



## Daily Verse and Comment

### Mark 16:17-18

(17) And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; (18) they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

*New King James Version*

Of [the gospel](#) writers, Mark is the only one to record this account. These verses are similar to both Matthew's and Luke's versions of Christ's commission to the apostles ([Matthew 28:16-20](#); [Luke 24:36-49](#)). However, only Mark includes the "signs [that] will follow those who believe." Are they commands for the followers of Christ or promises? In particular, does [Jesus](#) say Christians should handle snakes, or does He promise to protect them if they are bitten?

Many in the church believe, and it may well be, that Christ was speaking only to those [God](#) has called to preach the gospel. After all, in verse 15, He had said to the *eleven remaining disciples*, "Go into all [the world](#)." Combine this with the fact that we can see examples of the apostles fulfilling these signs in the New Testament and a case can be made for this view.

A snake bit the apostle Paul while he was on the island of Malta, and no harm came to him ([Acts 28:1-6](#)). However, he did not go looking for the snake in an effort to prove his [faith](#). The snake bit him unexpectedly, in front of others, and God protected him as promised.

Luke writes that "the seventy returned with [joy](#), saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" ([Luke 10:17](#)). He also records in [Acts 5:12](#), ". . . through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people." It is quite possible that this section of Mark applies to the apostles and perhaps is further limited to their lifetimes, that is,

the first century. A slight problem with this conclusion is that [Mark 16:17](#) says, ". . . these signs will follow *those who believe*." It would appear that these verses apply to all believers, all Christians, regardless of when they live.

In Matthew 4, [Satan](#) tempts Christ in various ways. At one point, he tries to get Jesus to throw Himself off the roof of the Temple, saying, "For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge concerning you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone'" (verse 6). Here Satan twists [Psalm 91:11-12](#), which says, "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone." God is promising protection to His people here, telling us that He will place His angels about us. He is not telling us to attempt to hurt ourselves in a deliberate effort to see if He will come through for us.

Interestingly, the next verse tells us that we will "tread upon the lion and the cobra" and that we will "trample underfoot" the "young lion and the serpent" (verse 13). Again, within the context of Psalm 91, God is promising His protection.

When Satan attempts to persuade Christ to jump off a building to prove that He truly is the Son of God, He answers the Devil, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'" ([Matthew 4:7](#)). Certainly, Jesus knew that God's angels were all about Him, but He also knew not to test God deliberately. Christ was quoting from [Deuteronomy 6:16](#), where hundreds of years earlier, He Himself had said this very same thing to the Israelites.

In Deuteronomy 5, through [Moses](#), He had rehearsed to the children of Israel the Ten Commandments. Then, in chapter 6, He told them to "[love](#) the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (verse 5). He further told them to teach God's ways to their children, fear Him, stay away from other gods, and do "not tempt the LORD your God" (verses 7, 13-14, 16). As Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 show, God's blessings would flow to them if they were obedient—blessings that include the promise of protection.

In [Luke 10:17](#), the seventy that Christ had sent out returned with great joy, amazed that even the demons had been subject to them. Jesus responds:

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven. (verses 19-20)

Protection is promised here, not a command to flaunt their God-given authority. He specifically instructs them "not [to] rejoice in this" because it was not of their doing, not a show of faith. It was God's protection pure and simple.

The prophet Isaiah pens words of God similar to these in [Isaiah 43:1-3](#), 5:

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; . . . you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. . . . Fear not, for I am with you.

Throughout His Word, God has promised us His protection. He is especially watchful over those He has commissioned to carry out His work, as well as all those whom He has called to make a witness for Him. The Bible is full of examples of His power to deliver His servants from life-threatening situations.

However, He does not guarantee to cover our foolishness when we put ourselves into potentially dangerous situations. He abhors being tempted—tested—as if He needs to prove Himself and His power to us. Psalm 78 shows His distaste for the Israelites' constant testing of Him in the wilderness. The last thing He desires is for members of His church to follow their example of unbelief (see [Hebrews 3:7](#) through 4:2).

— Mike Ford

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