



## A SCIENCE & RELIGION COMMENTARY

# GENESIS 3:14-15

*Rolf Bouma is the Pastor for Academic Ministries at the Campus Chapel in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and teaches environmental ethics and public policy at the University of Michigan. He holds advanced degrees in law and in systematic theology, with thesis work in biotechnology and a theology of nature. He has also served as a pastor to congregations.*

**14** The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. **15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

---

Ophidiophobia (fear of snakes) or herpetophobia (fear of reptiles) is among the most common of fears, and within the history of biblical interpretation this has been linked to the curse pronounced by God in Genesis 3.

The common explanation for such fear is an evolutionary one: those early humans who exhibited an avoidance reaction to poisonous creatures (this would also seem to account for fear of spiders) would be more likely survive. Whether this explanation is accurate or not is still unsettled, as some suggest that disgust is a better explanation than fear for human response to crawling creatures and there is a great deal of inconsistency in human reaction to animals that are dangerous. What is clear is that humans display an ability to identify snakes and spiders more quickly than other things, including potentially dangerous ones. The proposed explanation is that the human ability to identify potential danger quickly is what was selected for.