. 28)

10. Scab (vs. 27)
11. Plague (vs. 24)
12. Confusion of heart (vs. 28)

Were these diseases to come upon Israel as a blessing in disguise? Or were they to come as an act of the mysterious will of God? No! God said they would come as a result of disobedience. The list in Deuteronomy 28:22 did not include all the sicknesses that were to come on the disobedient. In verses 60 and 61 God makes it plain that if they were disobedient, He would send all kinds of diseases and epidemics upon them until they were obliterated.

Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. Also every sickness and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, will the LORD bring upon you until you are destroyed (Deut. 28:60,61).

These statements are so plain and solemn, how could anyone dare to alter their meaning? But the pride of man is deceitful. Unable to admit any fault, people talk themselves into believing that "the good Lord" is in some way getting glory out of their sickness. But dare we alter the clear teachings of the Bible?

Sickness is not always an indication of willful disobedience on the part of the believer. In some cases, heredity can be the cause of a predisposition to a certain disease. Failure to properly care for the body may indicate a violation of the physical, rather than of the moral law.

Some contend that the promise of healing in the Old Testament was only available in Old Testament days. They concede that sickness was spoken of as a curse *then*, but since today we are under a different covenant, the situation concerning sickness and healing is reversed. In essence, they are saying that today healing is a curse, and sickness is a blessing!

Such an interpretation violates the very laws of language. If the above were true, then God today is doing what the devil used to do and the devil is doing what God used to do. How ridiculous! The New Testament teaches divine health for the believer just as the Old Testament does. "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (III Jn. 2).

FACT FIVE: *The Bible teaches that sickness is a curse for disobedience, and healing and health are blessings from the Lord. Let us*

not be misled into making "of no effect" (Matt. 15:6) the plain statements of the Word of God.

Chapter Seven

Does the Biblical Promise of Divine Healing and Health Work?

It is one thing to rejoice in a great Bible promise, but another, in light of human frailty, to prove it is workable in everyday life. God gave these wonderful promises of divine health to the children of Israel. Did they actually work?

There was none feeble among His tribes (Psa. 105:37).

Here is the clear uncompromising answer. We are told that at this point in time there was not one feeble person among all the twelve tribes of Israel. They had no need of hospitals or pharmacies. There was no one on crutches or in a wheel chair. No one was dying with tuberculosis, no cases of cancer, no epidemics of smallpox or bubonic plague. The children did not have diseases such as measles, mumps or chicken pox.

At a later time, Israel did suffer all these evil afflictions and more. But that was not until they decided to go their own way and departed from the Law. Then sickness, disease and other terrors came upon them, just as God declared would happen if they were disobedient. But until that time, the children of Israel enjoyed immunity from sickness as promised under the covenant of healing and health.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF DIVINE HEALTH

The Bible demonstrates how the promise of divine health worked by recording Caleb's remarkable physical preservation at the age of 85:

So Moses swore on that day, saying, "Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children's forever, *because you have wholly followed the LORD my God*" And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I

was on the day that Moses sent me; *just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in* (Josh. 14:9-11).

There are two very important points concerning this testimony of Caleb. First, Caleb was one of the spies who brought back a good report. Time and again, we read that the Lord is displeased with people who murmur against Him—which, in effect, is accusing Him of dealing unfairly. The ten spies who brought back an evil report and made the people afraid to go into the land of Canaan, died in the wilderness. But Caleb and Joshua, who declared their faith in God by reporting that Israel was well able to go up and take the country, in due time entered the land and received their inheritance.

Caleb also experienced a remarkable physical blessing. He evidently enjoyed divine health all those years. He declared that at 85, he was as strong to go to war as he was the day Moses sent him to spy out the land. "As my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in" (Josh. 9:11).

Divine health is certainly God's plan. It is not His will for people to deteriorate mentally or become physically incapacitated as they grow older. Many Christians suffer physical and mental impairment later in life.

