



CREATOR

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A TALE OF FEAR & WONDER

*Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
Psalm 34:11*

Children are often captivated by the strange, bizarre, and sometimes scary things Jesus created. When I was four years old, I loved dinosaurs and wanted, more than anything in the world, to be a paleontologist when I grew up. *Reptiles* as a whole hold a singular fascination for the childlike. And rarely are our feelings neutral when we encounter these creatures—we are either repulsed by or attracted to them (remember Eve in the Garden?).

Those not so childlike in their thinking may see reptiles as truly loathsome creatures that must be avoided. Yet, we must ask, “Since all Creation honors Jesus, what does our Heavenly Father teach us about His Son’s character by causing these cold, scaly things to cross our paths?”

Please allow us to suggest that among the many lessons reptiles can teach us about their Creator—our Lord Jesus Christ—the one dominant message they “preach”¹ is *the*

fear of the Lord. And if we are teachable, this truth will lead to a rich wisdom, and the knowledge of our Holy God (Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 1:7). The angels in Heaven echo this “sermon” of the reptiles, proclaiming to the Elect here on Earth, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the Heaven and the Earth and sea and springs of waters.”² With all our studies of His Creation, can there be anything more profitable for us than growing in this fear of the Lord?!



Chameleon

Reflecting Christ’s otherworldly beauty

¹ Job 12:7-10
² Revelation 14:7



God gave the **Basilisk Lizard** the extraordinary ability to run on the surface of the water.

The **Gila Monster** and **Mexican Beaded Lizard** are the only poisonous lizards.



The **Komodo Dragon** is the largest lizard on Earth.

TUATARA



Although the **Tuatara** looks like a lizard, it's not. It has no external ears, but it does possess a "third eye" on top of its head that can detect light. It is found only on a few small islands off New Zealand.



New Zealand

Basilisk—Penn State University
Iguana—© Can Stock Photo / ESIGHT
Gila monster—© Can Stock Photo / Farinosa
Armadillo liz.—© NickEvansKZN / Shutterstock
Armadillo liz.—© Can Stock Photo / Farinosa
Komodo dra.—© Can Stock Photo / photomaru
Caiman—© Nynke van Holten / Shutterstock
Tuatara—© Can Stock Photo / Lensmen
Gharial—© PavelJiranek / Shutterstock

Commonly found in Mexico and Central America, Jesus often paints **Green Iguanas** in bright colors.

LIZARDS



Armadillo Lizard

Christ protects this lizard with a coat of thick scales. When frightened, it grabs its tail in its mouth, forming a spikey, armored ring!



THE REPTILES OUR LORD JESUS CREATED

CROCODILIANS

Caiman



Crocodilians include crocodiles, alligators, caimans, and gharials. Though similar in appearance, the Lord made 28 species using different skin patterns, colors, body sizes, and shapes of the jaw. The gharial has the longest and thinnest jaw of all Crocodilians.



Gharial

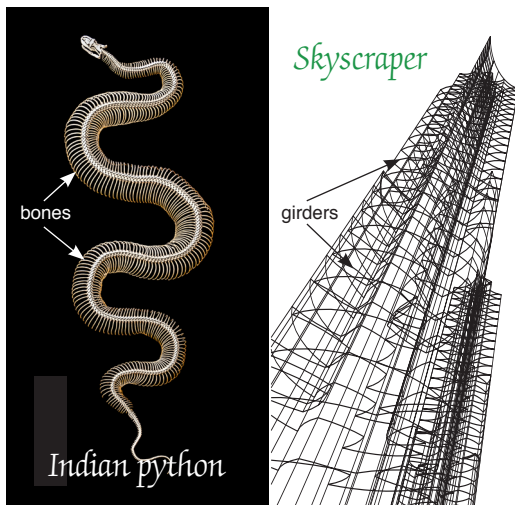
A COMMUNITY OF CREATURES

All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 1 Corinthians 15:39

The greater number of creatures that our Lord has made are small in size, and many go unnoticed. They belong to a huge collection of animals called *invertebrates*. Most are strange-looking and terrifying up close.

