

Snakes (Serpents) In the Holy Bible

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Abstract: The symbol of a serpent or snake played important roles in religious and cultural life of ancient Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia and Greece. The serpent was a symbol of evil power and chaos from the underworld as well as a symbol of fertility, life and healing. In this manner of research's aim to enumerate the using word in holy bible and to find out the variety of snakes mentioned in holy bible. Method of this study was; collection of data from sources of holy bible scripts and grouping the data and presentation of data finally analysis data with simple descriptive statistical way. Results of this research were snake "Actions" were 198 instances, "Cobra" mentioned 6 instances, "Serpent" mentioned were 43 instances, "Snake" mentioned were 44 instances, "Snakes" mentioned were 28 instances and "Viper" mentioned were 10 instances in holy bible respectively.

Keywords: Snakes, Serpents, Holy Bible, Cobra, Viper

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I. Introduction

Serpents in the Bible: Serpents (Hebrew: נָחָשׁ *nāḥāš*) are referred to in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The symbol of a serpent or snake played important roles in religious and cultural life of ancient Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia and Greece. The serpent was a symbol of evil power and chaos from the underworld as well as a symbol of fertility, life and healing.^[1] נָחָשׁ *Nāḥāš*, Hebrew for "snake", is also associated with divination, including the verb form meaning "to practice divination or fortune-telling". In the Hebrew Bible, *Nāḥāš* occurs in the Torah to identify the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, it is also used in conjunction with *seraph* to describe vicious serpents in the wilderness. The *tannin*, a dragon monster, also occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible. In the Book of Exodus, the staffs of Moses and Aaron are turned into serpents, a *nāḥāš* for Moses, a *tannin* for Aaron. In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation makes use of *ancient serpent* and *the Dragon* several times to identify Satan or the devil (Rev 12:9; 20:2). The serpent is most often identified with the hubristic Satan, and sometimes with Lilith.

The story of the Garden of Eden and the fall of man represents a tradition among the Abrahamic peoples, with a presentation more or less symbolical of certain moral and religious truths.^[2]

In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Genesis refers to a serpent who triggered the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden in Eden (Gen 3:1-20). *Serpent* is also used to describe sea monsters. Examples of these identifications are in the Book of Isaiah where a reference is made to a serpent-like dragon named Leviathan (Isaiah 27:1), and in the Book of Amos where a serpent resides at the bottom of the sea (Amos 9:3). *Serpent* figuratively describes biblical places such as Egypt (Jer 46:22), and the city of Dan (Gen 49:17). The prophet Jeremiah also compares the King of Babylon to a *serpent* (Jer 51:34).

Moses and Aaron: When God had revealed himself to the prophet Moses in Exodus 3:4-22, Moses recognized that the call of God was for him to lead the people of Israel out of slavery, but anticipated that people would deny or doubt his calling. In Exodus 4:1-5, Moses asked God how to respond to such doubt, and God asked him to cast the rod which he carried (possibly a shepherd's crook)^[20] onto the ground, whereupon it became a serpent (a *nachash*). Moses fled from it, but God encouraged him to come back and take it by the tail, and it became a rod again.

Later in the Book of Exodus (Exodus 7), the staffs of Moses and Aaron were turned into serpents, a *nachash* for Moses, a *tanniyn* for Aaron.

Fiery serpents: "Fiery serpent" (Hebrew: עֲרֻפָּיִם, Modern: *saraph*, Tiberian: *sä·rāf*, "fiery", "fiery serpent", "seraph", "seraphim") occurs in the Torah to describe a species of vicious snakes whose venom burns upon contact. According to Wilhelm Gesenius, *saraph* corresponds to the Sanskrit *Sarpa* (*Jawl agra*), serpent; *sarpin*, reptile (from the root *srip*, *serpere*). These "burning serpents" infested the great and terrible place of the desert wilderness (Num.21:4-9; Deut.8:15). The Hebrew word for "poisonous" literally means "fiery", "flaming" or "burning", as the burning sensation of a snake bite on human skin, a metaphor for the fiery anger of God (Numbers 11:1).

The Book of Isaiah expounds on the description of these fiery serpents as "flying saraphs", or "flying dragons", in the land of trouble and anguish (Isaiah 30:6). Isaiah indicates that these saraphs are comparable to vipers, worse than ordinary serpents (Isaiah 14:29). The prophet Isaiah also sees a vision of *seraphim* in the Temple itself: but these are divine agents, with wings and human faces, and are probably not to be interpreted as serpent-like so much as "flame-like".

