

## WHEN THE SERPENT BITES YOUR HAND, VICTORY IS AT THE DOOR

by Carter Conlon

Have you ever been suddenly attacked and not understood the reason behind it? At the time of the attack did you have a huge battle in your mind and feel like throwing in the towel? If you did then Satan has just tried to poison you against going on in the work of the Lord. Before you read this message today you need to know and understand that when the serpent bites your hand, victory is at the door!

In the book of Acts you read how the Apostle Paul came under such an attack, and how the devil tried to stop what God would do through his life by this infusion of poison into his hand. This message is not only about Paul but about a principle the enemy uses to try and stop all of God's children from fulfilling what the Lord has called them to do.

### ■ AFTER THE STORM A SNAKE BITE

*"Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us and warm us. As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, fastened itself onto his hand" (Acts 28:1-3, New Living Translation). I personally believe this attack by Satan against the Apostle Paul was strategically timed to take away from what God was forming in him.*

Like many of us today, Paul was on a journey from which he could not be dissuaded. Earlier in the Book of Acts

we see well-meaning people, followers of Christ, trying to stop him from the journey that was before him. But he said, *"Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done"* (Acts 21:13-14, NLT).

**He infused the poison  
of his own fallen nature  
into man.**

Paul indeed was taken prisoner in Jerusalem and eventually ended up in prison in Rome. He was not afraid of what awaited him because he had already endured much suffering. Paul had an inner knowledge that God's divine purposes were being fulfilled through his life. As a Christian, you too can have this assurance in your heart. Yet, like Paul, you may have people trying to stop you in your journey with the Lord. You may even face threats, because Satan knows what will happen through the life of a man or woman who surrenders to the complete will of God. You may not have a position of power and authority in society or in the church, but if your heart is set on going the distance God has prescribed for your life, you are a threat to the kingdom of darkness and therefore open to sudden attacks from hell.

Ask yourself this question: What was Satan after in Paul? Why did Satan attempt to destroy him by having a venomous snake infuse poison into his hand? This incident shows a type of tactic Satan uses against those that are a threat to him. You see, the only one who was a threat to the kingdom of darkness in this whole scene was Paul. The barbarians, the soldiers on the ship, and the other prisoners were not a menace to Satan's kingdom. In the midst of the storm, Paul had been given a word from God for all these people. The Lord gave him a promise because he was following in the footsteps of Christ, counting his life as nothing and God's calling as everything.

What were the events that led up to this incident? Paul was a prisoner aboard a ship headed for Rome, when he advised those sailing with him; *"Sirs," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on — shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our lives." But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul"* (Acts 27:10-11 NLT).

Paul's initial warning was disregarded. The same is true for many of you reading this today. You might be trying to speak into the lives of those around you, but your message falls on deaf ears. In reality, Paul had been brought into this storm, which could have been avoided, because of the spiritual ignorance of those who had charge over him. After many days in the

raging storm, all hope of being rescued was gone. However, Paul once again brought to them the Word of God. He offered them hope, brought them food, and told them how to get safely to land. Follow with me how, in contrast to the powerlessness of the hands of others, God brought hope through Paul's hand.

### ■ WHY SATAN GOES AFTER THE HAND

It is interesting to read that the viper came out of the heat. The snake could have been in the sticks Paul had collected, but I believe it was supernaturally placed in the fire by Satan, and the heat drove it to bite Paul's hand. Why is the hand significant? To begin with, in Genesis 3, Satan is described as a serpent in the Garden of Eden. There he infused the poison of his own fallen nature into man. Adam received the poison when he ate of the fruit of Satan's logic and became intertwined with him, and man became a fallen creation. Immediately in the very next chapter, we see one of the sons of Adam raising his hand in violence against his own brother. How quickly the poison in Adam was transmitted through his lineage. It could easily be said that the poison of the heart and the hand are one.

### ■ FEARFUL HANDS

Now, going back to the storm Paul was in, I see the fearful hands of the soldiers and sailors throwing the tackling of the ship overboard, not quite knowing what to do. Some perhaps were pacing the deck of the ship wringing their hands, while others were trying to find somebody to blame. In their actions, you see unbelief was manifesting itself among the people on the deck of that ship.

### ■ CHAINED HANDS

Perhaps the chained hands of the prisoners, in the belly of the ship where Paul had been, were begging for mercy. They knew the

ship was going to sink, but they saw no way out. This is how it is with people who are without God; they are chained to the ways of this world and cannot get free.