Christ also fashioned a group of organisms known as *vertebrates*. Vertebrates are animals *with backbones* and include mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.³ Because vertebrates have bones, they can grow to a much greater size than invertebrates, further demonstrating the creative glory Jesus shares with His Father.

We might liken the way that God created invertebrates—with their relatively fragile exoskeletons—to the countless wood-frame houses of an urban area. Vertebrates can then be thought of as the skyscrapers in a city,



strengthened by bony “girders, beams, and columns.” Both groups of creatures perform vital jobs for the health of the ecosystems in which they are found—each having divinely ordained ways of glorifying their Creator.

³ In 1825, Pierre-André Latreille, a French zoologist, was the first scientist to divide vertebrates into amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

WHAT MAKES REPTILES UNIQUE?

God made the beasts of the earth after their kind.
Genesis 1:25a

Reptilian anatomy shares similarities with other vertebrates, but Creator Jesus also made them unique in their own way:

- The skin of reptiles *is dry* and covered with numerous *scales* (made from a material similar to your fingernails).



A closeup of boa constrictor skin reveals beautiful scales.

- Their skin is water-tight allowing them to conserve moisture in the harshest of environments (reptiles are “waterproof”).
- Unlike amphibians—with which they are sometimes confused—most reptiles can live out of water.
- They have lungs and breathe air, unlike fish.



Turtles warming themselves in the sunshine

- And unlike mammals and birds, reptiles are “cold-blooded,” which means they depend upon the sun to warm them.



TYPES OF REPTILES

Christ Jesus further divided reptiles into five main types:

- Lizards — over 5,600 species
- Snakes — over 3,500 species
- Turtles — over 350 species
- Crocodilians — 28 species
- Tuatara — 2 species

How many reptile species can you name?

GOOD PARENTS

“Be fruitful and multiply.” Genesis 1:22

Although all reptiles are cold-blooded, we mustn’t think of them as cold-hearted. Jesus designed them to reflect *the care of His Heavenly Father* with a familial concern we often see in mammals and birds. Some reptiles are known to nurture their young:

- The female Indian python coils around her clutch of two dozen eggs while twitching her muscles to raise the temperature of her nest;
- American skinks protect and tend their eggs—turning them and keeping them warm;



Crocodile mother gently protecting her young from possible predators

- It is well known that crocodiles and alligators are incredibly faithful parents—often carrying their young in the mouth and aggressively guarding their nests.

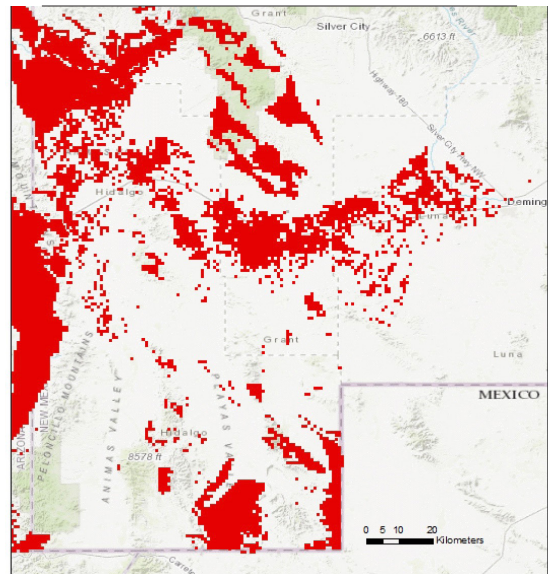


REPTILE RANGE

“Fill . . . the Earth.” Genesis 1:22

Reptiles can be found all over the world: in deserts, forests, grasslands, swamps, lakes, oceans, the Arctic Circle, and high in the Andes mountains⁴ . . . everywhere except Antarctica.

A study of a reptile’s range reveals that no species inhabits the full territory God has provided for them. The reason for this is a great mystery to herpetologists (scientists who study reptiles). Our Lord Jesus has commanded each type of reptile to live exactly where He ordained them to live: for example, sea turtles reside in the ocean, taipan snakes in Australia, and the Gila monster in Mexico and the southwestern United States. But no species of reptile has yet to take full advantage of the territory given to them. Let’s look at the amount of land available in southwestern New Mexico suitable for Gila monsters:



Red represents land suited for the Gila monster in New Mexico. Yet this reptile *is not* found in all these areas.

