

# **“THE FAITH OF A ‘SNAKE HANDLER’”**

**Acts 28:1-6**

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## INTRODUCTION

Read Mark 16:17-18: “And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

Here in Acts 28: 1-6 we see the one scriptural example of a person who took up a serpent and lived to tell about it. From these two passages modern snake-handling congregations attempt to derive their scriptural support for their practice. Recently the news reported the death of a prominent pastor who’d been bitten by a poisonous serpent and had refused medical treatment. He had been previously bitten but had lived to tell about it.

Is the ability to handle poisonous snakes during worship services an indication of a strong faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? Is this the kind of “faith” that God wants us to manifest?

I submit to you that snake handlers do not manifest biblical faith; they evidence satanic presumption similar to the second temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Evil One as recorded in Matthew 4:5-7. During Satan’s temptation he quoted from Psalm 91:11-12; Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 6:16 – “You shall not tempt [test] the Lord your God.” It is never right to put God to the test by performing some presumptuous and foolish activity.

When we examine carefully Paul’s behavior in Acts 28:1-6, we will see that Paul relied upon the sovereignty of God in everyday life as he obeyed God and did his will. He did not make the rules and expect God to conform to his desires; he let God make the rules and sought to conform his life to the will of God.

## **YOU MUST SUBMIT YOUR LIFE INTO GOD’S HANDS AND HE WILL SOVEREIGNLY PROTECT YOU AND ENABLE YOU TO DO HIS WILL.**

- I. GOD BRINGS HIS SERVANT “SAFELY THROUGH.” (V. 1; cf. 27:43—desire of the centurion toward Paul; the fulfillment toward all those on board the ship due to Paul’s presence (27:44; 28:1)
  - The Lord had told Paul that he would deliver him safely to Rome, because Paul had work to do for Him—23:11.
  - God’s servant is never safer than when he is in the middle of God’s will! External dangers are irrelevant.
  - A believer is never in more serious danger than he is when he is out of God’s will and living for himself.
  - In the will of God the ship had wrecked on the island of Malta – directly west of the island of Crete from which they had embarked in an attempt to reach a better winter port at Phoenix, on the western coast of Crete (27:12).

- II. GOD PROVIDED A HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE OF “BARBARIANS” LIVING ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA (2).
- These “barbarians” were not uncivilized; the expression is from the perspective of Greeks toward those who do not speak their language and share their culture.
  - The expression “no little kindness” has the idea of “extraordinary philanthropy”-- the word literally meaning “the love of man.”
  - In this case philanthropy was shown in common hospitality; the rain had “stood upon them” – that is, they were caught in a torrential downpour and were soaking wet. In addition they were “cold.”
  - The hospitality committee “kindled a fire and received us everyone.”
  - The New Testament places a high priority on hospitality – making it a necessary requirement for an elder (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8), and also of the earliest deacons as seen in Acts chapter 6.
  - Our Lord manifested hospitality toward his own disciples (Jn. 13), toward the 5000, and commended hospitality on the part of others such as he did in the house of Simon the Pharisee.
- III. GOD’S APOSTLE MANIFESTED THE GIFT OF HELPS IN MINISTERING TO HIS SHIP-WRECKED COMPANIONS AND TO HIS HOSTS ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA (3a).
- No one is too important for menial manual labor.
  - Every believer needs to be concerned for the health and well-being of other believers and even of the unsaved.
  - Paul gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire; as he did the warmth stirred into activity an ancient enemy.
- IV. GOD’S MAN IS ATTACKED BY A VENOMOUS VIPER (3b-5).
- The viper attack is undoubtedly part of Satan’s assault upon God and God’s servant.
  - The viper, hiding among the sticks, must have been dormant because of the cold weather and was revived by the heat.
  - Active service for God always stirs the animosity of our ancient enemy.
  - Satan did not desire the apostle to complete his course with joy.
- V. GOD’S MAN IS MISUNDERSTOOD AND FALSELY JUDGED BY THE WORLD. (4-6a)
- The serpent bit Paul and was hanging from his hand.
  - The natives concluded that Paul was being judged by the goddess “Justice” because he had committed some heinous crime such as murder.
  - Paul had been saved from shipwreck, but would now die at the hands of justice – after all, he was a common prisoner being delivered to Rome.
  - So it is that the world commonly misunderstands and misjudges God’s people and God’s servants; we ought not be surprised.
  - Normally a person would “swell up” or “fall down dead suddenly.”

VI. GOD DELIVERS HIS SERVANT FROM THE DEADLY ATTACK (5, 6b).

A. God's servant must simply "shake off" satanic attacks in the power of the Holy Spirit (5).

1. Paul "shook off" the serpent.

- Note that Paul was not looking for a deadly serpent.
- The danger came to Paul while he was about his ordinary duties.
- The Lord protected him because he was doing God's will.
- In no way was Paul acting presumptuously.

2. Paul "suffered no harm." (5)

3. "No harm came to him" (6).

B. The world does not expect God's people to survive satanic attacks.

- But, when God does amazing things for His people, the world tends to "deify" the servant of God instead of worshiping God Himself and giving Him praise—worshiping the "creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25).
- Cf. the veneration of "saints"; worship of gods and goddesses in human forms and with human characteristics and weaknesses.

CONCLUSION

As we can see, this passage is not about the great faith of a man that enables him to handle poisonous serpents. The passage is all about the greatness of God who directs his servant, provides for his servant, protects his servant, and honors his servant.

We must be about the will of God – not our desires and our agenda.

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