

THE LIONS OF JUDAH

John Roskoski, PhD

St. Peter's University, Omega Bible Institute

INTRODUCTION

The image of the lion has captured the imagination of humankind since antiquity. It has often been the symbol of kings and deities. Many texts of the Bible reflect the regard in which this beast was held. Throughout the Bible Israel's enemies were described using the images of the power, speed, and ferocity of the lion. The lion is a "symbol of might" in Scripture.¹ YHWH Himself is compared to a lion in His dealings with Israel and against the enemies of Israel.²

The culmination of the Biblical traditions regarding the lion is found in Revelation 5:5, wherein Jesus Christ is named the "Lion of Judah". This title, with its connotation of regal power, completes a specific Biblical writing tradition that has its roots in earliest Israel. Although the book of Revelation gives the passage an eschatological context, this work proposes that the title "Lion of Judah" joins, and completes, theological and literary traditions that originate in the Old Testament. Furthermore, these traditions seem to point to or have been influenced by the image of King David.

Tribal Blessing

¹ M. Tenney, ed, "Animals", s.v. Lion", *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 58.

² J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Chicago: Bruce, 1966), 513.

The first association of the image of the lion being connected with the Tribe of Judah occurs in Genesis 49: 8-12. It is a complex set of verses that speaks to the supremacy of the tribe of Judah. Verse 8 seems to reflect the role Judah had assumed in the Joseph narratives. Judah, prior to the second journey to Egypt, seems to take the lead role, formerly held by Reuben who was the first-born of Jacob (Genesis 43-44). The courage for speaking would earn the brothers' praise (Genesis 49:8). However, the blessing now shifts to placing Judah in a position of power over his brothers (49:8). It is reminiscent of Joseph's dream in which he, metaphorically, saw his family bow down to him (Genesis 37). It also foreshadows the primary role among the tribes which Judah would assume during the Davidic Monarchy.

Genesis 49:9 fully juxtaposes the role of Judah among the brothers with the fully established Judahite kingship, established under David. The verse is poetic and might be best rendered as the following:

Judah, a lion's whelp

From prey you have risen, my son:

He bends low, he crouches like a lion

And like a lion- who would rouse him

Overall, the structure of the verse is comprised of couplets that parallel each other in form. One can see a powerful chiasmic structure. The sets of terms "Judah" and "my son" as does "whelp" and "from prey" correspond to each other in the first couplet. The sets of terms "bends low, crouches" and "rouse him" as does "lion" and "lion(ness)" correspond to each other in the second couplet. The set of Judah/my son is synonymous as is lion/lion(ness). However, the set whelp/from prey is antonymous as is bends low, crouches/rouse him. Furthermore, each couplet juxtaposes the image of a young lion, or cub, in the first line with the image of an established and ferocious lion in the second.

A brief look at the actual Hebrew terms clarifies this juxtaposition. The Hebrew for "lion" is *'ariy* or *'aryeh*. Often this is a term used to denote a young lion, particularly when paired with another descriptive term. In the first couplet of the tribal blessing, Judah is called a "lion's whelp". The term for "whelp" is *goor*. This term refers to a cub that is still living in the lair. This connotation might be a remnant of an older root which generated the etymological development of the Hebrew term that is usually rendered "sojourn", "turn aside", "dwell (as in lodging)". With both terms, the state of lodging is considered temporary. Regarding the blessing, the cub is one that has not yet been weaned and is, possibly, still a suckling. This is in stark contrast to the image of eating prey, something done by a mature lion, used in the second line of this couplet. The term for risen is *'alah*. This is, usually, a verb of locomotion, connoting movement from one place to another. It became a common idiom after Israel was established and was used in regard to Israel in relation to other nations. One goes down, when moving away from Israel, but

one “goes up” to Israel, or places like Jerusalem.³ This seems to foreshadow the Promised Land and Jerusalem, David’s capitol city.