If reptiles could expand into these areas, then they certainly would fulfill Christ’s command “Be fruitful and multiply.”

⁴ The lizard, *Liolaemus tacnae*, has been found at 17,700 feet (5,400 m).

METABOLISM

In the beginning, the Son of God commanded His Creation to fill the world so that His Father's glory might shine everywhere. The Fall, however, has had a devastating effect on Earth. Many inhospitable environments have since appeared (deserts and polar regions). It was necessary, therefore, for Jesus to design—*ahead of time*—creatures that could thrive in these harsh places.

The best way to create an animal capable of surviving in a desert, for instance, with its sparse food and rainfall and extremes of hot and cold, is to make them “waterproof” and “cold-blooded.” Now, cold-blooded animals are not really true to their name. On hot days, their blood becomes as warm as ours. (Reptiles do not eat to stay warm, but they stay warm to eat—that is, digest their food.) A better term is *ectotherm*, which comes from the Greek words *ektos* “outside” + *thermos* “heat.” Reptiles are ectotherms because their bodies normally take on the temperature outside. For this reason, reptiles are not very good at withstanding cold.⁵

Reptiles move in and out of the sun and the shade to regulate their body temperature.



European
viper

The advantage to being an ectotherm is that Christ has slowed its metabolism—the animal thus requires much less food than mammals and birds.⁶ Turtles can go more than a year without eating, and a crocodile needs only one-tenth the food of a lion of the same size, yet is just as strong, quick, and fierce!

⁵ There are only three species of reptiles in the Arctic Circle—the European viper, the lizard *Lacerta vivipara*, and the slowworm.

⁶ A mammal or a bird is an endotherm—“inside heat.” God produces heat within them using organs such as the liver.

CHAMPIONS OF GROWTH

Despite their slow metabolism, some reptiles attain an enormous size. It was once thought that reptiles continue to grow throughout their lives, but this is generally not true. The majority experience a rapid period of growth as juveniles that slows down and eventually stops once they reach adulthood. As long as enough food is available, however, some reptiles can continue to increase in size even as adults. Crocodiles seem to be an example of this.

The saltwater crocodile owns the title of the world's *largest* living reptile—it can reach 23 feet (7 m) in length and weigh over 2,600 lbs (1,200 kg). Coming in second place is the leatherback turtle. One such turtle



Leatherback turtle

How can something so small grow to be so big?!

tipped the scales at over 2,000 lbs (900+ kg) and was nearly 10 feet (3 m) long. The world's *longest* reptile is the reticulated python. In 1912, a 32-foot-long (9.75 m) monster snake was discovered in Indonesia. At the other extreme is a tiny chameleon (*Brookesia nana*) in Madagascar. Adults only 0.53 inches (13.5 mm) long, head to tail, have been discovered.



Brookesia
nana

How can Jesus make a
reptile so tiny?!



AS OLD AS A TURTLE!

*His sovereignty rules over all.
Psalm 103:19*

Reptiles enjoy some of the longest lives of all animals. As a boy, I had a box turtle that lived in our home for more than 20 years.⁷ In 1766, a giant tortoise was caught on the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean by the French explorer Marion de Fresne. At the time of its capture, no one knew the reptile's age, although it was suspected to be a full-grown adult. The tortoise then lived in an army barracks until the year 1918, a total of 152 years. Only our God knows for sure how many decades passed between its hatching and death. (He sovereignly determines the lifespan of all creatures.) It is thought that giant tortoises might survive up to 300 years.



Here's a short list of "elderly" reptiles:

- Giant tortoise — 200–300 years
- Tuatara — 120 years
- American crocodile — up to 100 years
- Green sea turtle — 80 years or more
- Blanding's turtle — 77 years
- Grand Cayman blue iguana — 69 years
- Caiman — 60 years
- Komodo dragon — up to 50 years
- Boa constrictor — 42 years
- Geckos — 20 years

⁷ Box turtles (*Terrapene* sp.) can live up to 40 years.



