

## “Face to Face with a Lion”



Question – What would you do if you came face to face with a lion? Would you run? Would you fight? Would you play dead? Stand still? What would you do if you came face to face with a lion?

In September 2005, 60 year-old veteran lion keeper Nancy DeFiesta was doing routine chores at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago - hauling buckets of fresh water. She'd done it hundreds of times before. But this time, investigators say, she forgot something. Nancy had already unlocked the lions' gate. Helene and Adelor - 700 pounds of lion were prowling 12 feet above the moat where she worked. The female lion spotted her first.

DeFiesta said, "She (Helene) first jumped down and then Adelor, the male. My instant thought was, 'This is not real. This is a dream.' The male lion looked at me and I knew I was going to get bit."

What would you do if you came face to face with a Lion? It is an interesting question. Some may object and say, “I am no zoo keeper!” Or, “I am not planning to safari in Africa - This question is an interesting hypothetical, but it does not touch me.” Perhaps you are right – But perhaps you are wrong. Maybe this morning you are going to come face to face with a lion.

### **The Mighty Lion – Description and Symbolism**

Let's begin by looking at the lion - its description and how it is used symbolically in the Bible. After that we will put on our safari hats and seek out the two specific lions with whom we will come face to face!

Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary described the lion as "the fiercest and most magnanimous of the four footed beasts." The lion is at the top of the food chain – which is why it is called the "King of Beasts." While extinct from the Middle East today – in Bible times, both the African Lion and the Asian Lion's territories extended to Palestine. In Bible times, lions roamed the land – and the Lion is referenced in Scripture 157 times. The Lion is a very social animal and travel in groups called a pride – with 5-15 lions. They cooperate in hunting and protecting the pride. But the lion's primary characteristic is its strength:

- Judges 14:14 – The riddle asked, "What is stronger than a lion?"
- Proverbs 30:30 – "The lion which is mighty among beasts and does not retreat before any."

*And the strength of the lion is seen in its ability to stalk and kill its prey.* The lion will kill large and small animals for food. Says Wood: "Size for size the Lion is one of the strongest of beasts...a full grown Lion cannot only knock down and kill, but can carry away in its mouth, an ordinary Ox..."

The Lion is designed by God to be a hunting machine – Males can be up to 8 feet long, weigh up to 500 pounds, yet run the length of a football field in 6 seconds. A Lion can jump 12 vertical feet and 36 horizontal feet. The lion has claws are retractable, like a switchblade. The lion has 30 teeth in his mouth including four fangs designed for holding prey and breaking bones. With these teeth, the Lion has no ability to chew its food. It simple breaks the animal's bones, tears up its flesh and devours it by swallowing it in large chunks. In Hezekiah's lament he said God is... "Like a lion – so He breaks all my bones." Isaiah 38:13. (predatorconservation.com). As Samuel Johnson said, the lion is fierce and magnanimous – it is designed by God to be a strong efficient killing machine...

## **Lion as a Symbol**

One more point, before we come face to face with two lions. Let's begin to see how lions are used symbolically in the Scripture. We are just going to scratch the surface. Interestingly, as a symbol, the lion is used to represent both good and evil. It is good to be bold like a lion (Prov 28:1) and to have valor like a lion (1 Chronicles 12:8, 2 Samuel 17:10). However, because of the destructive power and strength of the lion it is often a symbol for evildoers. This is frequently the case in the Old Testament... Listen to these descriptions of Israel's enemies:

- Psalm 58:6: "O God shatter their teeth in their mouth; Break out the fangs of the young lions. O Lord."
- Psalm 17:12: The Psalmist writes: "He is like a lion that is eager to tear, and as a young lion lurking in hiding places."
- Psa. 22:13 They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Lion, of course, is its roar. You have heard it countless times as part of the MGM studio lion roar. There are 18 references in Scripture to the Lion's roar and they are often symbolic. Listen now to the roar of the lion. Amos 3:8 says, "A Lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken!" When you think of the fear of the Lord – think of the awe of the Lion's roar!

We have now briefly described the lion and started to see how it is used symbolically. Now we need to put on our safari hats to come face to face with two lions.

## **Two Lions Contrasted: Lion - Satan**

You may have guessed that the first lion we must look at is Satan. Please turn with me to 1 Peter 5: 8-9.

1Pet. 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1Pet. 5:9 But resist him, firm in your faith,

knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

After studying about the lion – this passage leaps, as it were, off the page. And, my friends, you and I will come face to face with this Lion, and some of you are facing him in your life right now. I must to ask you – what do you do? What do you do when you come face to face with temptation – and the urge to disobey God and give into sin? What do you do when you come face to face with injustice and tragedy and evil – and it seems that God does not care. What do you do when you have the urge to quit –because it is just too painful?

You see, Satan wants you and I to abandon our faith, to leave our marriages, give into sin, to despair when tragedy strikes. *He desires that our personal destruction would lead to corporate destruction* – the failing of the church. *Satan seeks to kill and destroy your faith* –This is the blow of his heavy paw. This is the cut from his retractable claws. This is the ripping from his 30 teeth - to gulp your faith down whole.