**I love the fact that by God's providence, Paul was brought from being a captive to a captain.**

### ■ PRAYING HANDS

In an added contrast, Paul was not wringing his hands or giving in to despair, but his hands were clasped or raised in prayer. Scripture tells us, *"No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, 'Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Fair Havens. You would have avoided all this injury and loss. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you'"* (Acts 27:21–24, NLT).

I love the fact that by God's providence, Paul was brought from being a captive to a captain. Paul was now giving the orders. All direction was relegated to a bound man, a prisoner, but a prisoner who sought God while everyone else was trying to work things out in their own strength. Let me challenge you in this hour not to give in to the secular climate that is around you. Do not wring your hands in despair; the God we serve is in control of everything as he was in Paul's day.

### ■ ENCOURAGING HANDS

*"So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said"* (Acts 27:25, NLT). I see Paul on

the deck of the ship placing his hands on somebody's shoulder, encouraging him. When everyone was running around in fear, Paul was telling them to be of good cheer.

### ■ PROVIDING HANDS

In this leadership role, Paul began to bring order to the panic and chaos. Not only was he providing direction he was also providing food for the people on board. *"Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. Then everyone was encouraged"* (Acts 27:34–36, NLT).

### ■ WORKING HANDS

At daylight, the ship ran aground and began to break up because of the violence of the waves. Those who could swim were commanded to get to shore, and the rest to grab hold of boards from the ship. Once safely on shore, they were tired, cold and wet from the rain, but Paul, who is a type of the true church of Jesus Christ, was out working with his hands gathering sticks. God was extending His hand through Paul as he continued to minister to the needs of the people. Paul brought the wood he had gathered to the fire, and that is when the snake fastened itself on his hand. The people of the island saw it hanging there and said to each other, *"A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live"* (Acts 28:4, NLT).

### ■ A BATTLE FOR THE MIND

Picture Paul for a moment. He sees the judgment in the eyes of the people around him as the snake clings to his hand. It is amazing how quickly people can come to the wrong conclusions. Paul is now in a battle for the mind, a raging battle not to give up. It is when you are reaching out and doing everything you know to do for the betterment of others, that suddenly out of the heat of the situation, the serpent comes



to poison your heart and attitude in life. Satan grabs onto the very hands that have been an extension of God and attempts to infuse the poison of his nature.

### ■ WHEN HANDS BECOME FISTS IN GOD'S HOUSE

Satan desires two things: to have man withdraw his hand from being extended on God's behalf, or to distort the image of God as revealed through the hand of man. The prophet Isaiah spoke about this to the people of Israel, who had a distorted image of the hand of God. Isaiah 58 was about God's own people not reaching out to the poor; not clothing the destitute. They had ceased to do the work of God and they had no compassion for fallen man anymore. It was now all about them. What kind of hands did the people of God in Isaiah's day have? "You fast to smite and debate with the fist of wickedness" (Isaiah 58:4). The hand of God as seen through His people had become a fist in His house—contention seemed to be everywhere.

God has chosen to extend His grace to a fallen world through our hands. That's why the hands of Christ were the first to be nailed to the cross. I pray that the weakness in my hands will be changed into the strength of Christ's hands. In Isaiah 58:9, there is a reference to the pointing of the finger to blame others; not pointing direction, but directing blame on one another. There was nobody who would just say, "Well, in spite of who's right or wrong, I'm asking your forgiveness."

### ■ WHEN HANDS ARE USED FOR GRABBING INSTEAD OF GIVING

The Bible speaks of the hand of a lazy person becoming selfish, "*A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again*" (Proverbs 19:24). When the focus of an individual's life is on

himself that person becomes selfish. Oh, how the devil loves it when the hand of the church of Jesus Christ becomes self-focused and egocentric; when His people withdraw their hand from helping others and simply grab for themselves.

**I believe many people are praying for others with no results because their hearts, and therefore their hands, are full of venom.**

### ■ SATAN WANTS TO STOP THE HEALING THAT WILL FLOW FROM YOUR HAND

I see Paul looking at these people and then looking at the serpent that has fixed itself on his hand. But we see in Acts 28: 5 that he shook the beast into the fire and felt no harm. Hallelujah! This is only my opinion, but I believe Paul looked right into that serpent's eyes and said, "No, devil, these people will not be cast into the fires of hell; you are cast into the fire not them. This is your destiny, Satan! Go right back to where you belong; you are under the judgment of God. Your ways are not my ways and I'm not allowing the way you think to be infused into me. You didn't want to follow the ways of God. You have infused poison into all these people, and you think you will have them for all of eternity. No! No! No! It's not them into the fire, it's you into the fire. I'm going with God and I believe that God is going to bring a marvelous deliverance for all these God has given to me."

