

Acts 28:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

Analysis

The barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand—Their instant theological interpretation reveals universal human recognition of moral cause and effect. They reasoned: **No doubt this man is a murderer** (πάντως φονεὺς ἐστίν) —retributive justice from the gods. **Whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live**—Greek 'dikē' (Δίκη, justice/vengeance) was personified as a goddess ensuring murderers received punishment. Their theology mirrors Job's friends: suffering proves guilt. Though wrong about Paul, they rightly perceived that ultimate justice transcends human courts—a truth Christianity affirms, though correcting its simplistic application. Ironically, Paul the former persecutor did carry guilt, but covered by Christ's atonement.

Historical Context

Ancient Mediterranean cultures believed deities actively punished evildoers through 'natural' calamities. The personification of Justice (Dikē) as a goddess pursuing vengeance was common in Greek and Phoenician thought. The Maltese conclusion reflects universal natural law awareness (Romans 1:32, 2:14-15).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you distinguish between divine discipline and random suffering in your life?
2. What does this account teach about conscience and moral awareness in all cultures?

Interlinear Text

ὡς	δὲ	εἶδον	οἱ	βάρβαροι	κρεμάμενον	τὸ
when	And	saw	G3588	the barbarians	hang	G3588
G5613	G1161	G1492		G915	G2910	
θηρίον	ἐκ	τῆς	χειρὸς	αὐτοῦ	ἔλεγον	πρὸς
the venomous beast	on	G3588	hand	his	they said	among
G2342	G1537		G5495	G846	G3004	G4314
ἀλλήλους	Πάντως	φονεὺς	ἐστίν	ὁ	ἄνθρωπος	οὗτος
themselves	No doubt	a murderer	is	G3588	man	this
G240	G3843	G5406	G2076		G444	G3778
ὃν	διασωθέντα	ἐκ	τῆς	θαλάσσης	ἡ	δίκη
whom	though he hath escaped	on	G3588	the sea	G3588	yet vengeance
G3739	G1295	G1537		G2281		G1349
ζῆν	οὐκ	εἶασεν				
to live	not	suffereth				
G2198	G3756	G1439				

Additional Cross-References

Luke 13:2 (Parallel theme): And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

Luke 13:4 (Parallel theme): Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

Acts 28:2 (Parallel theme): And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

Acts 28:5 (Parallel theme): And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.