



Jeff Sweeten

*Thus Saith the Lord*  
is presented by the

## Park Heights Church of Christ

1300 E. Boynton St.  
Hamilton  
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### Schedule of Services

#### SUNDAY

9:30 a.m. Bible Class  
10:25 a.m. Morning Worship  
1:30 p.m. Afternoon Worship

#### WEDNESDAY

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

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# Thus Saith the Lord

## A DEAD SNAKE

By Jeff Sweeten

It's like a big neon sign taped to the back of a fraternity pledge that says, "Kick Me"; some things just beg comment. Like the article about a Jonesville, Virginia, preacher<sup>1</sup>, now pushing up daisies and in the running for the latest Darwin award<sup>2</sup> (a less-than-prestigious tribute given to bad seed whose actions argue that they shouldn't be allowed to reproduce). This particular "Rev." Dwayne Long is also proof that misunderstanding the Bible can kill you.

It has long been asserted that Mark 16:17-18 is directed to Christians in this century, ignoring both the purpose (confirming the Word of God, 1 Corinthians 1:6-7 and Hebrews 2:3-4) and duration (cessation of miracles toward the end of the First Century, 1 Corinthians 13:8ff) of New Testament miracles. However, an ironic inconsistency has normally been most conspicuous in the selectivity with which false prophets have applied this text. Most modern-day miracle workers embrace the casting-out-devils, speaking-intongues, and healing-the-sick sections to the neglect of the drinking-deadly-poison and taking-up-serpents part. (I once challenged a woman during a Bible study to take a big swig of strychnine; she deferred to a later date.) There are, however, those rare, occasional and *short-lived* exceptions (pardon the pun).

Dwayne found out the hard way that Mark 16:17-18 didn't apply to him when he was bitten on the finger during a rattlesnake-handling service and promptly died. To his credit, he taught his congregation this false doctrine so well that they didn't bother calling for help; after all, he had preached energetically that any member who died from a snakebite during one of his lively services had received a sign from God that it's their time to go. And, so he went.

If my sense of humor holds too sharp an edge for you, consider God's expression of disdain against those who defy, ignore, or pervert His Word. Notice especially the blunt disdain God has for those who ignore His will and "invent to themselves" entertainments contrary to His Word (cf. Amos 6:5). When God calls through His Word and men refuse, rebelling against His revealed, written counsel, He says, "*I also will laugh at your calamity,*" even describing the demise of the wicked with disturbing clarity: "*Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer...: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD... Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them*" (Proverbs 1:26, 28-29, 31-32a). On one occasion, God mocked Israel for their idolatry, stating:

*"Yet you have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation."* Cf. Judges 10:11-14

So, ignoring God's will does come at a price, sometimes sooner than later. And, yes, a dead snake can be a powerful lesson (cf. Psalm 140:3).