

Mark 16:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

They shall take up serpents (ὄφεις ἀροῦσιν, ophéis arousin)—likely refers to Acts 28:3-5 where Paul survived a viper bite. **If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them** (καὶ θανάσιμόν τι πίωσιν οὐ μὴ αὐτοὺς βλάβῃ)—not permission to test God by deliberately handling snakes or drinking poison, but promise of divine protection in unavoidable danger during kingdom mission.

They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover (ἐπὶ ἀρρώστους χεῖρας ἐπιθήσουσιν καὶ καλῶς ἔξουσιν)—apostolic healing ministry confirmed the gospel (Acts 3:1-10, 5:12-16, 28:8). Hand-laying symbolizes impartation of blessing, not magical ritual. James 5:14-15 continues this practice with elders praying over the sick. Healing serves God's redemptive purposes, not human demands—Paul himself left Trophimus sick (2 Timothy 4:20).

Historical Context

Snake-handling cults wrongly use this verse to justify deliberate risk-taking. The verse promises protection in kingdom service, not immunity when tempting God (Matthew 4:7). Early Christians faced poisoning attempts by opponents. The Didache and early church fathers record prayers for healing. Medieval confusion mixed biblical healing with superstition; Reformation recovered biblical practices.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do you distinguish between faith-filled obedience in danger versus presumptuous testing of God?
2. What does biblical healing ministry look like—should churches today expect the same apostolic signs?
3. How do you reconcile promised healing with unanswered prayers and persistent illness among believers?

Interlinear Text

ὄφεις	ἀροῦσιν	καὶ	θανάσιμόν	τι	πίωσιν	οὐ	μὴ
serpents	They shall take up	and if	deadly	any	they drink	G3756	G3361
G3789	G142	G2579	G2286	G5100	G4095		
αὐτοὺς	βλάψει,	ἐπὶ	ἀρρώστους	χεῖρας	ἐπιθήσουσιν	καὶ	
them	hurt	on	the sick	hands	they shall lay	and	
G846	G984	G1909	G732	G5495	G2007	G2532	
καλῶς	ἔξουσιν.						
recover	they shall						
G2573	G2192						

Additional Cross-References

Luke 10:19 (Parallel theme): Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Acts 19:12 (Parallel theme): So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

Acts 4:30 (Parallel theme): By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

Acts 3:16 (Parallel theme): And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Acts 9:34 (Parallel theme): And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

Mark 5:23 (Parallel theme): And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.

Acts 3:12 (Parallel theme): And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

Psalms 91:13 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Romans 16:20 (Parallel theme): And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Acts 4:10 (Parallel theme): Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.