The text of the first line of the second couplet seems to have originated early in the history of Israel. Some scholars have debated the actual connotation of the description of “crouch”. Some suggest that it refers to a relaxed position. This interpretation is problematic because this imagery would be inconsistent with the surrounding description of a fearsome lion. Perhaps, it refers to the actions of cub imitating the adults. With the concluding term we read a poetic synonym for “lion”, *lawbee*. This is an archaic root that has no Biblical occurrences. It seems to have originated from the low sound of a lion’s roar. It developed to mean either “lion” or “lioness” in poetic renderings. In this text, the most probable meaning is “lion”. Admittedly, the lioness is the hunter of lion family. However, Judah is speaking of a young man. Moreover, he is depicting graphic images of ferocity and supremacy; traits often associated with males of the species. The roar of the lion is, usually, associated with the male of the species and was a familiar and terrifying sound” in ancient Israel.⁴ The second line of the couplet depicts an established king sitting on a throne, established and powerful. The term, often rendered “rouse”, has common meanings of standing up. Therefore, this line seems to refer to a king roused to an aggressive stance of standing up from his throne, ready to attack or battle his enemies.

Verse 10, seems to refer to the symbols of a ruler. It is unclear if these are royal symbols of the kingship or early tribal symbols that were adopted and transposed into royal symbols. Verse 11-12 introduces the imagery of the vine and wine. This continues the forward orientation of the text. These verses resume the couplet format of verse 9. He is tying his beast to the choicest stem. While this can be interpreted as a basis for the messianic image of the “root of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1), it seems to indicate that Judah will claim or reside in, Canaanite lands. Israel would not be depicted as a choice stem. Although the cultivated vine was a symbol of prosperity, Israel was often seen as a wild and untrimmed vine, yielding only wild grapes.⁵ The cultivated vine was the “emblem of the new and treacherous Canaanite environment”.⁶ This “stem”, in all probability, is a reference to the city of Jerusalem which was a Jebusite city that became the Davidic capitol. The text concludes, in verse 12, about the intensity of Judahite king’s image. His eyes are darker than wine seems to be a reference to the area around the Wadi Sorek, the home of Samson and Delilah. The Hebrew term, *soreq*, can refer to choice grapes of a special, deep red, color or the vine on which the grape grows. The eyes of Judah are darker than this rich color. The term, “blood of the grapes”, in the preceding verse, testifies to the shade of red. His teeth are whiter than milk. Canaan is often described as a land flowing with “milk and honey”. Because milk soured so quickly it was considered a delicacy and a sign

³ G. Wehmeier, “alah”. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 2: 886

⁴ McKenzie, 513.

⁵ M. Tenney, ed. “vine, vineyard”, *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987) 1051.

Cf. F. Moriarty, “Numbers”, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 1:89, wherein he points out that the Untrimmed vine was known as the “nazirite vine”(Lev 25:5,11).

⁶ N.H. Snaith, “Numbers”, *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1981) 256.

Cf. J. Martin, *The Book of Judges* (NY: Cambridge, 1975), 158.

of prosperity and peace.”⁷ Judah will surpass this symbol. Therefore, the Judahite king will not only lay claim to the land of Canaan, but will surpass it. Judah will stand against the “creeping Canaanization” that corrupted the Yahwist faith. Claus Schedl argues that in the book of Judges “we see the tribes . . . in a constant struggle for existence”. Schedl continues:

“The Canaanite city-states and city alliances continued to exist and they represented not only a political danger for Israel, but also a religious peril. . . The social and political system of the new nation [Israel] was extremely simple. Even after the conquest of the country the patriarchal family and clan formed the back-bone of the national life. . . This naturally weakened the young nation’s power whenever unified action was necessary. On the contrary, Israel’s enemies . . . were all, at the same time, organized about a tightly structured central leadership, administered by kings or princes, and this proved to be a further disadvantage for Israel.”

The Canaanites, and other nations, exerted a powerful influence on Israel causing a marked syncretism, a mixture of the YHWH faith and the pagan cults, or “creeping Canaanization”. According to Schedl, this syncretism is the one “real cause of national disaster for Israel”.⁸ Therefore, the Judahite monarch will overcome and defeat the threats posed by the enemies of Israel.

