

Acts 28:1-10: Try as He Might, the Viper of Life Can't Hurt You

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I. Introduction

There's a Viper who will stop at nothing to destroy you and everything you are. He seems to have the power of life and death, but he doesn't. He's powerful, he's cunning, and he's been around since before the dawn of man. But if the heart of the One who made him beats inside you, then the Viper can't hurt you. Christ has the power to shield you from his bite.

II. Acts 28:1-10: Has the Viper of Life Convinced You That His Bite has Taken Your Life?

28:1-6, the storm and sea that should've taken their lives was still raging when Paul and 275 others made it safely to shore after the shipwreck. Having escaped death, they discovered that the island they landed on was Malta; it was 60 miles south of Sicily. The storm had carried their ship more than 560 miles, from Crete to Malta. It's the early hours of the morning and since it's still windy and pouring rain, they're cold and wet. So the natives of Malta show them incredible kindness. They kindled a fire and made them all feel welcome, likely providing them blankets and dry clothes. Paul made himself useful and helped gather sticks for the fire. As he laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself to his hand.

The natives seeing the viper dangling from Paul's hand concluded (according to their theology) that Paul was a murderer who had cheated death by way of a stormy sea, but Justice (the name of one of the Greek gods) didn't allow him to live. They believed something akin to karma, the idea that each person is rewarded or punished according to their past deeds. The natives were close, i.e., Paul wasn't a god, but there was a god involved: The God of the universe was watching over everything that was happening to Paul. Paul (and the 275 others) should have died at sea. But God brought him back to life so to speak. Everything that happened to Paul God superintended, even this viper bite. Why? Why would God allow this viper to bite Paul? In fact, why allow him to almost die at sea? Paul and Jesus have a lot in common. The Viper wanted Jesus dead and he caused Him a lot of suffering. But he couldn't stop the Author of life, neither could he stop Paul.

As the viper clung to Paul's hand, he shook it off into the fire and suffered no harm. The natives, however, expecting him to swell up and die, watched him intently for a long time. But nothing happened so they changed their minds. They no longer thought he was a murderer. Since Paul survived the deadly snake bite, they thought he was a god. They were close: Paul wasn't one of the many Greek gods, but he had the God beating inside him (Galatians 2:20; 4:6).

28:7-10, the leading official/citizen of Malta, a man named Publius, had an estate and he took them all in and entertained them, treating them hospitably for three days. And it happened that his father was seriously ill with a fever and dysentery. This dysentery was known as Maltese Fever. It was due to an organism found in goat's milk on the island. The Viper tried to snuff the life out of Paul, but it couldn't. In fact, the life-giving power that beat in Jesus was inside Paul. So he prayed to God, laid his hands on the father (as Jesus had done so many times with others who were ill) and he healed him! Word got out and everyone on the island with a disease came and they too were healed. The people of Malta were so grateful to Paul, that they honored him and the 275 others in many ways (there's a beach there to this day called "St. Paul's Bay"). When they left the island, they provided them with everything they needed for their trip (food, clothing, they may've even paid their fare).

The Viper first tries to use Paul, then he tries to kill him? There's a viper that's been after Paul since he was born. He was there during his formative years. He made sure that Paul became the most unbendable, the most religiously zealous Pharisee to walk this earth (Acts 26:4-5; Galatians 1:14). And when the time came, the Viper put this Pharisee to use. The Viper was there egging him on when he was holding the clothes of those stoning Stephen to death (Acts 7:58; 22:20). He was with Paul every step of the way as he persecuted Christians. But then Jesus, the author and finisher of life, appeared to Paul and his life was forever changed. But the Viper wasn't through; he was still there trying to get at Paul. Since Paul switched sides, now the Viper wanted him dead. So everywhere Paul went, the Viper was waiting with mobs, riots, and individuals ready to kill him (Acts 13:45, 50; 16:16-24; 17:1-10; 18:12; 19:23-31; 21:26-32; 22:22; 23:11-15). For a moment in Acts 14 it looked like the Viper had succeeded, but then the Author of life brought Paul back to life, 14:19-20. Paul knew that his life was not in the Viper's hands; it was in the Lord's hands. And if He promised to get him to Rome alive (23:11; 27:24), then that's exactly what was going to happen and no hurricane nor snake on the shore of Malta was going to stop him.

A little girl believes the Viper's bite has taken her life but the Lord revives her? When she was little she had a terrible head injury: she fell down a flight of concrete stairs and her head was bleeding. But since the emergency room doctor didn't do much for her (he patched her up and sent her on her way), from this point on in her life, she believed that there was something wrong with her brain. In short, she wondered whether this injury left her slightly brain damaged. And every time she took a standardized test and failed it, she was convinced that there was something wrong with her brain. Fast forward, she's in her twenties now. She's about to graduate college with her degree. She's gotten straight A's in all of her college years, but she's terrified of failing her final licensing exam. These are the thoughts that ran through her mind:

"If I don't pass, it's probably because my brain's not right from that fall I had as a kid."

"If I get a bad grade, I'll have to take the test over again after I graduate school but I won't have time to study because I'll have to start working!! And if I don't have time to study, I'll fail again!"

"If I fail, I'll let my teacher down; it'll reflect badly on her and the entire class!"

"If I fail to pass, my grade will throw the whole program off and the entire school will look bad because of me."

Notice how much the Viper convinced her to put on this one single test: it's as if her entire life and the life of the school hang in the balance! But the Lord came to her rescue. He showed her that there was nothing wrong with her brain. She's a straight A student! She's very smart and capable of this and any other test.

The day of the test came and the Viper began to work on her. During the test, she literally thought she was failing. It was so difficult for her because the questions were so hard. But she knew that the Lord was with her. She remembered what the Lord showed her the weeks prior to the test: there was nothing wrong with her brain; she could do this and peace fell over her. What was the result..... she passed the test!