LIZARDS

*God made the beasts of the earth after their kind.
Genesis 1:25a*

Greater than 50 percent of all reptiles are lizards. They range in size from the tiny Madagascar chameleon to the ten-foot-long (3 m) Komodo dragon of Indonesia. Our Lord Jesus graciously provides lizards with scaly skin and long tails. He also gives them ears, eyes, a nose, and a mouth like many other animals. Their internal anatomy is similar to that of mammals, yet not quite as complex.

God has placed thousands of lizard species on Earth—in a variety of shapes and sizes and colors—pointing to Christ's infinite creativity. Herpetologists have attempted to assign easily-identifiable categories to each type of lizard but this has proven difficult. There are chameleons, iguanas, geckos, dragon lizards (bearded dragon), slow worms, girded lizards (armadillo lizard), *Heloderma* (Gila monster), wall lizards, skinks (the most numerous of lizards with > 1,000 species worldwide), monitors/goannas, worm lizards, and *Bipes* (a lizard with only two legs!).



God also proclaims Himself to be the greatest of all artists through the amazing palate of colors and patterns He paints upon chameleons, geckos, and iguanas. His unique creation and sovereign placement of Italian wall lizards on the many islands in the Mediterranean, allows each island to be adorned with a lizard possessing its own special color pattern.



Italian wall
lizard

Many lizards living in warm climates prefer to bask in the sun, warming their bodies up to 107 °F / 42 °C. These creatures literally live on the edge of life for if their temperature rose slightly more this, they would die. Lizards need to remain hot while they eat so they can digest their diet of tough insects. (Other lizards, such as iguanas, consume mostly plants, and monitors are meat eaters.) As a group, lizards are so heat-tolerant that they thrive in the hottest place on Earth—Death Valley. Eighteen species of lizard live there.

THE SONG OF THE ALLIGATOR

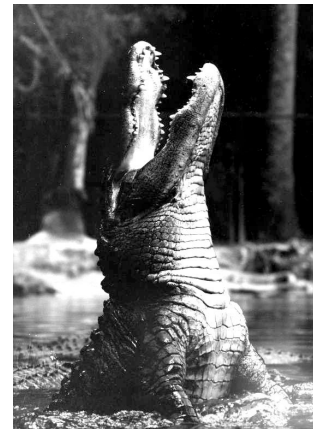
“The beasts of the field will glorify Me.”
Isaiah 43:20

The largest living reptile, the saltwater crocodile, belongs to a group known as the Crocodilians. The Crocodilians include crocodiles, alligators, caimans, and gharials—28 species in all.

Reptiles as a whole do not vocalize much. Not true for alligators.⁸ These beasts are capable of loudly worshiping our Lord with praise reaching 92 decibels—equivalent to the sound of a motorcycle at full throttle! Their aria has been described as an “earth-shaking, soul-stirring song.”⁹ With head pointed toward Heaven, the male regularly bellows using his unique basso profundo voice. Scientists long thought that these vocalizations were a way of attracting a mate, but Chinese herpetologists

have found the exact opposite. Their research has revealed that female alligators are not at all interested in these songs. On the other hand, 75 percent of the male alligators within earshot joined in the chorus.

May our Creator be greatly praised!



SNAKES AND THE FEAR OF THE LORD

God made . . . everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.
Genesis 1:25

Our Lord Jesus made many strange-looking creatures, none more so than snakes. But what makes snakes unique among reptiles? When we examine them, two things immediately become obvious—they have very long, slender bodies and they lack legs. Among vertebrates, they own the most complex backbones of all. A horse has 54 vertebrae;¹⁰ snakes possess between 100 and 600 vertebrae depending upon species.

As we might expect, all the internal organs of a snake are long and spindly—stomach, liver, spleen, kidneys—specially designed by Christ to fit into a very narrow tube. To save space, our Lord greatly reduced the size of the left lung and stretched out the right lung to compensate.

Snakes cannot blink (neither can geckos) because they lack eyelids and their hearing is not as good as ours because they lack external ears. Our ever-inventive and gracious Lord Jesus, however, did provide snakes with two very special senses: a *heat-sensing organ* (in pit vipers) and the *Jacobson’s organ*.

All snakes and a few lizards (monitors) have forked- or split-tongues. If you’ve ever

⁸ There are two species of alligators—Chinese and American.

