



WAS VENOM PRESENT IN A “VERY GOOD” CREATION?

November, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

A question that deserves consideration from a biblical and scientific perspective is the question of “*was venom (a form of poison that can cause death) present and active before the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden,*” particularly when God had declared His creation “*very good*” at the end of the sixth day of creation as stated in Genesis:

“God saw all that He had made, and it was very good! There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day”
Genesis 1:31

This verse indicates that what had been pronounced individually good on the previous five days of creation was now called “*very good*” collectively. So, how could some creatures (such as some snakes, spiders and lizards) be equipped with systems that were specifically designed for killing other animals and/or creatures? Although this dilemma presents some significant theological challenges, let's look at Scripture and see if we can – at least – provide some clarity to this question. *All biblical quotes are from the New English Translation (NET) Bible which is a direct translation from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts.*

CREATION

In overviewing the creation account as found in Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:25, God uses a day by day account of His creative power from the beginning of the heavens and the earth to the crowning point of His creation, the first humans on earth, Adam and Eve. However, in the verses that follow the creation account, we find several perspectives that may illuminate how creatures that were originally created *very good* (or perfect) could – at some point in time – use biological systems that were specifically designed for killing and also consuming other animals and/or creatures remembering that venom is a dangerous toxin that requires a body that is specially equipped to make, store and deliver the toxin into another creature, normally to cause death. Because a snake was a central figure within the biblical fall account (and is mentioned over 80 times in the Bible), we will focus on the perspective of venom in snakes.

There are 3,000 known snake species with about 400 of those species considered as venomous.¹ The inland taipan snake found in Australia (Figure 1) is considered the most toxic of any snake as the venom from one bite is capable of killing 100 men in less than one hour (if left untreated).²



Figure 1. Inland Taipan Snake

The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates a typical design and complexity overview of the parts that are necessary to deliver venom to another animal and/or creature. This complex system consists of specific attributes as follows:

- Retractable fangs, venom-conducting tubes, venom glands and muscles to contract the venom glands
- Venom that consists of an adaptation of protein and digestive enzymes to produce either a neurotoxin or hemotoxin based venom
- A sophisticated sensory system to detect the minute heat signal from a prey's body, even in total darkness
- The ability to determine the approximate weight of its prey so the appropriate venom can be injected