This text, Genesis 49:8-12, seems to juxtapose a patriarchal blessing with a definite forward orientation. Although it is most likely that this blessing originated in early Israel it is also likely that it was redacted during the Davidic reign. According to E. Maly, following an argument of B. Vawter, “Judah. . . is described in terms that can only reflect the Davidic period”. The passage affirms the “permanence of David’s hegemony. . . David remains the center of interest.”⁹ S.H. Hooke also suggests a Davidic redaction of this text. He points out that Moses represents an earlier stage in Israel’s history and in the Blessing of Moses, possibly originating before or concurrently with Genesis Blessing, the place of Judah “among the tribes does not seem to be fully established”. In the Genesis account, “Judah is established as the leading tribe in virtue of the Davidic kingship. . . The warlike prowess of Judah [seems] to reflect the victories of David”.¹⁰

Overall, the text of Genesis 49:8-12 uses the metaphor of a lion cub to depict the early stages of the tribe of Judah, originating in the time of the patriarchs. In its final version, we see juxtaposition between the cub and an established adult lion, a metaphor for King David. The symbols of Canaan and the successes of King David could only have been written after the dangers of the Canaanites and other enemies were eradicated and the limited successes of the Judges were already known.

⁷ McKenzie, 576.

⁸ C. Schedl, *History of the Old Testament* 5 vols (NY: Alba House, 1973) 2: 266-268.

⁹ E. Maly, “Genesis”, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 1:45.

¹⁰ S.H. Hooke, “Genesis”, *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Nelson 1981) 204.

Samson; The lion of YHWH

In the Samson narratives, Judges 13-16, there is an account of Samson slaying a lion during his trips to Timnah (14: 5-6). We see many of the metaphors of Genesis 49:8-12 expanded upon in the narration of this heroic feat. Although the details might be somewhat problematic, in that it is unclear as to whether or not his parents were with Samson, the focus is how a young lion attacked Samson at vineyards of Timnah. Once again we see a narrative juxtaposition of the images of a lion and vineyard. Although recent archaeology has shown that Timnah was a cosmopolitan city, with a mixed population, it seems as though it was dominated by the Philistines.¹¹ This would be the basis for Manoah's derogatory name, "uncircumcised", for Timnah (Judges 14:3). There is little doubt that a city like this would have vineyards attached to its environs.

Timnah is mentioned twice in the tribal allotments listed in Joshua. Timnah is listed as the one of the borders of Judah (Joshua 15: 10). It is also part of the cities of Dan (19:43). Quite possibly, it was originally Danite but after the Danite Migration the town was absorbed into the tribe of Judah. B.G. Wood argues:

"In looking at the historical situation, the most logical time for the Danites to have undertaken this migration would have been shortly after the invasion of the Philistines. . . . They eventually settled on the southwest coast of Canaan in ca. 1177 BC, taking over the coastal area assigned to the Danites. Very likely, it was this incursion that forced the Danites to migrate to Laish...Therefore, 1175 BC is the most reasonable time for the migration to have taken place."¹²

Most scholars accept the conjecture of A. Alt regarding the list in Joshua 15: The city list is understood as dating from the Monarchy, whereas the boundaries are understood to pre-date the city list and present early tribal claims. The references to the boundaries differ somewhat from the list of cities (vss. 20-63). The boundaries are "idealistic". According to P. Kearney, the boundaries include "all the Philistine territory, some of which Israel never possessed, and extending far southward through territory in which Israel never actually settled."¹³

Timnah is prominent as a boundary marker. One might propose the following theory to reconcile Judahite and Danite claims to the area. If we follow Alt, and the generations of scholars who have defended his position, we must also factor in the Danite Migration, something we have already discussed. It seems likely that Timnah was originally claimed by Dan. When the Danites migrated northward, the tribe of Judah absorbed the town into his tribal claim. It is a well-documented dynamic that smaller or weaker tribes were absorbed into larger tribes. Judah was the dominant tribe in the southern part of Israel. To absorb a town on the boundary would be a simple matter. Therefore, based on Alt's proposal, it can be argued that the conflict regarding Timnah represented the shifting boundaries that characterized the period of the Judges.

¹¹ G. Kelm, A. Mazar, *Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 93.

Cf. Kelm, Mazar, "Three Seasons of Excavations at Tel-Batash" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (1982); "Batashi, Tel El-", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1:626.

¹² B.G. Wood, "Recent Research and Discoveries on the Conquest", *Archaeology and Biblical Research* (1991) 109.

¹³ P. Kearney, "Joshua", *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 2vols (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 1:139.

