

2 Corinthians 12:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Analysis

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. The phrase **lest I should be exalted above measure** (hina mē hyperairōmai, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι) appears twice—bookending the verse—revealing God's purpose: the skolops (σκόλοψ, "thorn," "stake") prevents pride from **abundance of revelations** (hyperbolē tōn apokalypseōn, ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων).

The **thorn in the flesh** has generated endless speculation (eye disease, epilepsy, malaria, persecution, opponents), but Paul intentionally leaves it unspecified—what matters isn't the thorn's nature but its function: preventing spiritual pride. The paradox is stunning: God gives extraordinary revelations (third heaven, paradise, unspeakable words), then gives a divinely ordained affliction to prevent those revelations from producing arrogance. Grace includes both the gift and the safeguard against misusing the gift.

Messenger of Satan (aggelos Satana, ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ) to **buffet me** (kolaphizē, κολαφίζει, "to strike with fists") shows God's sovereign use of evil: Satan meant it for harm, God meant it for sanctification (cf. Job 1-2). The passive "there was given" (edothē, ἐδόθη) indicates divine agency—God gave the thorn, even though Satan delivered it.

Historical Context

Written in Macedonia (AD 55-56) after years of Paul bearing this unspecified affliction. The Corinthians, like modern prosperity gospel adherents, likely viewed suffering as evidence of sin or weak faith. Paul's theology of redemptive suffering—where God ordains affliction to prevent pride and showcase grace—radically contradicts health-and-wealth theology. The thorn isn't punishment but preventive grace.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Why does God sometimes give extraordinary spiritual experiences and then ordained afflictions to prevent pride from those experiences?
2. How does the "messenger of Satan" language show God's sovereignty over evil—using Satan's attacks for sanctifying purposes?
3. What does Paul's non-specification of the thorn's nature teach about focusing on affliction's purpose rather than its details?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| καὶ | τῇ | ὑπερβολῇ | τῶν | ἀποκαλύψεων | ἵνα | μὴ |
| And | G3588 | through the abundance | G3588 | of the revelations | to | G3361 |
| G2532 | | G5236 | | G602 | G2443 | |
| | | | | | | |
| ὑπεραίρωμαι | | ἐδόθη | μοι | σκόλοψ | τῇ | |
| I should be exalted above measure | | there was given | to me | a thorn | | G3588 |
| G5229 | | G1325 | G3427 | G4647 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| σαρκί | ἄγγελος | Σατᾶν, | ἵνα | με | κολαφίζῃ | ἵνα μὴ |
| in the flesh | the messenger | of Satan | to | me | buffet | to |
| G4561 | G32 | G4566 | G2443 | G3165 | G2852 | G2443 G3361 |
| | | | | | | |
| ὑπεραίρωμαι | | | | | | |
| I should be exalted above measure | | | | | | |
| G5229 | | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 33:55 (Parallel theme): But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Judges 2:3 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Corinthians 5:5 (Parallel theme): To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Daniel 5:20 (Parallel theme): But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

Galatians 4:13 (Parallel theme): Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

Job 2:7 (Parallel theme): So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

1 Timothy 3:6 (Parallel theme): Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Genesis 32:25 (Parallel theme): And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

Genesis 32:31 (Parallel theme): And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

Deuteronomy 8:14 (Parallel theme): Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;