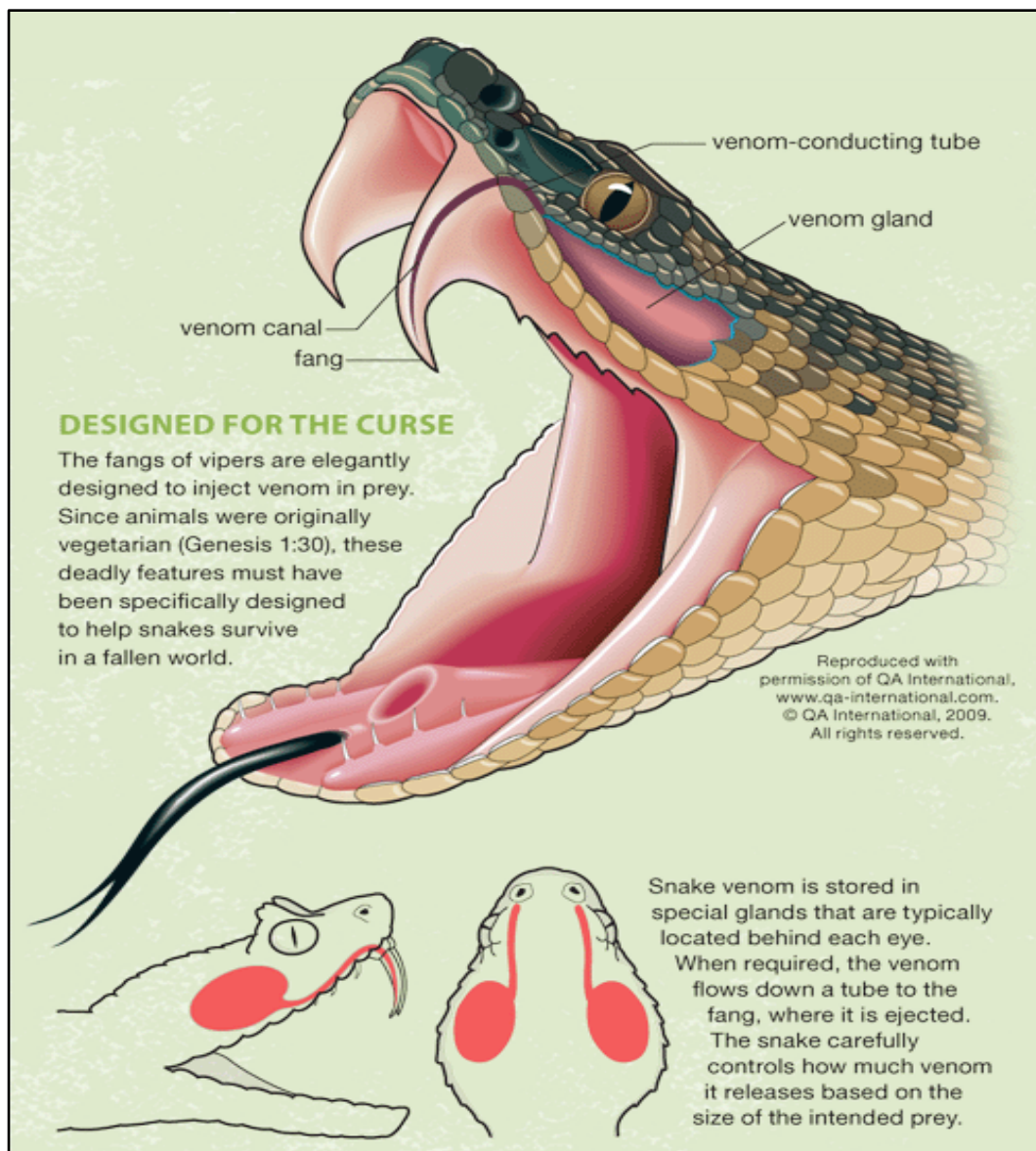


Figure 2. Typical Snake Venom Delivery System

As it is apparent that the specific venomous features of snake design seem to be clearly designed for this cursed world and not for a *perfect* creation, let's contemplate the following questions:

- 1) Did God add these features to snakes at the curse?
- 2) Did God design the original "*very good*" snakes with venomous features, knowing that Adam would sin and that venomous snakes would soon need the appropriate features in a cursed world?
- 3) Did God place these features in the "*very good*" snake's genes, but they were not activated until after the curse as snakes had offspring and began to spread over the earth (mediated design)?
- 4) Lastly, and from an evolutionary viewpoint, did a snake's ability to kill with venom slowly arise as a result of mutations and natural selection after Adam's sin?

Although the first three questions are not addressed in Scripture, the fourth question is directly answered in the New Testament as follows:

"For all things in heaven and on earth were created by Him – all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers – all things were created through Him and for Him"

Colossians 1:16

This verse indicates that the ability of a snake to injure/kill with venom was a direct result of the creative power of God, not the slow process of Darwinian evolution.

Now, let's consider the initial three questions and begin with the first chapter of Genesis where God is giving specific instructions to the newly created Adam and Eve and highlight some applicable observations:

(29) "Then God said, I now give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the entire earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. (30) And to all the animals of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food. It was so"

Genesis 1:29-30

These two verses indicate that man's dominion over the earth had one major limitation – *diet* – and stresses that the living creatures were not for food and sustenance. Rather, all living creatures – both humans and all other creatures with the breath of life – were given *plants* for food, so initially they were

vegetarians. Even though these verses are debated by some, they would make no sense in light of God's Covenant with Noah directly after the Flood as follows:³

"You may eat any moving thing that lives. As I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything"

