

# Thorns and Thistles

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A large portion of mankind has lived in an agrarian based society for most of its history. Consequently, God has used familiar objects associated with working, and living, in a farming community to teach important spiritual lessons. One example of this method of instruction is the use of “thorns and thistles” mentioned in Genesis 3:18.

At first glance, it may appear that God is speaking in literal terms about thorns and thistles growing up and causing problems for a farmer. However, when viewed with other scriptures on this subject it will become apparent that God is revealing a much deeper spiritual truth.

As any farmer or gardener knows, thorns and thistles can be very frustrating to deal with. They slow down the work that is being done, can be difficult to remove, may cause injury, inhibit growth or possibly destroy useful plants, trees, and flowers. If they’re not completely removed, they will come back to cause more problems. These same characteristics are similar to activities associated with the fallen host of heaven as will be seen in a number of scriptures on this subject.

Before examining these scriptures, it is important to consider the context in which thorns and thistles is first used,

Then to Adam He (God) said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall cause to grow for you... (Gen. 3:17-18; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

As this section of scripture shows, Adam broke a command from God and received a consequence for his disobedience. Adam went from a condition in which he was able to have positive interaction with spirit beings described as “trees” in the garden of God (see the website document entitled: “What Tree Did Eve Eat From?”) to a situation where his life would be more difficult and frustrating, ending ultimately in death (Gen. 3:19). These thorns and thistles were not present until Adam disobeyed the word of God. It appears that they sprang up as a result of his decision to rebel against God’s command. Now Adam would be exposed to them, and have to deal with them as he struggled to live and provide for his family.

There is a similar situation describing a struggle between forces that are contrary to the will of God, and in this example, against His people Israel,

But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land (Canaanites) 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).

This is an important scripture because it shows God using “thorns” in a figurative sense to describe a Gentile nation’s negative impact on Israel’s ability to live a peaceful and happy life in harmony with God’s law.

In Joshua 23:13, God warns Israel that these “thorns” will harass them until they die, which is very similar to the language used in Genesis 3:19 (cf. Eze. 28:24).

In Judges 2:2-3, the Angel of the Lord commanded Israel to remove the pagan shrines, and if they refused to obey this command he would allow the Gentiles to be, “thorns in your side.”

King David understood that the rebellious angels of heaven are the real “thorns” that the descendants of Adam have been dealing with, even though they are behind the scenes.

But the sons of rebellion shall be as ‘thorns’ thrust away, because they cannot be taken with (human) hands (2Sam. 23:6).

The apostle Paul also understood this important truth,

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a **thorn in the flesh** was given to me, a **messenger of Satan** to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure (2Cor. 12:7; emphasis added).

This rebellious spiritual host will be dealt with by Jesus Christ and the demons are aware of this because they commented about it during Christ’s ministry,

And when he had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him as they were coming out of the tombs, so very fierce that some were not able to pass through that way.<sup>29</sup> And behold, they shouted saying, “What to us and with you, son of God? Have you come before the appointed time to torment us?” (Mt. 8:28-29; RNT).

In Isaiah 27:4, Christ is seen as God’s agent to deal with the fallen host of heaven who will not be victorious,

...Who would set briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together (Isa. 27:4).

The apostle Paul understood the use of thorns and thistles in Old Testament scriptures because he used similar language to describe the punishment that awaits the fallen host,

For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bear thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned (Heb. 6:7-8).

In the book of Proverbs, God warns mankind that thorns are something to guard against, spiritually speaking. Therefore, thorns are not meant to be taken as literal weeds on the farm or in the garden,

Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them (Prov. 22:5).

These thorns and thistles have a negative effect upon those within a nation. If they are not rooted up, they start to take over and cause harm to an entire country,

The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood (both literally and metaphorically); every man hunts his brother with a net that they may successfully do evil with both hands – the prince asks for gifts (favours), the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire; so they scheme together. The best of them is like a brier; the most upright is **sharper than a thorn** hedge (Mic. 7:2-4).

If left unchecked, thorns have the ability to take mankind's focus off the more important aspects of this life, which are not physical at all (Mt. 6:25-34). Mankind is meant to inherit eternal life upon repentance of sin, combined with a determination to live in harmony with God's law,

Now the one sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the word, yet the cares of the age and the deceitfulness of riches, together choke the word and he becomes unfruitful (Mt. 13:22; RNT).

False prophets and religious leaders are also compared to thistles and thorns because they too are being influenced by the fallen host,

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inside are predacious wolves (only concerned about themselves).<sup>16</sup> "From their fruit you will recognize them. They do not gather grapes from **thorn bushes**, or figs from **thistles** (Mt. 7:15-16; RNT).

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works (2Cor. 11:13-15).

Those influenced by the rebellious host of heaven orchestrated a final scene before Christ's death, in which they left their trademark on the only one through whom they could receive forgiveness for their sins,

And having weaved a crown of thorns, they set it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and falling on their knees before him, they mocked him, saying, "Greetings, King of the Judeans! (Mt. 27:29).

In conclusion, the thorns and thistles that came up, figuratively speaking, after Adam's sin, represent the negative influence of the fallen host who make it their job to disrupt the relationship between the only true God and His people. Thankfully, this influence will be dealt with by Jesus Christ upon his return to rule this planet and establish his Father's law worldwide (Rev. 20). The effects of this future work of Christ will be very positive and God describes the end result in symbolic language showing that the fallen host will no longer have any ability to cause harm,

For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees (loyal angels of God) shall clap their hands. Instead of the **thorn** shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off (Isa. 55:12-13).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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