

When We Suffer, God Has Good Reasons

International Bible Lesson

Acts 28:1-10

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“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” (Acts 28:4—KJV).

“The natives saw the snake hanging on Paul’s hand and said to one another, ‘This man must be a murderer, but Fate will not let him live, even though he escaped from the sea’” (Acts 28:4—GNB).

“When the natives saw the viper hanging from Paul’s hand, they said to one another, ‘This man must be a murderer; though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live’” (Acts 28:4—NRSV).

The island natives of Malta believed that some of their gods would enforce a just verdict upon those who seemed to have escaped punishment for their crimes. When they saw a poisonous snake bite the Apostle Paul, they concluded that Paul deserved just punishment for murder. Strict justice demanded that Paul deserved to die if he had murdered someone; therefore, one of their gods must have sent the snake to impose a just punishment that Paul had escaped after he swam to shore. Even today, whenever something bad happens to someone, some think that the person suffers because they have committed some sin; but this certainly was not the case for the Apostle Paul and many others. Though Paul at one time had breathed “threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,” Jesus had forgiven Paul and had called him to preach the good news of God’s forgiveness to others (Acts 9:1).

Why did Paul suffer the snakebite? Earlier, Paul wrote, “All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). After Paul survived the snakebite, the natives concluded that Paul was a god; so, Paul could correct their ideas about their gods and teach them about the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ. Paul further displayed the power of Jesus by healing many on the island, and when they departed, the natives gave them all the provisions they needed. Indeed, whenever those who love God suffer, Jesus has a loving purpose.

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Thinking Further

1. Why do you think God allowed the snake to bite the Apostle Paul?
2. Why do some people suffer troubles?
3. How did the islanders demonstrate the fact that they understood justice, right, and wrong, but did not know the true God? How might someone demonstrate this fact about himself or herself today, while not knowing the true God?
4. How did Paul demonstrate the pure grace of God when he prayed and healed Publius’ father? How did this make a difference?
5. How can Christians look upon every difficulty, hardship, suffering, and trouble as an opportunity to serve God and share the Good News about Jesus?

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