It is certainly God's will that we retain our faculties throughout life. Although we may lose the resilience of youth, certainly it is not God's plan that we decline physically and mentally when our wisdom has matured and our usefulness has reached its zenith. If we could be at 85 like Caleb was, how much richer our lives would be and how much greater our opportunity to accomplish God's vision. God's promise to those who believe is, "With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psa. 91:16).

WHAT GOD DID FOR MOSES

The life of Moses illustrates in an even greater way that physical preservation is possible to those who live close to God. Moses lived at a time when the average life span was about 70 years. However, he lived an additional 50 years—to the age of 120! At such an advanced age, he could have weakened or become incapacitated mentally and physically. But he retained the virility of his youth until the day he died.

Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor abated (Deut. 34:7).

Not only was Moses' health still in tact at this age, but his eyesight, one of the first senses to decline, remained undimmed. This is surely something more than divine healing or divine health—it is divine life! Moses had lived

near God. He had witnessed His glory when he was on the mountain. When he came down his face shone with celestial glory (Ex. 34:28-33). That was beyond the norm. It does, in fact, hint at some of the ultimate possibilities that may be enjoyed by those who have reached out and "tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5).

God's promise of health and healing is for all who enter in, not for special favorites. The whole nation of Israel not only experienced divine healing, but moved together into the realm of divine health. And "there was none feeble among His tribes"

(Psa. 105:37).

"YOUR YOUTH IS RENEWED LIKE THE EAGLE'S"

Psalm 103 is a favorite Scripture of many. Here the Spirit of God reminds us to bless the Lord and forget not *all* His benefits. God knew that many people would do that very thing— appropriate some of His benefits and forget others.

First, the psalmist mentions salvation: "Who forgives all your iniquities" (vs. 3). Salvation is appropriately the first thing to remember.

Secondly, we are to remember the benefit of divine healing: "Who heals all your diseases" (vs. 3). Too many forget that blessing, to their own sorrow and loss.

There are other things to remember, such as protection from danger. "Who redeems your life from destruction" (vs. 4). The Christian life is not supposed to be a poor, meager existence. It is to be crowned "with lovingkindness and tender mercies" (vs. 4). In other words, it is to be abundant life. Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

The psalmist closes his review of the great benefits of the Lord by saying, "Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (vs. 5). Although many sermons have been preached on this text, often the truth is missed. The way God renews our youth is different than using implants or cosmetic surgery. Restoring our youth cannot be realized through earthly means. Only God has the secret of youth, and He gives it to His "eagle" saints. Many of God's people would be

in their graves today if they had not looked to God to fulfill His promise to renew their lives like the eagle.

There are two important things to note about this promise. First, to have our youth renewed we must satisfy ourselves with the "good things" of God. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Physical bread will fail, but the Word of God is life indeed.

Divine health is for those who feast daily on the "good things" of God's Word.

Second, the eagle soars high above the ground. So the Christian must live above the things of this life. He must sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus and receive from God. The renewal of youth is for "eagle" Christians like Caleb and Moses.

FACT SIX: God has not only promised salvation and healing. He also renews our youth. But this experience is only for "eagle" Christians who choose to live above the perishable things of this life, and who are satisfied with the "good things" of God.

Chapter Eight

Does the New Testament Teach Divine Health?

We see that both the Old and New Testaments teach divine healing. We have also seen that the Old Testament goes beyond teaching healing to divine health. Does the New Testament teach this also?

It is significant that not one leading character in the New Testament was sick. There was sickness in the New Testament Church, of course, but it was not praised. In fact, Paul considered it an indication of something seriously wrong.

For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep (I Cor. 11:29,30).

Here Paul explains why members of the Church are sick. He in no way suggests that sickness is a blessing, but rather that it comes because of serious neglect.

In this passage, Paul was talking to the Corinthians about communion. Most believers agree the cup represents the blood of Christ, shed for their sins. However, they are less knowledgeable about the bread—Christ's body which was broken for our body. Many Christians, even those who believe in healing, have not discerned the Lord's body—that He already bore their sickness in His body. Paul says "many are weak and sick" and "many sleep" because they have not discerned the Lord's body.

