

# CREATURES OF THE CREATOR

## Part Eight: The Lion



For thousands of years the lion has represented power and authority. As the second largest cat (only the tiger is larger), the lion can instill in us feelings of both fear and respect. Truly, lions represent some of God's most majestic creatures.

### Shrinking Range

At one time lions could be found in Greece, the Middle East, India (northern), and Africa. In the days of the Old Testament, lions were common in Palestine, but they were gradually killed off by herdsman protecting their flocks. A few lions lived in Persia until last century. The last one was sighted there around 1930. Today, native lion populations remain only in India (very small) and Africa (declining). Lions used to range throughout much of Africa, but now live mostly in the sub-Saharan region.



### Physical Characteristics

There is no denying that lions are impressive looking animals. They have very muscular bodies with enough strength when hunting to break the back of a zebra. The bones of the front legs are arranged in such a way as to give the animal a wide range of motion. Male lions weigh about 425 pounds while females tip the scales at about 275. Males are about four feet tall, females about four inches shorter. The males have a mane of hair which begins to grow at age two. The mane can vary in color from tan to black.

The mane makes the lion seem larger and intimidates prey as well as other lions and hunting competitors (like the hyena). The mane is similar in texture to stiff horsehair and help protect the animal during fights. Generally speaking, the darker and fuller the mane, the healthier the lion. Some research carried out in Tanzania suggests that the longer the mane the more successful a fighter the lion is. It has also been observed that the female lions tend to prefer males with larger, darker manes.

The lion is made for hunting. The paw has soft pads so that it can walk quietly and sneak up on its prey. Lions are *digitigrade* walkers – which means they walk on their toes instead of on the whole foot. The claws on the lion's paw are retractable to prevent injury when not in use. Claws grow in layers. as One layer wears off, it is shed and a new claw appears. The claws on a large lion can be 1 ½ inches long.



*Female Lion Captures Gazelle*

To aid further in the hunt, lions have very good night vision. Their eyes have a special reflective coating that allows them to see even by starlight. They also have an excellent sense of smell which helps them to find food. This sense of smell is aided by an additional sense organ on the roof of their mouths (called the Jacobson organ).

The lion's teeth are spaced in such a way that they can fit between the vertebrae of their favorite prey animals. Instead of the lion's back teeth being molars, they are *carnassals* which work like a pair of scissors. Since their jaws do not move from side to side, they do not chew their food, but tear it and then swallow it in chunks.

Finally, the lion's roar is perhaps its most distinctive physical characteristic. Only four cats can roar (lion, tiger, leopard, and panther). When a lion roars, it can actually raise a cloud of dust, and

it has been noted that a lion's roar can be heard up to five miles away.

## Lion Families and Cubs

Lions live together in groups called *prides*. The leaders of the pride are the strongest males. Typically there will be a number of females with two or three males. Younger males will be expelled from the pride and will either take over another pride themselves or will form a group of male lions that will hunt together and take over another pride together.



*Newborn Lion Cub at Dane County Zoo in Wisconsin*

The young lion cubs always look so "cute" in pictures. They do not have an easy childhood, however. Lion cubs are born in litters of two or four and usually weigh about a pound at birth (12 inches long). Only one of eight cubs survives to adulthood. Some die during teething because it is so painful and weakens the animal. Often a new male (or males) taking over a pride

will kill all the cubs so they can mate with the females.

## Lions In the Bible

2 Kings 17 tells the sad history of Israel (the northern tribes of the divided kingdom). Israel rejected the LORD and bowed down to idols. Eventually God allowed Assyria to take Israel into exile. When the conquering Assyrians settled in Samaria, however, they did not worship the true God either, so the LORD sent lions among them.

**2 Kings 17:25-26** When they first lived there, they did not worship the LORD; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people. <sup>26</sup> It was reported to the king of Assyria: "The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know

what he requires."

- What was the response of the Assyrians to the lions? After God had used the lions to show the Assyrians their sins, did they repent and turn to Him? – Does God ever send "lions" into our own lives as part of bringing us to repentance? How are the Law and Gospel used together to bring someone to godly repentance?

Daniel in the lions' den is no doubt the most famous reference to lions in the Scriptures:

**Daniel 6:22** "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

In figurative language, the Bible refers to our Lord Jesus Christ as a *Lion*:

**Revelation 5:5** Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

- What characteristics of the lion are also characteristics of Jesus? Can you think of Bible passages that might remind us of the lion-like qualities of our Savior?

## For Further Study

There are many other references to lions in the Bible that are not covered in this short pamphlet. Use a concordance to find other interesting passages.

## Selected Resources

<http://www.co.dane.wi.us/danedept/press/img/lioncub20030730.jpg>

<http://www.recipeapart.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/lion-hunting-6.jpg>

<http://www.lionking.org/~sichi/lion2.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion>

<http://www.lionlamb.us/lion/lionfact.html> | All the Animals of Bible Lands, by George Cansdale