

but allowed him to suffer and die. A few days later our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead (as recorded in John 11).

When the widow Dorcas of Joppa fell sick, she was not healed, even though she was characterized by faith that expressed itself in many good works of kindness and charity. She died of her illness. Christians in Joppa sent for Peter, who came and raised her from the dead (as recorded in Acts 9).

When Epaphroditus (Paul's co-worker and helper in Rome) became sick and grew gradually worse, the believers at Philippi prayed for him; and when Epaphroditus was at the point of death, the Lord had mercy on him and on Paul, and spared and healed him (as recorded in Philippians 2).

When Paul wrote the church at Corinth a second letter from Macedonia on his third missionary journey, he mentioned that he had been given a thorn in the flesh, sent by Satan to buffet him. Various interpreters have speculated on what this thorn might have been. Some have proposed that it refers to Satanic suggestions to Paul's mind; some have proposed some particularly vicious human opponent of Paul; and some have proposed some kind of disease or chronic ailment.

We don't know what this "thorn in the flesh" was, except that it might have caused Paul a considerable amount of pain and discomfort. One suggestion that some have found helpful as a possible explanation arises out of Paul's own statements in Galatians 4:13-15. He mentioned that when he preached the gospel to the Galatians for the first time, it was because of a change of plans due to a physical condition he was experiencing. This condition was serious enough and unpleasant enough that it could have caused the Galatians to despise or loathe Paul, but they overlooked it. This physical condition appears to refer to some kind of eye disease or eye disfigurement that either produced an unpleasant appearance or was looked down upon.

In any case, Paul prayed earnestly to the Lord to remove the thorn, not once, but three separate times; but the Lord chose not to deliver him from the suffering, but to give him sufficient grace to bear it and live with it. And Paul learned how to be content with it! (as recorded in II Corinthians 12)

Some of these godly persons (Job, Hezekiah, and Epaphroditus) God healed after a period of sickness and suffering; others (Elisha, Lazarus, Dorcas, and Paul) He chose not to heal. He allowed Elisha to die; He raised Lazarus and Dorcas after they experienced a mortal illness and died; and He gave Paul grace to live with his infirmity, probably for the rest of his life.

Eventually, however (and this point is crucial) all godly persons (except those who are still alive at Christ's Coming) must experience a time when vital bodily organs fail or wear out or are destroyed by some disease; and then their corruptible bodies die and disintegrate in physical death and rest in the grave until the time of resurrection. This is true even of all those Christians who claim that Christ has purchased present deliverance from sickness by His atonement! Eventually they all die! And