FACT SEVEN: *It is important during communion that each believer not only discern the cup as representing the blood of Christ, shed for the remission of his sins, but also that the bread is a token of the body of Christ, broken for His body.*

Chapter Nine

Christians Are Members of the Spiritual Body of Christ

I Corinthians 11:29,30 teaches something more. There is a *physical* and *spiritual* body of Christ. All Christians are members of the spiritual body. Paul goes on to say, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (I Cor. 12:26).

He makes a comparison between Christ's spiritual body and the human body. A schism between members of the body of Christ can result in sickness. Therefore believers should maintain Christ-like relations with other members of the Church. The inference is that believers at odds with each another could fail to be healed. Such was the case in the Corinthian church. There was division, and members were not reconciled to one another.

Christ is the head and we are members of His body. Is it the will of God then that sickness defile His body? No one would dare suggest that Christ suffered sickness while on earth. Surely it is not God's will that His body be sick now.

Since we are members of the body of Christ, we can understand why Paul prayed that our bodies, as well as our souls and spirits, should be sanctified completely.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thes. 5:23).

FACT EIGHT: *Believers are members of the mystical body of Christ. We should take care of one another or we will suffer ourselves. Christ's body never had sickness while on earth. Since we are now members of His body, we should not be sick.*

Chapter Ten

God's Will for the Believer—Health and Prosperity

The New Testament verse that best expresses the will of God for the Christian's success and health is, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (III Jn. 2). The Apostle John desired above all that God's people should be healthy and successful. Surely the Apostle John, who had leaned on Jesus' breast and had an understanding of spiritual things, knew what was God's will and prayed accordingly.

John knew that sickness was a curse and health a blessing. Undoubtedly he had heard Jesus teach that disease was the work of the devil (Lk. 13:16; Acts 10:38). He knew Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. He had personally witnessed Jesus' earthly ministry. He knew that He had devoted much of His time to eradicating disease and delivering people from suffering. Understanding all these things, it was only natural that he would pray that the people of God would enjoy health and prosperity.

It should be observed, however, that John makes it clear that divine health and economic well-being are not for the careless, the disobedient or those who seek blessings for selfish purposes. These blessings are for Christians who prosper in their souls. A sick soul invites a sick body.

Some may have inherited strong constitutions and are naturally healthy; but those who are not so fortunate must look to God for healing and health. Healing and health may be expected on the basis of the status of one's soul.

FACT NINE: *Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach divine healing and health. The Apostle John desired above all things for believers to prosper and be healthy, but only as their souls prosper. Failure to nurture and discipline the soul could well jeopardize the health of the body.*

Chapter Eleven

Was the Apostle Paul Sick?

Before we go further, it is essential to settle the question of Paul's "thorn in the flesh." It is so often a refuge for those who see sickness and disease as a blessing. Some claim that the Apostle Paul suffered from an eye disease, and that this disease was Paul's "thorn in the flesh." They reason that if a great apostle like Paul was afflicted with such a serious disease, ordinary believers can scarcely hope for anything better. This reasoning would be valid—if it were true that Paul suffered from the above-mentioned affliction. However, the supposition has no Scriptural foundation.

1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY A "THORN IN THE FLESH" IS?

The phrase "thorn in the flesh" evidently refers to a figurative and not a literal "thorn." In the Scriptures, the term "thorn in the flesh" is used to indicate persecution by wicked persons, not diseases. Moses said:

But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. (Num. 33:55).

Later, Joshua used the term in the same way: "They shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:13).

Again in Judges 2:3, the Lord speaks of the Canaanites as "thorns in your side." Therefore, according to Scripture a "thorn in the flesh" is not a disease, but people whom the devil uses to annoy or persecute the children of God. Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture settles the matter of what Paul meant by a "thorn in the flesh."