Satan wants to stop you with his poison so you do not get to the place where God can stream His healing power through you. I believe many people are praying for others with no results because their hearts, and therefore their hands, are full of venom. Something is wrong in their

lives; something of the enemy has been embraced in their hearts, and no healing flows anymore through their hands.

I want you to see the focus of this message: Satan was after the healing that was about to flow through Paul's hands. In Acts 28:8 it talks about a man who lay sick of a fever. Paul laid his hands on him, prayed, and healed him. Now note, this is the same hand that had been bitten by the serpent. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed (Acts 28:9).

### ■ HANDS RAISED IN THANKSGIVING

After this season of healing through the yielded servant Paul, the power of God continues to flow through him. In Acts 28:15, Paul tells us that he continued his journey to Rome but not before raising his hands in thanksgiving to God!

### ■ HANDS THAT REACH OUT IN HOSPITALITY

At the end of the chapter, in verse 30, we read, "*And Paul remained two whole years under house arrest and received all that came to him.*" You now see the hand of Paul reaching out and shaking the hand of Roman and religious leaders alike who were living in spiritual ignorance. The hand that refused the poison of the viper is now a welcoming hand of hospitality to everybody who would come to him, sharing with them the wondrous love and power of the kingdom of God. The incredible vision of God's keeping power flowed through this man's hand.

### ■ GOD'S WORD NOW FLOWS THROUGH THE HAND OF PAUL

Now you begin to perceive the bigger picture of what the enemy was after. You see, God was about to put a pen in Paul's hand. And in prison he was going to write the epistles to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, and to

the Colossians. He was going to write to Timothy, a young man who was being trained in the ministry, and with his hand, Paul would write heaven-directed instruction and revelation. Could you imagine what our Epistles would look like if the poison of Satan had not been shrugged off into the fire? What a terrible and tragic legacy would have followed Paul if he had not shaken off the snake.

You see, if God is going to put a pen in your hand, if your life is going to mean something after you're gone, if you're going to leave a legacy, the enemy is going to come after it. He's going to try to put poison into your life and ultimately into that hand. And the tender encouragement that could have come from you would be lost. You can see Paul writing to Timothy, "You don't have to be afraid—I made it here and God has sustained me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. God has not given you a spirit of fear, Timothy, but of power, love and a sound mind." Paul's hand is clear, his heart is clean, he is writing a pure word from God.

### ■ LET US END OUR JOURNEY WITH TENDER HANDS

We have the right to shake that serpent off into the fire. We have the right to say, "No! These hands belong to God. This life belongs to God. You will not stop me from being a vessel through which the love of God will be manifested in my generation. You will not take away the authority that God has placed within my life. Satan, in Jesus' Name—back in the fire!" Hallelujah!

I want to get to the end of this journey with tender hands. I

always know when people have walked with God honestly and truthfully. They are men and women who have soft hands as they get older. People who have not walked honestly have rigid, tight hands; there is no tenderness in them. It almost feels like you're shaking hands with a claw. And quite often their personality matches their hands. It's sad, but it's true. Mark somebody who has walked with God, and see how tender their hands are in dealing with people. When they write you a letter, they are not condemning, but there's tenderness. And this tenderness of God is exhibited in everything they do because they refused to be poisoned by Satan's attack on their life.

If you have been bitten, and perhaps a serpent is still hanging on your hand, it might be time today, in fact, right now, to throw it back into the fire. The moment you do this, healing will start to flow. Let it go, and say, "God, there's a higher calling on my life than being embittered by some poison or other. I choose to cast it back into the fire and I now receive your healing into my life."

Carter Conlon  
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### TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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### WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

|          |         |                |        |
|----------|---------|----------------|--------|
| Sunday   | 10:00AM | 3:00PM         | 6:00PM |
| Tuesday  | 7:00PM  | Church Service |        |
| Thursday | 7:00PM  | Prayer Meeting |        |
| Friday   | 7:00PM  | Church Service |        |

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