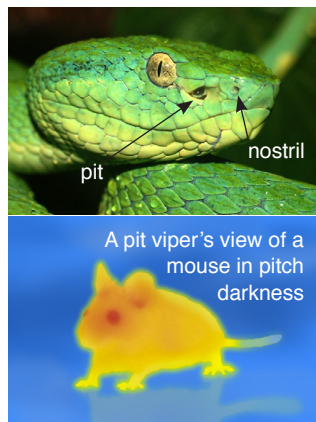
⁹ Archie Carr, *The Reptiles*, (New York: Time Inc., 1963), 16.

¹⁰ Vertebrae (VUR - tuh - brey) are blocks of dense bone that form a very strong column, which helps stabilize the back.



watched a snake, you may have noticed it flicking its tongue in and out of its mouth (see the rattlesnake on p. 9). It does this to pick up minute amounts of chemicals suspended in the air. The tongue is then drawn back in and these chemicals are analyzed by the Jacobson's organ¹¹ embedded in the roof of its mouth.

Rattlesnakes and other pit vipers have been gifted with a small opening on either side of the face—between the eyes and the nostrils. These openings form *deep pits* which contain special tissue for detecting heat (infrared radiation). Pit vipers “see” warm-blooded prey—mice, gerbils—in complete darkness. Pit organs are so expertly created that they can distinguish a 0.005 °F (0.003 °C) temperature difference between objects, allowing the snake to easily tell a warm-blooded creature from a heated rock. *Isn't our Creator amazing?!*



Herpetologists place most snake species into four large groups:

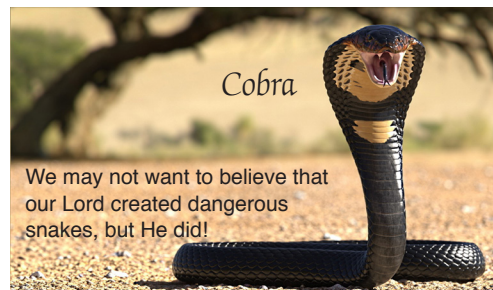
- *Boas*—boas, anacondas, pythons,
- *Colubrids*—considered “typical snakes,” which include two-thirds of all species,
- *Vipers*—pit vipers, Russell’s viper, and
- *Elapids*—cobras, coral snakes, sea snakes, mambas, tiger snakes, kraits, taipans.

The last two of the above four groups are venomous, which means they can inject a toxin into their prey using fangs. Of the 3,500 species of snakes worldwide, around 600 are venomous. But only 200 species—six percent—are deadly enough to kill people.¹²

A snake’s venom is not a simple poison like cyanide or strychnine. Most venoms

are a complex mixture of peptides, proteins, carbohydrates, lipids, and ions. There may be hundreds, even thousands of different proteins found in a single venom, revealing the mysterious genius of our Creator and loudly exclaiming *the fear of the LORD!*

Each year, 7,000 to 8,000 people in the United States are bitten by venomous snakes, yet only five people die on average. Worldwide, between 81,000 and 138,000 people are killed by snakebites annually. The hardest-hit places are Mexico, Brazil, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia / Indonesia. India, by far, experiences the most snakebites annually—81,000 total with 11,000 fatalities.



In God’s mercy, scientists and doctors have been allowed to develop ways to neutralize snake venom. *Antivenoms* have been perfected to counteract many snake toxins, but their production is expensive and generally unavailable in poorer countries. Sadly, agricultural workers and children are the most likely to succumb to snakebites.

Snakes—like sharks and spiders—communicate that our Creator is One to be feared! And *this is a good thing* because “in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:35). At the same time, antivenoms show that our Heavenly Father is a God of great mercy and compassion (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Sea turtle—© Ed Jenkins / Shutterstock
 Red-eared slider—© Can Stock Photo / MykolaVelychko
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11 This organ was first discovered in 1811 by the Danish anatomist, Ludvig Levin Jacobson.

12 Our Lord Jesus certainly reveals Himself as a God to be feared, but He does it in a measured way.





Sea Turtles

Our Lord Jesus created seven species of sea turtles: flatback, green, hawksbill, leatherback, loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, and olive ridley.