Serpent of bronze: In the Book of Numbers, while Moses was in the wilderness, he mounted a serpent of bronze on a pole that functioned as a cure against the bite of the "seraphim", the "burning ones" (Numbers 21:4-9). The phrase in Numbers 21:9, "a serpent of bronze," is a wordplay as "serpent" (*nehash*) and "bronze" (*nehoshet*) are closely related in Hebrew, *nehash nehoshet*. In 2 Kings 18:4, a bronze serpent, alleged to be the one Moses made, was kept in Jerusalem's Temple^[1] sanctuary. The Israelites began to worship the object as an idol or *image of God*, by offering sacrifices and burning incense to it, until Hezekiah was made King. Hezekiah referred to it as *Nehushtan*^[28] and had torn it down. Scholars have debated the nature of the relationship between the Mosaic bronze serpent and Hezekiah's Nehushtan, but traditions happen to link the two.^[1]

New Testament Gospels: In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist calls the Pharisees and Saducees, who were visiting him, a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7). Jesus also uses this imagery, observing: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Gehenna?" (Matthew 23:33). Alternatively, Jesus also presents the snake with a less negative connotation when sending out the Twelve Apostles. Jesus exhorted them, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as *serpents*, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Wilhelm Gesenius notes that even amongst the ancient Hebrews, the serpent was a symbol of wisdom.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus made mention of the Mosaic serpent when he foretold his crucifixion to a Jewish teacher. Jesus compared the act of raising up the Mosaic serpent on a pole, with the raising up of the Son of Man on a cross (John 3:14-15).

Snake handling: Snake handling is a religious ritual in a small number of Christian churches in the US, usually characterized as rural and Pentecostal. Practitioners believe it dates to antiquity and quote the Bible to support the practice, using references such as (Mark 16:18) and (Luke 10:19).

Temptation of Christ: In the temptation of Christ, the Devil cites Psalm 91:11-12, "for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in [their] hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." He cuts off before verse 13, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon (*tanniyn*) shalt thou trample under feet."

The serpent in Psalm 91:13 is identified as Satan by Christians:

"*super aspidem et basiliscum calcabis conculcabis leonem et draconem*" in the Latin Vulgate, literally "The asp and the basilisk you will trample under foot; you will tread on the lion and the dragon". This passage is commonly interpreted by Christians as a reference to Christ defeating and triumphing over Satan. The passage led to the Late Antique and Early Medieval iconography of Christ treading on the beasts, in which two beasts are often shown, usually the lion and snake or dragon, and sometimes four, which are normally the lion, dragon, asp (snake) and basilisk (which was depicted with varying characteristics) of the Vulgate. All represented the devil, as explained by Cassiodorus and Bede in their commentaries on Psalm 91. The serpent is often shown curled round the foot of the cross in depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus from Carolingian art until about the 13th century; often it is shown as dead. The crucifixion was regarded as the fulfillment of God's curse on the serpent in Genesis 3:15. Sometimes it is pierced by the cross and in one ivory is biting Christ's heel, as in the curse.

Ancient serpent: Serpent (Greek: ὄφις; Trans: *Ophis*, /o'-fēs/; "snake", "serpent") occurs in the Book of Revelation as the "ancient serpent"^[40] or "old serpent" used to describe "the dragon", Satan the Adversary, who is the devil. This serpent is depicted as a red seven-headed dragon having ten horns, each housed with a diadem. The serpent battles Michael the Archangel in a War in Heaven which results in this devil being cast out to the earth. While on earth, he pursues the Woman of the Apocalypse. Unable to obtain her, he wages war with the rest of her seed (Revelation 12:1-18). He who has the key to *the abyss* and a great chain over his hand, binds the serpent for a thousand years. The serpent is then cast into the *abyss* and sealed within until he is released (Revelation 20:1-3).

In Christian tradition, the "ancient serpent" is commonly identified with the Genesis serpent and as Satan. This identification redefined the Hebrew Bible's concept of Satan ("the Adversary", a member of

the Heavenly Court acting on behalf of God to test Job's faith), so that Satan/Serpent became a part of a divine plan stretching from Creation to Christ and the Second Coming.

Religious views

Biblical apocrypha and deuterocanonical books: The first deuterocanonical source to connect the serpent with the devil may be Wisdom of Solomon. The subject is more developed in the pseudepigraphal-apocryphal Apocalypse of Moses (Vita Adae et Evae) where the devil works with the serpent.

Christian: In traditional Christianity, a connection between the Serpent and Satan is created, and Genesis 3:14-15 where God curses the serpent, is seen in that light: "And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life / And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel".

In this manner of research's aim to enumerate the using word in holy bible and to find out the variety of snakes mentioned in holy bible.

II. Materials And Methods

Research type: systematic review from published books and research articles in online publications.

Collection of data from sources of holy bible scripts and grouping the data and presentation of data finally analysis data with simple descriptive statistical way.

III. Results

Actions of snakes (198 instances)

Cobra (6 instances)

Serpent (43 instances)

Snake (44 instances)

Snakes (28 instances)

Viper (10 instances)

44 Bible Verses about Snakes

MOST RELEVANT VERSES with verse concepts:

Genesis 3:14

The LORD God said to the **serpent**, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life;

Isaiah 65:25

The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the **serpent's** food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain," says the LORD.

Micah 7:17

They will lick the dust like a **serpent**, Like reptiles of the earth. They will come trembling out of their fortresses; To the LORD our God they will come in dread And they will be afraid before You.

Genesis 49:17

"Dan shall be a **serpent** in the way, A horned **snake** in the path, That bites the horse's heels, So that his rider falls backward.

