

Acts 28:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Analysis

Paul's servant leadership appears as he **gathered a bundle of sticks** (φορυσάνων πλῆθος)—an apostle doing manual labor to help others. **There came a viper out of the heat** (ἐχιδνα)—a venomous snake, likely the Maltese viper, emerged from dormancy and **fastened on his hand** (καθῆψεν). The Greek 'kathapsen' suggests the snake bit and clung tenaciously. This incident recalls Jesus' promise that believers would 'take up serpents' without harm (Mark 16:18), fulfilled literally here. Paul's vulnerability while serving others becomes an opportunity for divine protection and witness. The viper attack echoes Satan's pattern—striking when God's servants are engaged in humble service.

Historical Context

Mediterranean vipers become sluggish in cold weather, hiding in brush piles for warmth. Paul's collection of firewood was necessary but hazardous work. First-century understanding recognized viper bites as typically fatal, making Paul's survival (v. 5) all the more remarkable to witnesses.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How do you respond when attacked while serving others faithfully?
2. What does Paul's willingness to gather firewood teach about Christian leadership?

Interlinear Text

συστρέψαντος δὲ τοῦ Παύλου φρυγάνων πλῆθος καὶ
had gathered **And** ^{G3588} **when Paul** **of sticks** **a bundle** **and**
G4962 G1161 G3972 G5434 G4128 G2532

ἐπιθέντος ἐπὶ τὴν πυράν ἔχιδνα ἐκ τῆς θερμῆς
laid **them on** ^{G3588} **the fire** **a viper** **out of** ^{G3588} **the heat**
G2007 G1909 G4443 G2191 G1537 G2329

ἐξελθοῦσα καθήψεν τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ
there came **and fastened on** ^{G3588} **hand** **his**
G1831 G2510 G5495 G846

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 23:33 (Parallel theme): Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Matthew 12:34 (Parallel theme): O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.