

In II Thessalonians 1:5 Paul says that the believers in Thessalonica are suffering for the kingdom of God.

In I Peter 3:14 the apostle Peter speaks of suffering for the sake of righteousness. In chapter 4, verse 19 he exhorts those who suffer according to the will of God to trust in God as they continue to do what is right. And in chapter 5, verse 10 Peter says that, after they have suffered for a little while, God will perfect and establish believers.

Now although it could properly be objected that these are all instances of suffering for the name and testimony of Christ, rather than suffering because of sin, nevertheless it remains that some suffering for righteousness' sake involves physical pain and suffering. For example, in II Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul tells how he suffered in prisons (which were usually damp, unheated, filthy places), how he suffered many sleepless nights, how he suffered from cold and exposure in various places, how he suffered often from hunger and thirst simply because there was no food, and how he even suffered stoning!

The Lord healed his wounds and sicknesses and gave him relief from physical pain and discomfort, sometimes immediately and sometimes gradually, sometimes supernaturally and sometimes naturally with the help of Luke the physician, but in the meanwhile Paul suffered a great deal, and probably carried the scars of his beatings and stoning to his grave.

In addition to these cases of suffering for righteousness' sake, let us note some instances in Scripture of sickness and suffering in the lives of godly people that did not result from persecution and affliction for righteousness' sake; and let us see whether God delivered them.

Job lost 1,000 oxen, 500 female donkeys, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, a great many of his servants, his seven sons and three daughters, and his health. His entire body was covered with terrible boils, and he suffered mental and spiritual anguish and intense physical pain. God delivered him, but only after a period of suffering.

The prophet Elisha became very sick and gradually became worse until he died (as recorded in II Kings 13). Although Elisha had miraculously restored the son of a Shunammite woman to life, and miraculously healed Naaman of his leprosy, he could not heal himself of his own sickness. Of course, we know that Elisha did not do miracles by his own power, whenever he chose to; rather he did them by God's power and by God's will. It was obviously not God's will to heal Elisha of the sickness of which he died.

When Hezekiah became mortally ill, and Isaiah told him to set his affairs in order in view of his approaching death, Hezekiah prayed earnestly to God and wept, and God healed him and added 15 years to his lifetime (as recorded in Isaiah 38).

When Lazarus of Bethany became mortally ill, and his sisters called Jesus' attention to the sickness, Jesus did not come and heal His friend,