Further complicating the image of the period of the Judges is that Timnah was controlled by the Philistines during this period. Therefore, vineyards of Timnah, in this account, form another link between the image of the lion and the tribe of Judah.

The narrative reads that a “young lion of the lions” came out “roaring to meet him”. This image, a masterpiece of narrative, foreshadows dominant themes in the Samson narratives. There is a parallel between the roaring of the lion and the Philistines who came “shouting to meet him” (Judges 15: 14). The Hebrew for the beast which attacked Samson is *kephir*. Many linguistic scholars have noted the cognate Hebrew term, to “cover”, as a possible common root. If this is the case, the term was applied to the young lion to denote that he now has a mane, a hair covering. This connotes that the lion is old enough to hunt prey, but probably not grown into his full strength. With the connotation of hunting prey, we see a fulfillment of the Genesis blessing, “on prey you have risen”.

The account relies heavily on the motif, recurrent in the Ancient Near East, of a young hero vanquishing a lion. It serves as a narrative “rite of passage” in many heroic traditions; Herakles, Gilgamesh, and David, for example. Samson is now ready to undertake his mission. Herein we see another significant parallel. The young lion can be understood as a metaphor for Samson, on two levels. First, he is still a young man and this is his first recorded feat of strength. Like the lion, he has not yet reached full maturity or full strength. But, even as a young hero, with the onrush of the YHWH Spirit, he is able to vanquish the beast. Second, it is unusual that in heroic literature the lion with which the hero fights is depicted as “young”. This tends to diminish the act. But it is in complete congruity with Samson’s mission; to **begin** the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Philistines (Judges 13:5). The mission was in its early stages of maturation, like Samson and the lion.

The dramatic account of Samson and the lion also points to the power of YHWH. Although Samson and the Judges were “drawn from the people . . . the real hero of the book of Judges is YHWH”.¹⁴ It is the power of His Spirit, the charisma, that allows the Judges’ successes. The reference to the onrush of the Spirit which preceded this encounter may suggest the image that YHWH was the true lion of Israel (cf. Hosea 5:14, Amos 1:2, 3:8). The description of the ease in which Samson tore the lion is a testimony to the power of Spirit; he, literally “cleaved the lion as one cleaves a kid”. This connotes that Samson tore the lion to pieces, as supported by the later reference to the honeycomb (Judges 14: 8-9), with the tremendous ferocity that characterized a lion attack. Through the power of the YHWH, Samson was embodying the lion of Israel by being the lion of YHWH. This depiction of YHWH as the true lion of Israel is consistent with the idea that YHWH alone is to be the King of Israel (Judges 8:22). This continues the theme, introduced in Genesis 49:8-12, which personifies the image of the leonine King and forms another stage in the development of the image of the “Lion of Judah”.

David Killing Lions

David, in 1 Samuel 17:32-37, claimed to have killed lions, and bears, when he was speaking to King Saul about facing Goliath. Little is known about the species of bear that inhabited Israel. It

¹⁴ J.L. McKenzie, *The Old Testament Without Illusion* (Chicago: Thomas More, 1979) 222.

may have been the Syrian Brown Bear. The animal was known for its fearsome growl (Isaiah 59:11) and vicious attacks (Amos 5:19). The image of the bear is used to describe the anger of YHWH (Hosea 13:8). It is interesting to note that in the Amos and Hosea passages, the image of the lion is also used. This seems to suggest that bears had a similar reputation to lions. Perhaps the great mane of the lion, especially in a region that attributed much significance to hair, distinguished the beast and allowed the royal connections.

David claims to have killed the lions by grabbing the beast by the neck or throat. Many translations render this as “beard”. As McCarter discusses, the “beard” could easily be understood as the mane of the lion, which would connote a full grown beast. However, the image does not apply easily to the bear, as we do not know enough about the animal’s appearance. The ambiguity seems to derive from the LXX, as this version refers to the “*pharyngos*”- the neck area.¹⁵ In either case, the image is clear; David is matching the ferocity of the attack of the beast, and slaying it. With this image, he is taking onto himself the ferocious traits which characterize the lion. The image of the neck area echoes the Genesis blessing, 49:8, which speaks of Judah’s hand on the “neck” of his enemies.

