

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 φονεύς ἔστιν) —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

ώς δὲ εἶδον οἱ βάρβαροι κρεμάμενον τὸ^{τὸ}
when And saw the barbarians hang
G5613 G1161 G1492 G3588 G915 G2910 G3588

θηρίον ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἔλεγον πρὸς
the venomous beast on hand his they said among
G2342 G1537 G3588 G5495 G846 G3004 G4314

ἀλλήλους Πάντως φονεύς ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος
themselves No doubt a murderer is man this
G240 G3843 G5406 G2076 G3588 G444 G3778

οὐ διασωθέντα ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ἡ δίκη^ἡ
whom though he hath escaped on the sea yet vengeance
G3739 G1295 G1537 G3588 G2281 G3588 G1349

ζῆν οὐκ εἴασεν
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.

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