2. DID PAUL INFER IN ANY WAY THAT HIS "THORN IN THE FLESH" WAS BLINDNESS OR SOME KIND OF DISEASE?

In the passage where Paul speaks of his "thorn in the flesh," he says:

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (II Cor. 12:8-10).

3. WHY DO SOME INSIST THAT PAUL'S INFIRMITY WAS BLINDNESS?

It is purely the tradition of men! Actually, to say that Paul was blind is a direct denial of Scripture. It is true Paul was blinded on the Damascus road. However, we are told that after this Paul spent three days and nights in prayer and fasting. Then Ananias came and laid his hands on Paul that he might receive the Holy Spirit *and his sight*, which he did (Acts 9:18). Consequently, to hold to a tradition that Paul was nearly blind is to go directly against Scripture.

4. DID PAUL CONSIDER HIS INFIRMITY A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

Paul implies that his infirmities were a blessing in disguise. Paul was blinded by the light from heaven that shone round him as he approached Damascus, threatening to slaughter Christians living there. But after his proud heart had been subdued, he regained his sight. Had God sent blindness to Paul as a blessing? The Old Testament declared that blindness was a curse that would come on the disobedient (Deut. 28:28).

Paul knew blindness was a curse. When the false prophet, Bar-Jesus, sought to prevent Paul preaching the Gospel in Paphos, the apostle turned to the sorcerer and said:

"O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand (Acts 13:10,11).

5. DID PAUL EVER TEACH THAT SICKNESS WAS A BLESSING?

Paul did as Jesus did: He taught and preached healing of the body and soul, and great miracles took place as a result. Paul did not teach that people were to regard sickness as some special providence from God. He taught that sickness came upon Christians because they either did not judge themselves or because they did not discern the Lord's body.

For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged (I Cor. 11:29-31).

6. IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT PAUL BELIEVED THE LORD SENT SICKNESS ON HIM AS A "THORN IN THE FLESH"?

As long as Paul lived, he trusted in Christ as his Healer. His faith in God for healing never diminished, even in his last years. In the final chapter of Acts (28), after Paul had escaped from the shipwreck and reached land, he was bitten by a poisonous viper. The natives thought he would fall down dead. But Paul trusted in the Great Physician and was not harmed. As long as Paul lived, he trusted the Lord for healing and health.

7. DID PAUL ACT LIKE A SICK MAN?

Paul suffered many infirmities and deprivations, but he was able to endure them because he had a strong body. Only a well person could evangelize the nations as Paul did. His testimony was, "I labored more abundantly than they all" (I Cor. 15:10). That is not the testimony of a sick man.

FACT TEN: *Paul's thorn in the flesh was not sickness; the apostle enjoyed divine health. Paul suffered from infirmities such as weariness, trials and persecutions. We may suffer from the same infirmities, but we need not suffer from disease since Christ already carried that on the cross.*

Conclusion

There was one godly man in the New Testament who was sick and almost died. Why did he become so ill?

He was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him... for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me (Phil. 2: 26,27,30).

It appears that the Philippian church had failed to properly support Paul while he was serving them. Epaphroditus saw the need and worked beyond his strength to make up for the lack. But it was too much for him. He broke down physically and almost died. God spared him, but it was not a matter of being healed from a disease. Epaphroditus apparently required an extended period to recover his strength.

Many ministers and Christian workers keep working though their strength is depleted. When people go beyond their strength, it sometimes takes months or even years to recuperate.

Few godly biblical characters were afflicted with sickness. This indicates that disease is something outside the divine plan. Disease is a curse and not a blessing. The principle exception is Job. (The problem of Job is fully considered in the book *Why Do the Righteous Suffer?*)

Job himself disclosed the main reason for his sickness. The spirit of fear had taken hold of him. And fear is a shortcut to sickness and disease (Job 3:25,26). It was the devil, not God who put the boils on him (Job 2:7). But it was God who healed him and he prospered more than before. After he was healed, Job evidently enjoyed divine health. He lived for another 140 years after his illness!