This image is also used in Psalm 7:2-3. The psalmist, apparently David, laments about the enemies “tearing” him apart. The term “to tear”, in this instance, is a cognate to the term used for “prey” in Genesis 49:9; *taraph/tereph*. The term is graphic in its imagery and connotations as it depicts the tearing or plucking of flesh from bones. This “Psalm of David” also echoes the image of “neck”. In verse 3, the Hebrew presents the term *nephesh*. In other occurrences, this term is often rendered “soul”. However, M. Dahood has argued that “neck” is one of the related senses or meanings of *nephesh*.¹⁶ Dahood’s conclusions support the graphic and physical images used in the text, whereas a reference to the “soul” would seem out of place in such speech. Therefore, this psalm is combining the forward oriented themes of the Genesis blessing with the speech of David to Saul, thus lending more support to the idea of a Davidic redaction of the words of Jacob.

The symbol of the leonine king of Judah is solidified by Proverbs 30: 29-31. Three beasts are mentioned that are seen to have been “stately of stride”. The rooster and he-goat are mentioned for their contentious nature. However, the lion is the first beast mentioned and given the most detailed description. Some scholars have commented that the reference to “stride” connotes forthrightness and “the honesty of their behavior and their success”. The lion depicts an “excellence [that] lies in their pride and confidence”. The phrase “retreats from nothing” signifies “fearlessness”.¹⁷ The lion represents the “unvanquished hero”.¹⁸ The figure of the king is the climax of the text and the focus of the description. He is depicted as force that cannot be resisted. Such an image occurs again in Proverbs 20: 2 and 8. This powerful king is embodied in the person of King David, the unvanquished hero of Judah.

¹⁵ P. McCarter, *1 Samuel* (NY: Doubleday, 1980) 287.

¹⁶ M. Dahood, *Psalms I* (NY: Doubleday, 1965) 41.

¹⁷ M. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 880.

¹⁸ Tenney, 57.

King David completes the leonine traditions up to the monarchy and will be the foundation for the messianic line. In the person of David we are now able to see the embodiment of leonine Judahite king. No longer is the image a foreshadowing of the power and ferocity of the lion cub, which is the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49. No longer are the lion and the hero paralleling each other, as in the Samson account. Now David sits on the Judahite throne, in Jerusalem, as the full grown and fearsome lion; the archetypical “lion of Judah”. However, his authority still relies on YHWH, the lion of Israel, who defends and admonishes the people. The Davidic Kingship was always to be charismatic (1 Samuel 16:13) and, therefore, established on the power and Spirit of YHWH.

THE LION OF JUDAH

Jesus Christ, in Revelation 5:5, is named the “Lion of Judah”. Herein we see the completion of the traditions of the leonine king of Judah. However, this title is not without Gospel foundations. The Gospel bridges the Old Testament traditions with the eschatological images through the words of John the Baptist.

The Wincing Fan

John the Baptist foretold, in graphic images, the Messiah taking his *wincing fan* in hand to gather the good harvest and burn the chaff (MT 3:12, LK 3:17). This image echoes Proverbs 20:8. In Proverbs 20:2 we read of the fearsomeness of the king, likened to a lion’s growl. This fearsomeness is part of the “king’s aura of dread”, in that he is fearsome even when not angry. To provoke him is perilous and the fearsomeness, like the lion’s growl, is but a warning and not dangerous in itself.¹⁹

The king “is so powerful that he can disperse evil with but a glance” (Proverbs 20:8). It is an expression of awe; his eyes are penetrating and fear-inspiring.²⁰ J. Rylaarsdam comments further:

“On earth, there is nothing more dreadful than the king’s wrath. . . The king is the creative instrument of God who speaks the word of God among men and deserves obedience no less than God. As viceregent of God he *wincing* evil and rewards the righteous and pure”.²¹

A key term is “wincing”. In Hebrew the term is *zara*. The basic connotation is to “stir up the air to produce a scattering and spreading effect”. The term occurs in many verbal forms to indicate a “scattering or dispersing for reasons of purification or chastisement. Grain is cleansed of chaff by using a fan to blow it away. God’s covenant people require a purifying also, but it is a chastening experience; hence the Lord is said, metaphorically, ‘to fan’ his people (Jer. 15:7), with the result that they will be scattered as chaff to various distant lands.”²²

¹⁹ Fox, 663

²⁰ Ibid., 666.

