

The VIPER that bit Paul

in Acts 28:3-6 **was** / is ...

“But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, **a viper** came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. So when the natives saw **the creature** hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.” But he shook off **the creature** into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.” (Acts 28:3-6)

allowed to

strike God's representative

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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calmly

cast into the fire (28:5)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

**

closely linked to

the storm in chapter 27

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

described in

considerable detail (28:6)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

evidence that

Paul was God's apostle

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

feared

by the locals on Malta

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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good for

Paul's skeptics (28:6)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Descriptive



Meditation

perhaps a European horned viper

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in line with

Acts 27:24 & Mark 16:18

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

instinctively

striking when disturbed

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

**

large enough

to be seen by all (28:4)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

more about

Paul than the viper

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

**

near the end

of the Book of Acts

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

not deliberately

handled by Paul

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

perhaps the most

hated animal in Europe

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

**

somewhat like the

the lions Daniel faced

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

unable to

to harm God's apostle

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Directions: after reading through **Acts 28:1-10** and some articles on snakes on Malta and in Europe, consider and discuss how the viper that bit Paul is described above. **Do you agree with the various points made? Would you change some of them or add new points? At the end, discuss the most important descriptive phrases and make personal applications.** In doing so, think about your attitude and the attitude of others, especially Jewish people then and now, toward the Apostle Paul. Also, think about the way spectacular miracles are less common in the latter portions of the end of Acts. — © 2022 by Jon F. Mahar, Hakusan City, Japan and Alexander, Maine, U.S.A.

What kind of viper was it?

Since no poisonous snakes live on the densely populated island of Malta today, we can not know for sure. Yet, the symptoms of snake bite described in 28:6 fit those the European horned viper which may have been present on the island in Paul's day when the population was much smaller than today.

Why should we study a snake?

The snake itself was not so important, but Paul's miraculous deliverance from it was. Many clearly saw the snake attached to the apostle's hand and that Paul was not harmed. This was powerful evidence that Paul was a special man. The storm in the previous chapter showed this about him as well. Both the storm and the viper are near the end of Acts and show that Paul should be respected and heeded as God's apostle.

Daniel's deliverance from the lions showed much the same regarding the Old Testament prophet. The lions are in Daniel chapter six shortly before most of Daniel's important prophecies in the following chapters. Likewise, after the end of the book of Acts we have Paul's many inspired letters, all of which are to be taken seriously.

Why didn't Paul correct those who thought he was a god (28:6)?

Perhaps he did correct them, but this is not recorded in chapter 28 because a disclaimer of deity might have been viewed too negatively. The emphasis in chapters 27 and 28 is that Paul and his message must be taken seriously. So a denial of deity is not reported in chapter 28 like it is in chapter 14.

Is there a connection between this viper and those in Numbers 21:4-9?

None is directly stated. However, some of those who were bitten by the serpents in Numbers for speaking against Moses were saved by looking to the brazen serpent. God provided for their salvation just like he did for ours through the cross of Christ. (See John 3:14-16.) Likewise, Paul's deadly serious message of salvation from sin is centered on the one who was nailed to the cross but raised in resurrection. Therein is God's victory over the evil one, the one who first appeared as the serpent in Genesis chapter three.

What are the applications?

The main application is that Paul's saving message should be heeded, but what about those of us who already are believers. For us, the question is, "Do we take ALL that Paul taught and wrote seriously?" It is not ok, for instance, to love Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts in First Corinthians but avoid his teaching about God's righteousness in Romans. Likewise within Romans, it is not acceptable to love chapter eight and ignore chapters nine and eleven. All that Paul wrote must be taken seriously because he was God's apostle.

What about charismatic snake handlers?

Secondarily, it is important to note that Paul did not deliberately handle the viper. So Mark's controversial verse regarding poisonous snakes (Mark 16:18) was not an open invitation to purposefully handle them. At most, it was a prophecy of divine protection from snakes for the apostles in the early church.