What is our response? Look back at the text. Peter tells us our response. First to be of sober spirit – be on the alert! Don't fall asleep spiritually - don't have a naive sense of security. Second, resist him – standing firm in the faith. Ed Blum said, The Christian response to Satanic opposition is not panic or flight, but firm resistance in faith. Resist.”

Remember Nancy DeFiesta at the Lincoln Park Zoo? She was trained on what to do - how to resist a Lion's attack. First, She didn't try to fight the lion head on – that would be foolish. How many times do you hear people on radio or TV encouraging Christians to fight the devil – The Bible nowhere advises such tactics. Rather she kept her cool and she resisted.

In an interview she described how she resisted the attack. Fox News described the situation this way:

(1) DON'T PANIC: She kept her cool – she didn't panic: "Nancy was badly injured, but somehow she was aware enough to know if she panicked, she was dead." You know Peter told the church about this lion so we could be prepared, so we would expect satanic attack, opposition, and temptation. This is no surprise to the Christian. Don't panic - Keep a sober spirit. Alert - is what Peter says.

(2) GET HELP: Somehow, Nancy managed to call for help on her cell phone, even as she was being attack: "I'm in the moat with a lion!" she said. Peter told his congregation that they were also not alone – the suffering they were experiencing also was occurring in other places (v 9). In other words – you don't have to fight this battle alone. Call for help – one your cell phone to another believer who can help you. Call to God in prayer for spiritual intervention. You need to get help when you are attacked by this lion!

(3) RESIST THE ATTACK: DeFiesta said, "If you ever watch a cat with a mouse and the mouse doesn't move, the cat will keep waiting for it to move. I didn't move." The reported asked: "You think if you moved, she might have killed you?" She said, "Oh yeah. Yeah. She was with the lions no more than a minute. Rescuers blasted fire extinguishers to scare the cats off. She had 64 puncture wounds from the lion's bites, but she survived and so can you.

Barclay said, "The devil is like any bully; he retreats when he gallantly and bravely resisted in the strength and in the company of Jesus Christ." What do you do when you face the lion that is Satan? You resist – You resist – You resist – You resist – You resist. If you resist, you will survive. You may get bitten, you may struggle, but you will be alive, your faith will be intact, and that lion's attack will fail.

## Lion of Judah

Now we look at our second lion and we need a little background - His birth was predicted in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. The Patriarch Jacob was prophesying about the future of his 12 sons. When he came to the boy Judah he was predicted to be the preeminent son - over all the brothers. Jacob said, “Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him us? The scepter shall not depart from Judah...to him shall be the obedience of the people.” Genesis 49:9-10

That is – using the image of a Lion, Judah is set up as the victorious son – the one who has defeated his enemies and lies, satisfied. Judah will be the King and will rule not only Israel, but one day all the people of the world. This is a prophecy of the Messiah fulfilled in Jesus Christ. How do we know this?

Revelation 5:5 says, “Stop weeping; behold the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah the root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”

Our second lion – is the lion of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ and He is a very different kind of lion than any we have looked at thus far. Imagine a lion who rather than being your enemy is your friend. Imagine a lion who rather than using his power for your destruction, uses for your protection. Jesus is the messiah, which means the one who saved. Our savior is the Lion of Judah! He is the lion of lions, and his strength makes Satan look like a little kitten.

What do you do with this Lion? Two proper responses. First, if you don’t know him – Jesus calls for you to believe in Him – Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say to you, if any man hears my words and believe Him who sent me – he has everlasting life – he will not come into condemnation, but has past out of death into life” John 5:24. Jesus the lion of Judah says – believe in me – that I want to be your friend, not your enemy. That I love you and that I died on the cross to pay the penalty of

everything you have done that is wrong – so you can be forgiven, completely. How – by believing in Jesus Christ – As you look at the Lion of Judah, will you believe?

If you already believe there is a second response – when you look at the Lion of Judah. He calls you to love Him. And loving means obeying Him as Lord and Master. Jesus said, “He would has my commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my faith” John 14:21. As you look at the Lion of Judah – will you love Him – will you obey Him – whatever he tells you to do or to go wherever he tells you to go?

As the Lion of Judah we see him in his strength. Though we love him we are in awe of him – after all we are still talking about the image of a Lion. In the *Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children are trying to understand Aslan, a lion symbol for Christ. They ask the Beaver if Aslan is a man:

"Aslan a man? Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion-- the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he--quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about being safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

### **Conclusion:**

What do you do when you come face to face with a lion? We have seen that it depends on what kind of Lion. When you face temptation, sin, evil – the Lion that prowls and seeks your destruction. *Resist Him*. Don't give in. Endure patiently. Pray! When you face Jesus Christ – the Lion of Judah – if you don't know Him believe in Him. If you do know him – love him – obey Him. In reverent awe – As the beaver said, “He is the King, I tell you!”