²¹ J. C. Rylaarsdam, “The Proverbs” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1981) 453.

²² G. Van Groningen “zara”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* Chicago: Moody, 1980)1:251.

John's words foretelling of the Messiah echo the Judahite king with the attributes of a lion with its power to disperse. However, the words connote a specific part of the harvesting process. While winnowing is an integral part of the process of cleansing the wheat, it is not the harshest part; that would be threshing, that process which came before the winnowing. The Hebrew terms for "threshing" are *dush* or *havat*. The Greek term is *aloao*. In both Hebrew and Greek, the terms have denotations of "to trample, tread down, beat out/off". The process entailed beating the sheaves of grain with a rod or trampling the sheaves under the feet of the oxen that pulled a wooden sled around the threshing floor. The method of threshing used was based on the type of grain harvested. The threshing floor was outdoors and a hard surface, usually packed clay soil. It could also be terraced rock.²³ Oxen would drag rough wooden sleds with notched rims across the grain. These sleds were weighted down with stones and had sharp rocks or metal points on the underside.²⁴ This was meant to separate the kernels from the stalks of grain. Generally, the floors were built in the hill country "where the night winds could more easily blow away the chaff" which was to be winnowed. To guard against thieves, the workers would sleep on or near the floors.²⁵

Winnowing was often done with a shovel or fork with two or more prongs. The process entailed throwing the grain into the air after it had been threshed so that the wind would carry off the chaff. Often, it was done at night to take advantage of the winds which came off the sea.²⁶ This fork-like shovel was used to "fan" or toss the threshed grain. According to J. Fitzmyer, this text begins to attach an eschatological aspect to the Messiah, Jesus, which is to follow John. The Messiah will sort humans according to their worth and is more powerful than John.²⁷ Therefore, John is conflating several Messianic-King traditions into the One who is to come after him, Jesus. Jesus will assume the role and attributes of the leonine King who separates the righteous from the wicked.

That John ascribes this process of "winnowing" to Jesus is an aspect of his words that should not be overlooked or understated. The gentler image of winnowing is no accident of terms; it provides a sharp contrast to the Yahwist leaders whose work Jesus completed.

Israel's history was the threshing process, as trials and disasters characterize Biblical history; slavery, apostasy, oppressing nations, loss of the ten Northern tribes, the Babylonian Exile. Yet, Israel, like the grain on the threshing floor, was protected by God's chosen leaders; the Patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Kings, and Prophets. The harsh process of separating the good wheat from the chaff was over. It would now befall to the Messiah to perform the final separation. This final separation is much more passive, allowing the prevailing winds to remove the chaff, than the violent aspects of the threshing. So, too, Jesus carries out his ministry and mission in direct contrast to his violent and fierce Old Testament predecessors.

²³ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 888.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 888.

²⁵ Tenney, 1012.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1066.

²⁷ J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (NY: Doubleday, 1970) 474.

Revelation 5:5

The stark, and contrasting, juxtaposition of the “Lion of Judah” with the “lamb” in Revelation 5:5 completes the contrast of violent and gentle imagery. Yet, it combines the powerful imagery of the lion with the image of the lamb in a way that is reminiscent of Isaiah 11, the Peaceful Kingdom. The opposite images do not exclude each other, they complement each other.

The scene depicted is a vision of “divine sovereignty” embodied in the Lion of Judah “who will reign on earth [and is] symbolic of earthly sovereignty”.²⁸ Herein is the fulfillment of the words in Genesis 49:9. The lion is the most frequently mentioned animal in the Bible, it was an “emblem of strength, majesty, courage, and menace. . . It also was a symbol of intellectual excellence”. Heroes, Kings, and God Himself were described with the image of the lion.²⁹ This is the “root of Jesse”, as foretold in Isaiah 11:1, 10, and completion of the line of David. This is Jesus the Christ culminating the leonine traditions. No longer is it the cub, representing Judah, or the young lion paralleling Samson, or the fully grown lions slain by David. In each case the image of the lion is embodied in the heroic image, possibly, as a secondary aspect of the text. However, Jesus merges the image of the lion with the human embodiment and is the Lion of Judah. Moreover, Jesus is now fully identified with YHWH, the lion of Israel in the Old Testament. To Jesus is attributed all earthly and Divine sovereignty.