Genesis 9:3

Genesis 1:29-30 would be meaningless if Noah were already eating animals that were eating plants. Therefore, from Genesis 1:29-31, John Wesley concludes – *"The animals (everything with the breath of life) did not attempt to devour, or in any way hurt, one another. All were peaceful and quiet, as were the watery fields wherein they ranged at pleasure. There were no birds, or beasts of prey; none that destroyed or molested another; but all the creatures breathed, in their several kinds, the benevolence of their great Creator."*⁴

Also, let's look at an additional account of the relationship of animals and man during the creation account in Genesis:

"The Lord God formed out of the ground every living animal of the field and every bird of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name"

Genesis 2:19

At this point in our discussion, we can conclude from the previous verses that prior to the sin and resultant fall by Adam and Eve that God had declared His creation *"very good"* which indicates perfection and harmony in His creative work over the previous six-days of creation. Additionally, Genesis 2:19 also indicates there must have been some type of harmony/acceptance between the animals and Adam, particularly when this perception is later canceled in Genesis 9:2.

THE CURSE

Now, let's continue with the perspective of harmony between animals/creatures and man by looking at the temptation, the resultant sin and fall as outlined in Genesis:

(1) *"Now the serpent was more shrewd (crafty) than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Is it really true that God said, you must not eat of any tree of the orchard?"* (2) *The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat from the fruit of the trees of the orchard;* (3) *but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, you must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die."* (4) *The serpent said to the woman, "Surely you will not die, (5) for*

God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil. (6) When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, and was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. (7) Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves”

Genesis 3:1-7

These seven verses give the well-known Scriptural account of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, from their acceptance of the deception by the serpent that leads to their fall along with the introduction of sin with a resultant curse on all of creation by God that is still active today. However, within the parameters of our discussion, notice the following perceptions:

- Many theologians identify or associate the serpent with Satan. In this view Satan comes in the disguise of a serpent and speaks through a serpent which can explain the serpent’s ability to speak
- The immediate context from the Hebrew pictures the serpent as simply one of the animals of the field created by God (Genesis 1:14). Although speculative and not addressed by Scripture, an ancient Jewish interpretation explains the reference to the serpent in a literal manner, attributing the capacity to speak to all of the animals in the orchard as follows:

“On that day (the day the man and woman were expelled from the orchard) the mouth of all the beasts and cattle and birds and whatever walked or moved was stopped from speaking because all of them used to speak to one another with one speech and one language (presumed to be Hebrew)”⁵

- Although Scripture does not directly address the previous Jewish interpretation, it is interesting that there was a special relationship between the animals/creatures as God had created the earth with its inhabitants in perfect unity. Interestingly, Eve was not surprised and/or afraid of the serpent as they straightforwardly communicated with each other
- As a side point, also notice that the serpent was not limited to crawling on the ground until cursed by God. It was then forced to crawl on its belly from then on (Genesis 3:14) and would indicate the serpent was capable of traveling upright until cursed
- Lastly, the animals/creatures in the garden enjoyed a ***non-threatening*** relationship with Adam and Eve as this bond will be revoked at the end of the Flood as stated in Genesis 9:2 when God tells Noah that – “*Every living creature of the earth and every bird of the sky will be terrified of you*” indicating that animals will *fear humans* from this time forward

Once Adam and Eve sinned by rejecting God's instructions, the "*very good*" creation was cursed from that point on and radically changed from perfection to a creation and its inhabitants that were cursed and began to decay and would ultimately die (Genesis 2:17).

WAS VENOM PRESENT IN A VERY GOOD CREATION

With the previous discussion as a foundation to our initial question of "*Was Venom Present In A Very Good Creation*," let's specifically look at the third chapter of Genesis and the verses where God curses the serpent:

(14) "The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the wild beasts and all the living creatures of the field! On your belly you will crawl and dust you will eat all the days of your life. (15) And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"

Genesis 3:14-15

From a simplistic viewpoint, let's summarize several perspectives of our previous discussion and Genesis 3:14-15:

- **Were venomous snakes deadly from the beginning of creation?**

The answer to this question is **NO** from two perspectives:

