Session 4

Lion/Lamb

Genesis 49:8-12; John 1:29; Revelation 5:5-6

Memory Verse

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

– Revelation 5:5, CSB

Lion/Lamb

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus is both the Lion of Judah, powerful with royal authority, and the Lamb of God, the sacrifice that saves us.

CALL TO ACTION: Because Jesus has sacrificed everything for us, we give everything for Him.

Think about a lion for a moment. What comes to mind? Lions are fierce, powerful, and awe-inspiring.

Modern Asiatic lions are an endangered species that once lived from the Middle East to India. They live around sixteen to eighteen years and weigh in at an impressive 300–500 pounds. Though their heads reach about the waist level of a six-foot-tall person, they are much more powerful. Living in groups we call prides, lions often work together to bring down prey like zebras and wildebeests (with lionesses being primary hunters!). With their top speed around eighty-one kilometers per hour, lion hunts are an impressive thing to behold. There's a reason we call the lion the "king of the jungle."[1]

Now, in contrast, picture a lamb. Even the name conjures up a picture of innocence! Where lions are awe-inspiring, lambs are simply adorable. They are often small, soft, fluffy, and gentle.

Lambs, too, like to live in groups and have some pretty impressive qualities. Their special rectangular pupils give their field of vision a 270-degree radius (much larger than a human's field of vision!), and they have a strong sense of smell and hearing. But even with this, sheep are easily frightened. Their diet? Grass and hay. No hunting necessary.[2]

As animals go, the lion and the lamb could not seem more different. Yet both are used as metaphors to describe Jesus. Let's explore how and why.

When you think of Jesus, are you more likely to think of Him as a lion or a lamb?

What do you know about how the Bible uses both of these pictures of Him?

Session Summary

Back in Genesis 49, Jacob's blessing wove lion symbolism into the line of Judah, pointing to the power and authority of "he to whom it belongs" (Genesis 49:10, NIV), Jesus. This imagery comes full circle in our passage in Revelation, where the elder described Jesus as "the Lion from the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5).

But alongside this imagery of power and strength, Jesus was also described as a gentle lamb. What a different picture than the mighty lion! But this view of Jesus is just as important. Jesus is "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29) who came to serve as the sacrifice to take away the sins of the world!

This holiday season, we celebrate and worship Jesus as both the mighty Lion and the sacrificial Lamb.

1. The Scepter Will Not Depart (Genesis 49:8-12)

How is Judah described in this passage?

Where do we see lion imagery in this passage?

These verses come from a passage in which Jacob (Israel) bestowed a blessing upon his sons (from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel) at the end of his life. This portion of the text was Judah's blessing.

In Judah's story, we see a redemption arc. Judah is the brother who suggested selling his brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt:

> *Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh," and his brothers agreed. When Midianite traders passed by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt.* —Genesis 37:26-28

The very next chapter in Genesis, Judah behaved sinfully toward his daughter-in-law, Tamar, continuing his moral failures. But, in a stunning reversal, in Genesis 44, we see Judah offer himself up for his brother Benjamin:

> *"Now please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave, in place of the boy. Let him go back with his brothers."* —Genesis 44:33

Judah had a bumpy road, but this is the line from which Christ would come! This is a reminder that God can use anyone for any purpose to realize His plans! In Genesis 49, he received a prophetic blessing from his father, and the future looked bright!

Though Judah was the fourth-born son, Jacob predicted that Judah's brothers would praise and bow down to him (we see the fulfillment of Joseph's dream in Genesis 42:6).

Jacob went on to describe Judah as a lion: "a young lion," a crouched lion, and a lioness that no one dares to rouse (v. 9). In the ancient Near East, lions often symbolized power and royalty.[3] Lions are powerful, strong, and cunning, and Judah's tribe would produce powerful descendants, too, like King David, and, most importantly, Jesus.

The scepter and staff (symbols of kingship) wouldn't depart from Judah's tribe. Indeed, a descendant of David was on the throne from the time of David's reign until the exile, and it was understood that the Messiah would come from his line, too.

Verse 10 says, "until he to whom it belongs shall come" (NIV). The ultimate ruler that would come from Judah's line wasn't David but Christ Jesus. It is Jesus who has the right to carry the scepter, to rule, for all eternity. "The obedience of the peoples belongs to him" (v. 10, CSB). The Lion of Judah is Jesus.

What are some ways you see this imagery connected to Jesus during His time on earth and following His death and resurrection?

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2. He Who Takes Away the Sin of the World (John 1:29)

What does it mean for Jesus to be the "Lamb of God"?

What are some ways we might misunderstand this picture of Jesus?

In Genesis, we saw the image of the powerful lion. In John, we see an image of the gentle lamb.

Jesus even described Himself as gentle:

> *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*
> —Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

Jesus is more powerful than a lion and simultaneously as gentle as a lamb, but the lamb imagery here in John 1:29 is even richer.