Snapping Turtles

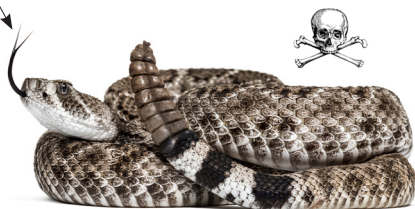
Two kinds of snapping turtles exist—common and alligator snapping turtles.

Anacondas are the biggest snakes in the world!



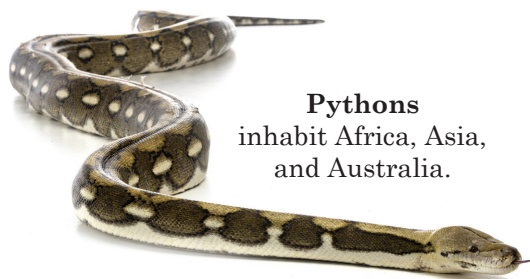
SNAKES

forked tongue



Rattlesnakes

Our Creator made 36 species of rattlesnakes—they live in North, Central, and South America.

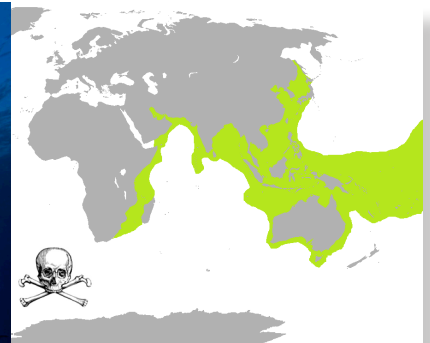


Pythons

inhabit Africa, Asia, and Australia.



Sea Snake



Sea Snakes

Over 60 species of sea snakes live in the oceans. All are venomous but rarely bite people.

"Red on yellow may kill a fellow."



Coral Snakes

Box Turtles and Red-eared Sliders make great pets.



Red-eared Slider



Box Turtles



Tortoises

There are between 40 and 50 different kinds of tortoises in the world. Many of them live long lives.

TURTLES

Pages 2 and 9 form a "Reptile Poster."

THE BRONZE SNAKE

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord . . .
2 Corinthians 5:11 KJV

Christ, in His infinite humility, does not hesitate to use the mean things of this world—those things we consider base—to illustrate His amazing grace. We see our Lord in Numbers 21:4-9 instruct Moses to fashion and cast (of all animals) *a bronze snake*. God's people had been bitten by innumerable vipers due to their blasphemies. Coming to their senses, they confessed their sins / repented. God then graciously provided a way—the *only way*—for them to be saved from the poison of His wrath. As Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the wilderness, they humbly looked upon it and were saved from certain death.

DIVINE TYPES

The bronze snake is not the only time our Lord Jesus applies a “mean” illustration to Himself. In Leviticus 16:20-22, we read that the sins of Israel are placed on a specially chosen goat—the scapegoat—which is then sent into the wilderness. In this Scriptural account, the goat is a type of Christ, who removes sin far from His people. God sometimes ordains that animals—be it a snake or goat—represent His Messiah.

The elevated bronze snake represented Christ and foretold of Jesus being lifted up on a cross, dying for the sins of His people (John 3:14-15). And so it is for us—if we repent of our sins, “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2), we too will be saved from divine wrath. As with the bronze snake, *Jesus is the only way to be rescued from Hell* (1 Thessalonians 1:10)!

Eve's encounter with the Serpent in the Garden reveals a certain irony in her reaction. Snakes usually stir up a reasonable

fear in us, and I believe this is our Creator's intended design. Using his deceptive charm, the devil concealed the danger of the snake, blinding Eve to a proper fear of the Lord, and opening the door wide for her disobedience.

Why have we emphasized the frightening quality of reptiles? A proper fear of the Lord is absolutely necessary in order to receive Him and be saved from our sins.

*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that
whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.*

John 3:14-15

*Lord Jesus, please teach us about the
creatures called reptiles, that we might fear
You more purely and love You more deeply.
Deliver us from a crippling dread of scaly
things, while impressing upon our hearts a
wonder and proper caution for all things wild.*



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