

# Behemoth and Leviathan

The Bible refers to many of the common animals we know today. The list includes lions, wolves, bears, sheep, cattle and dogs along with various kinds of birds, rodents, reptiles, and insects. What is interesting is that this extensive list includes three animals that we no longer recognize. These three are (in the original Hebrew language) tanniyn, behemoth (yes, it's spelled correctly—at least as close as we can get in Roman characters), and livyathan. Although we alter the spelling of behemoth and Leviathan slightly, we still use those same words in bibles today. However, tanniyn is always translated into another word when we write it in English. Tanniyn occurs 28 times in the Bible and is normally translated “dragon.” It is also translated “serpent,” “sea monster,” “dinosaur,” “great creature,” and “reptile.” Behemoth and Leviathan are relatively specific creatures, perhaps each was a single kind of animal. Tanniyn is a more general term, and it can be thought of as the original version of the word “dinosaur.” The word “dinosaur” was originally coined in 1841, more than three thousand years *after* the Bible first referred to “Tanniyn.” To make things clearer, we constructed the following table comparing the scientific names with the Biblical names tanniyn, behemoth, and Leviathan.

## Behemoth

It “eats grass like an ox.”

It “moves his tail like a cedar.” (In Hebrew, this literally reads, “he lets hang his tail like a cedar.”)

Its “bones are like beams of bronze, His ribs like bars of iron.”

“He is the first of the ways of God.”

“He lies under the lotus trees, In a covert of reeds and marsh.”

Some bibles and study bibles will translate the word “behemoth” as “elephant” or “hippopotamus.” Others will put a note at the edge or bottom of the page, stating that behemoth was probably an elephant or a hippopotamus. Although an elephant or hippopotamus can eat grass (or lie in a covert of reeds and marsh), neither an elephant or a hippopotamus has a “tail like a cedar” (that is, a tail like a large, tapered tree trunk). In your kid’s dinosaur book, you will find lots of animals that have “tails like a cedar.”

We would expect behemoth to be a large land animal whose bones are like beams of bronze and so forth, so whatever a behemoth is, it is large. A key phrase is “He is the first of the ways of God.” This phrase in the original Hebrew implied that behemoth was the *biggest* animal created. Although an elephant or a hippopotamus are big, they are less than one-tenth the size of a Brachiosaurus, the largest (complete) dinosaur ever discovered. [1] A Brachiosaurus could therefore easily be described as “the first of the ways of God.”

Comparing all this information to the description in your kid’s dinosaur book, you may come to the conclusion that “behemoth” is not a normal animal, it is a dinosaur—the brachiosaurus. We agree with that conclusion!

Note: Some paleontologists have found fragmentary leg bones, ribs, or vertebrae which they propose belong to “new” sauropods larger than Brachiosaurus. Examples of these include Amphicoelias, Argentinasaurus, Sauroposeidon, Seismosaurus, Supersaurus and Ultrasaurus. There currently is not enough evidence to *really* determine the size of any of these, and some paleontologists believe that they are merely large examples of known dinosaurs like Brachiosaurus or Diplodocus. In any case, only the “modern scientific name” of behemoth would change. The point would still remain that behemoth refers to a dinosaur, not a “modern animal” like an elephant or hippopotamus.

## Leviathan

The following is a list of attributes according to Job chapter 41, Psalm 104:25, 26 and Isaiah 27:1. This is only a partial listing—just enough to make the point.

“No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up.”

“Who can open the doors of his face, with his terrible teeth all around?”

“His rows of scales are his pride, shut up tightly as with a seal; one is so near another that no air can come between them; they are joined one to another, they stick together and cannot be parted.”

“His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning lights; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke goes out of his nostrils, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes out of his mouth.”

“Though the sword reaches him, it cannot avail; nor does spear, dart, or javelin. He regards iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee; slingstones become like stubble to him. Darts are regarded as straw; he laughs at the threat of javelins.”

“On earth there is nothing like him, which is made without fear.”

Leviathan “played” in the “great and wide sea” (a paraphrase of Psalm 104 verses 25 and 26—get the exact sense by reading them yourself).

Leviathan is a “reptile [1] that is in the sea.” (Isaiah 27:1) Note: The word translated "reptile" here is the Hebrew word *tanniyn*. This shows that "Leviathan" was also a "tanniyn" (dragon).

Unlike behemoth, who is *huge*, Leviathan is *ferocious and terrifying*. Many references (we have not listed them all) refer to the sea, so Leviathan is probably a sea creature. Although some bibles refer to Leviathan as an alligator or crocodile (and both of these are fierce) neither of these is a sea creature. They like the water, but they spend much of their time on land. Further, the question “Who can open the doors of his face. ...” implies that nobody can pry Leviathan’s jaws open. Yet we are all familiar with “alligator wrestlers” who routinely pry open an alligator’s jaws. Alligators do not match the description of Leviathan—and *we are not done yet*.

The description of the scales is interesting. Several verses describe these great scales. Compared to Leviathan’s armor, iron is like straw and arrows can not make it flee. Let’s face it, an arrow can do a lot of damage to a crocodile or alligator. This is not a description of either of them—or any living animal we are aware of.

*And now for the key ingredient: fire.* It is hard to read Job 41:18-21 without realizing the Bible is telling us that Leviathan breathes fire. That alone will eliminate *almost* every living animal. *Yes, there is one animal that can spew fire in today’s world.* It is called a **bombardier beetle**. This beetle is a native of Central America and has a nozzle in its hind end that acts like a little flame thrower. It sprays a high-temperature jet of gas (fueled by hydroquinones and hydrogen peroxide with oxidative enzymes) for protection. Now, if a Central American *beetle* has a built-in flame thrower, *so could Leviathan*. By the way, crocodiles and alligators are out of the picture on this one, don’t you agree? Before we leave the topic of fire, there are two more notes you may find interesting:

The history of every culture is filled with stories of fire-breathing dragons. If you think about it, in all the past ages wouldn’t *someone* have made up a story of a fire-breathing lion or something? Nobody did because the dragon stories are based on truth, and only “dragons” breathed fire. It is easy to imagine Leviathan as a member of the dragon (*tanniyn*) family. (Plus, Isaiah 27:1 strongly implies this connection.)

Many fossil dinosaur skulls contain unexplained, empty passages. Scientists have not been able to guess the reason for these passages. Would it make sense that some dinosaurs used these passages as “gas tanks” for the combustible mixture used to “breathe fire?” We believe it does.

Comparing all this information to the description in your kid’s dinosaur book, you may come up with the conclusion that Leviathan is a *kronosaurus*. We have heard (and read) other suggestions, but the *kronosaurus* is the best match of any known creature to the description of Leviathan. Internet web site [clarifyingchristianity.com/dinos.shtml](http://clarifyingchristianity.com/dinos.shtml), 11-20-2004