For the Jewish people, the unblemished lamb was an object of sacrifice. When God brought His people out of Egypt during the exodus, His mighty works culminated in a devastating final plague: the death of the firstborn. To protect His people from this plague, God called upon Moses and Aaron to prescribe the sacrifice of an unblemished animal (a sheep or a goat), which was to be slaughtered at twilight, and its blood brushed on the doorposts of the house (then the animal was meant to be roasted and eaten by the family). You can read about this in Exodus 12:1-13.

This sacrificial lamb protected the people from God's divine wrath that was poured out on the Egyptians. This event was celebrated during the Jewish festival of the Passover.

Just as the blood of this sacrificial lamb protected the people from this devastating plague in the land of Egypt, Jesus's blood protects the believer, washing us clean from our sins and saving us from the divine wrath we deserve as sinners.

Isaiah, too, referred to the Messiah as a lamb, generations before Jesus's earthly ministry:

> *He was oppressed and afflicted,*
> *yet he did not open his mouth.*
> *Like a lamb led to the slaughter*
> *and like a sheep silent before her shearers,*
> *he did not open his mouth.* —Isaiah 53:7

In John 1:29, John the Baptist identified Jesus plainly as "the Lamb of God." Jesus was the offering of God, on behalf of His people, sent to earth to take "away the sin of the world." Jesus's sacrifice saves us, just as the sacrifice of the unblemished lamb saved the Israelites in the exodus (Jews in Jesus's day would have naturally connected this mention of the "lamb" to the Passover).

Jesus isn't only the powerful lion of the tribe of Judah; He is also the gentle, sacrificial lamb.

How have you experienced Jesus's gentleness in your life?

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3. The Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5-6)

How is Jesus described in these verses?

How can Jesus embody both of these descriptions?

We come full circle in this passage in Revelation. In Revelation 5, in the heavenly throne room, John saw a sealed scroll with writing on both sides, and just when he despaired because it looked as though no one would be worthy to open it, another emerged.

One of the elders (from Revelation 4:10) comforted John, telling him there was no need to weep. Someone worthy to open the scroll was there, and that someone was Christ Jesus. The elder called Jesus "the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (v. 5).

Jesus's description as the Lion of Judah here recalls the messianic prophecy in Genesis 49 that we began our study with. The elder identified Jesus as the Lion of Judah, but when John looked, he didn't see a lion. He saw a lamb! And not just any lamb. John saw "one like a slaughtered lamb" (v. 6). When we hear "lion," we expect a powerful, fierce creature, but instead, John saw a gentle, vulnerable one (a lamb is among the most vulnerable animals). But this gentle, slaughtered lamb has conquered. Christ conquered death and the grave on the cross, where He served as the sacrificial lamb and made atonement for our sins. His blood protects the believer.

This is the lamb that John the Baptist proclaimed, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29), recalling the language of Isaiah 53:7. But this lamb, a weak creature by human standards, is triumphant. He has conquered and has power (the seven horns symbolize Christ's perfect and complete power)! He is the Lion and the Lamb.

Why do we need Jesus to act as both lion and lamb on our behalf? Where do you feel most in need of Him now?

Conclusion

Today, we saw the juxtaposition between Jesus as the Lion of Judah and the sacrificial lamb, sent to die for our sins.

Christ is the Lion of Judah, who is powerful, with royal authority. "The obedience of the peoples belongs to him," and "the scepter will not depart" from Him. Jesus will reign forever and ever.

When Jesus was born, many had a general idea of what the Messiah would be like that included great power. The lion imagery aligned well with this idea. The Messiah was believed to be the "king of the jungle" who they needed to regain their power from the oppression of the Romans.

But while Jesus did have the power and authority to conquer in every sense, He wasn't the military conqueror the people expected. Jesus conquered death and the grave and gave us the gift of eternal salvation through His work as the sacrificial lamb. He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" as John wrote in John 1:29.

In the season of Advent, we celebrate that Jesus came to earth out of God's great love for us and worship Him as both the Lion and the Lamb.

What does our study today teach us about Christ and His character?

How can we encourage one another in the power and gentleness of Christ on our behalf?

Who is God calling you to share the truth about Christ with now?

Memorize

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

- Revelation 5:5, CSB

References

[1]"Asiatic Lion," National Geographic, accessed October 23, 2026, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/facts/asiatic-lion;
Ellen Morgan, "10 Lion Facts!" National Geographic Kids, accessed October 23, 2026, https://www.natgeokids.com/au/discover/animals/general-animals/10-lion-facts/.

[2]"Sheep and Wool," Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom, accessed October 23, 2026, https://oklahoma.agclassroom.org/resources/agricultural-facts/ag-facts/sheep/;
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[3]Jason Bermender, "Lion of the Tribe of Judah," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary,* ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).