- God created His creation "*very good*" which indicates perfection
- In God's "*very good*" creation of Genesis 1, snakes did not injure or kill with venom. Additionally, snakes did not eat other animals, as there was no death. Instead, God gave green plants for every animal/creature to eat (Genesis 1:30). At this point in our discussion, it is pure speculation to state how snakes were originally and biologically created with or without venomous features

- **Were venomous snakes present after the fall?**

The answer to this question is **YES!** Therefore, this perspective does not apply to the "*very good*" time period prior to the fall, as there was no sin and death as we have previously discussed. However, an additional question is – when did perfect snakes from a "*very good*" creation become venomous? Although Scripture does not elaborate on these questions, let's look at a few considerations:

- The disobedience of Adam and Eve thrust the entire creation into a curse, and ever since the "*whole creation*" has been groaning (Romans 8:22).
Venom vividly demonstrates the consequences of the fall and sin
- The curse in Genesis 3:14-15 announces that God will put enmity between the woman and the serpent and their "seed" (or offspring) but involves

more than a future hatred between women and snakes. The Hebrew term for “*enmity*” does not apply to animals but to moral agents. Though Satan will cause suffering to the “seed of the woman,” he will be dealt a mortal blow by that seed⁶

- Genesis 3:15 is known by the term Protevangelium, or “first gospel” – a prophetic picture of the time when Satan would be defeated by the woman’s triumphant “Seed” who is Christ
- Scripture also indicates that the serpents “seed” refers to those who willfully set themselves against the seed of the woman (John 8:44 and Ephesians 2:2-3). The age-long conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan (Matthew 13:37-40:1 and John 3:8-12) will continue until the end (Revelation 12:17). He that crushes the serpents head refers to a future descendant of the woman and is a singular noun – and is a reference to Jesus Christ^{7,8,9}
- Interestingly, Scripture is silent on the relationship of the animal kingdom and mankind until after the Flood when God speaks to Noah as follows:

(2) “Every living creature of the earth and every bird of the sky will be terrified of you. Everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea are under your authority. (3) You may eat any moving thing that lives. As I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything”

Genesis 9:2-3

CONCLUSION

How could animals/creatures that were originally created perfect become so deadly, and in some cases (snakes), so common? It is highly unlikely that God created venomous predators after the fall as He finished creating on day six (Genesis 2:1-3). Therefore, it is both biblically and scientifically sound to accept the premise that God created many animals/creatures with incredible genetic flexibility to be able to change their shape, physiology, and behavior, sometimes even radically.¹¹ Even though natural selection and mutations can change existing genetic information, they cannot create new specified genetic information from nothing – only God can do that!

So, according to Dr. Gordon Wilson, Senior Fellow of Natural History at New Saint Andrews College, Idaho, the best explanation is as follows:

“God created all His creatures (at the moment of creation) with the necessary genetic information to transform into creatures that looked and behaved radically different. At the fall, I believe that God (either through natural or supernatural cause and effect) turned on the appropriate genetic information to transform certain vegetarian creatures

into predators or prey with amazing defense mechanisms. This means all their weapon systems developed along with the necessary behavioral changes needed to wield them effectively.

There are countless examples of animals and plants that use the same DNA to build radically different shapes, structures, or functions. Two examples are the metamorphosis of tadpoles into frogs and caterpillars into butterflies. This is so common that we rarely marvel at how amazing this process truly is! Think about it: a tadpole has a radically different body, feeding habits, physiology, and mode of movement from its final form, the frog. If we didn't know about this phenomenon, we would assume that the tadpole was an entirely different creature than the frog. But it is the exact same creature with the exact same genetic information. By analogy it is not hard to imagine how a radically different creature can be produced from the same DNA.

Compared to the tadpole and caterpillar metamorphosis, front-loading a vegetarian snake with the necessary genetic information to become a predator, specially armed with fangs and venom glands, is not at all difficult for our great God!" Venomous creatures remind us that something is not right and needs to be restored."

"That the creation itself will also will be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God's children," Romans 8:21

RESOURCES

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