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He

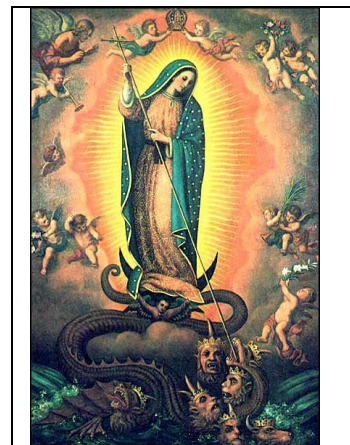
shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Exodus 4:3

Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a **serpent**; and Moses fled from it.

Exodus 7:9-13

"When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a **serpent**.'" So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts.



Genesis 3:15

Proverbs 23:32

At the last it bites like a **serpent** And stings like a **viper**.

Isaiah 30:6

The oracle concerning the beasts of the Negev. Through a land of distress and anguish, From where come lioness and lion, viper and flying **serpent**, They carry their riches on the backs of young donkeys And their treasures on camels' humps, To a people who cannot profit them;

Acts 28:3-6

But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. [read more.](#)

Isaiah 14:29

"Do not rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, Because the rod that struck you is broken; For from the serpent's root a viper will come out, And its fruit will be a flying **serpent**."

Deuteronomy 8:15

He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery **serpents** and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint.

Deuteronomy 32:33

"Their wine is the venom of **serpents**, And the deadly poison of **cobras**."

Job 20:14

Yet his food in his stomach is changed To the venom of **cobras** within him.

Revelation 9:19

For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like **serpents** and have heads, and with them they do harm.

1 Corinthians 10:9

Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the **serpents**.

Numbers 21:4-6

Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." The LORD sent fiery **serpents** among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

Amos 5:19

Verse Concepts As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a **snake bites** him.

Amos 9:3

"Though they hide on the summit of Carmel, I will search them out and take them from there; And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea, from there I will command the **serpent** and it will bite them."

Psalms 91:13

You will tread upon the lion and **cobra**, The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.

Mark 16:18

they will pick up **serpents**, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Luke 10:19

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on **serpents** and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.

Isaiah 11:8

The nursing child will play by the hole of the **cobra**, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

Isaiah 27:1

In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, With His fierce and great and mighty sword, Even Leviathan the twisted **serpent**; And He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.

Jeremiah 46:22

“Its sound moves along like a **serpent**;For they move on like an army and come to her as woodcutters with axes.

Jeremiah 51:34

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured me and crushed me,He has set me down like an empty vessel;He has swallowed me like a **monster**,He has filled his stomach with my delicacies;He has washed me away.

Matthew 10:16

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as **serpents** and innocent as doves.

Matthew 7:9-10

Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a **snake**, will he?

Luke 11:11

Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a **snake** instead of a fish, will he?

Psalms 58:4-5

They have venom like the **venom of a serpent**;Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear,So that it does not hear the voice of charmers,Or a skillful caster of spells.

Psalms 140:3

They sharpen their tongues as a **serpent**;Poison of a viper is under their lips. Selah.

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of **vipers**, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

Matthew 12:34

You brood of **vipers**, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Matthew 23:33

You serpents, you brood of **vipers**, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

Romans 3:13

“Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “the poison of asps is under their lips”;

Revelation 12:9

And the great dragon was thrown down, the **serpent** of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Genesis 3:1-13



Genesis 3:1-13

Now the **serpent** was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’”

2 Corinthians 11:3

But I am afraid that, as the **serpent** deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Revelation 20:2

And he laid hold of the dragon, the **serpent** of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

John 3:14-15

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.

Numbers 21:7-9



Biblia Pauperum illustration of Eve and the Serpent

So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." And Moses made a bronze **serpent** and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

2 Kings 18:4

He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze **serpent** that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan.



Numbers 21:7-9

Power Over Snakes

Luke 10:19

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on **serpents** and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.

Things Like Snakes

Micah 7:17

They will lick the dust like a **serpent**, Like reptiles of the earth. They will come trembling out of their fortresses; To the LORD our God they will come in dread And they will be afraid before You.

IV. Discussion

According to the results of this research were snake "Actions" were 198 instances, "Cobra" mentioned 6 instances, "Serpent" mentioned were 43 instances, "Snake" mentioned were 44 instances, "Snakes" mentioned were 28 instances and "Viper" mentioned were 10 instances in holy bible respectively.

These results by the published bible quotes and online research articles and books. In the world has so many snakes with poison or without poison but holy bible mentioned only poisonous snake such as Cobra and Viper. In furthermore cobra has 8 types and viper has 16 types but bible mentioned common name of snakes and it is caused neurotoxins and haemotoxins to the human therefore bible gospels mentioned main stream as two varieties respectively.

V. Conclusion

Finally concluded this research were snake "Actions" were 198 instances, "Cobra" mentioned 6 instances, "Serpent" mentioned were 43 instances, "Snake" mentioned were 44 instances, "Snakes" mentioned were 28 instances and "Viper" mentioned were 10 instances in holy bible respectively.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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