Yet, although the lion of Judah has prevailed the lamb appears. The lamb, the sacrificial animal associated with the Passover which was seen as the great saving act of God and foundational to Israel, is also associated with Jesus. Jesus was the “lamb of God”, according to John the Baptist (John 1:29). Jesus was also the lamb that was slain on Preparation Day (John 19:31). The gentle image of the lamb belies the power it was to subsume. According to J. D’Aragon, the titles, “Lion of Judah and “root of Jesse”, “show how the lamb has fulfilled OT promises”. The lamb is shown to share the power and knowledge of God. Although the lamb is connected to sacrifice and was led to slaughter, Revelation also “considers the Lamb a conqueror who after his sacrifice holds a universal dominion”.³⁰

The Greek term used is *arnion*, which is elsewhere rendered “little lamb” (John 21:15). However, the aspect of dominion would suggest the better rendering is “ram”. Also, the text describes “seven horns”. According to Massyngberde, “the horn is proverbially a symbol of courage, strength, and might in both gods and men.”³¹ In the image of the lamb we see the two great saving acts of the Bible, Passover and the Cross, fused. Salvation, in each case, emerged from the power of the sacrifice and not the force of arms. The author of Revelation needed to blend the images of the lamb with the ram. As the victims, the Passover lamb and Jesus went quietly to slaughter and the power of their actions forged a new religion and opened the Kingdom of God. There is new type of power depicted in Revelation 5:5-6. In the past, the Charismatic Leaders were prompted to violence to save Israel, the earthly Kingdom. This now passes to a universal Kingdom, or Kingship, of God. The lion makes way for the lamb, which

²⁸ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (NY: Doubleday, 1975) 87.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁰ J. D’Aragon, “The Apocalypse” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall 1968) 2:476.

³¹ Massyngberde, 88.

completes the ferocious power that was shown in the early history of Israel. We see here the powerful Gospel theme that the Father has given over all things to the Son (John 3:35).

CONCLUSIONS

The depiction of Jesus as the “Lion of Judah”, in Revelation 5:5, is the culmination of key Old Testament traditions regarding the Tribe of Judah and its growth and development in Salvation history. The territory of Judah was where David established his capitol city, Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Zion, was the “holy mountain” (Psalm 2:6) where God allowed his name to dwell (1 Kings 11:13, etc). In the “City of David” we see the combination of earthly and Divine power. It is a strong foundation for the Messianic Lion of Judah.

The words of Jacob foretold of the powerful King of Judah, David, with the image of a cub. The power of Samson foreshadowed the kingship of David, with the image of the young lion of the lions, and stood as the foundation to Davidic glory. Based on this glory, David was allowed to establish the Messianic line. David was the archetypal lion of Judah and Jesus Christ was its completion and fulfillment. In David we see the culmination of the lions from Israel’s history; as embodied in Judah and Samson. David is the fully established lion, bolstered by the Spirit of the Lord, unvanquished and fearsome. He begins the dispersing of evil. This evil, perhaps, was embodied in the Philistines as their defeat formed the founding triumph and keynote to his reign (2 Samuel 5). He is the majestic lion who sits on the throne of Judah, completing the work of the young lion of Judah; Samson.

David’s reign unfolded on the historical stage. It was to lead the way for the eschatological “Lion of Judah”, Jesus, who claims the role once reserved for YHWH by his triumph over death in his Resurrection. He is now the leonine King of the “new” Israel, an Israel that is built on faith and not geography. Although manifesting in the form of a lamb that went to slaughter, the power and majesty of the lion now protects and stands over his new Israel, the Church. The lamb is among the elders and, therefore, with his Church (5:6). The ferocity foretold by Jacob, the roaring of the beast that met Samson, and the formidable countenance of the Davidic lion are all fulfilled by the Messianic Lion of Judah and lead the way for the sacrificial lamb whose blood sealed the New Covenant. The Lion still dispels evil with his glance (Proverbs 20:8) and remains in his dangerous crouch so that none should rouse him (Genesis 49:9). His roar is still terrifying and ready to meet those who would harm his people (Judges 14: 5). The lions of Judah’s history point to the Messianic Lion of Judah, whose power still supports the Lamb.

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