

Stories From The Stable

Christmas Series

Genesis 49 & Revelation 5

Written By

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So far in our study of **Stories From The Stable** we have dug into the theological import of animals which were possibly there that holy evening to witness the birth of Jesus, the Christ. It's test time. Can you name the animals? Donkey, Goat, Camel, Lamb, Ram, Dove, and, yes, the Ox, the servant animal of all animals. Each one, as we have seen, taught us rich, timeless truths about the message and mission of our Lord. They also challenged us personally, too, grow up in the faith God has given to us. It is my prayer that this short series has challenged, convicted, encouraged, and embolden you in your faith walk.



but based on what I've read in the Old and New Testaments, I'm going with . . . wait for it . . . the Lion. "Wait a minute," you say with deep concern. "There couldn't have been a lion in that stable." Pragmatically, I'd have to agree with you, especially from what I know of their carnivorous ways. Had a real lion been sleeping on some straw, he'd most likely have

Today we have the unique privilege of unveiling the final beast in Bethlehem's out-of-the-way, probably insignificant little stable. Can you guess what this beast might be? I don't know about you,



awakened and had the other animals for, well, dinner. Theologically, however, I would have to disagree with your astute and logical appraisal because there was, in fact, a lion cub present in the person of the baby Jesus. The lion cub which would become a lion had to be there because both testaments picture the Messiah in this fashion. Which texts are we talking about? One at the beginning of the Bible, and one at the end of the Bible. We'll sink our interpretive shovels into this rich, royal soil by posing out sermonic question:

What Do We Learn From The Lion? (Selected Texts)

Answers From Genesis 49

To begin, I must give you a little contextual background. In Genesis 3:15, God prophesied that one day He would send the Seed, the Messiah, to summarily decimate and destroy the Satan and sin. After Cain killed godly able over how to approach the living God (Genesis 4), God worked to bring the Seed through the chosen line of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth (Genesis 4:25-26). After the Noachic flood, God moved to bring the Seed through the line of Shem (Genesis 5:32; 10:21). Eventually, Shem would be the great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather of Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation God promised to bring the Messiah through (Genesis 12). I due time, Abraham, the inheritor of the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant, would become the great grandfather of Jacob, who, in turn, would become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Genesis 49, as Jacob, the recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant and the progenitor of the messianic seed, prepared to enter heaven, he called for his twelve sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin) in order to give them a prophetic word (the word "bless" is only used with reference to Joseph in 49:25-26) of what God had in store for them and their descendants. The first three sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi learned that their past sins, though forgiven, would cause them to reap what they had sown.

When we arrive at verse 8, we encounter one of the most amazing predictive and powerful prophecies in the Old Testament. And what is a prophecy, anyway? It is a precise, specific word from God about what will occur, at some point, in space and time history. Ostensibly, a prophecy is also just another way to validate that the Bible is, in fact, the Word of God because only God, who is omniscient, could tell us what will transpire hundreds and even thousands of years before the fact. God's prophetic word through Jacob to his son, Judah, is as encouraging as it is exact:

⁸ Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. ⁹ Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? ¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. ¹¹ He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes.

¹² His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk (Genesis 49:8-12).

Judah, whose name in Hebrew means “praise” (Genesis 29:35), would be praised by his brothers for he would be the leading warrior tribe who would subdue their enemies (v. 8). It is interesting how Jacob states this truth. Judah in Hebrew is *Yehuda* (יהודה), and praise is *yoduka* (יודוק). In Hebrew it is a melodic play on words, which is most appropriate coming from the lips of a loving father like Jacob. How do you talk with your children? Interestingly enough, after the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity, they took the name of the chief tribe of Judah and shortened it to Jew and their promised land was called Judea. Amazing, as prophesied, all the tribes would so identify and praise the dominate tribe of Judah they would, essentially, call themselves by a name which speaks of this premier tribe.

To study Israel’s history in the period of the Conquest, the Judges, and the Kings is to see that Judah did lead the tribes in victorious battle. Based on the direction of Moses in Numbers 1, Judah would lead Israel’s army into battle as they followed directly behind the Ark of the Covenant. David, of course, who was from the line of Judah, defeated the godless enemies existing in the Promised Land (2 Samuel 8). His son, Solomon, extend Israel’s boundary’s to Abrahamic Covenant levels (1 Kings 4:20-25).

From Genesis 49 verse 9 God informs the sons that Judah will be likened unto a young, powerful lion. This was a logical choice to define the leading tribe because lions were historically known for their strength (Judges 14:18), courage (2 Samuel 17:10), stealth (Psalm 10:9), and ferocity (Psalm 7:2). Lions were also associated in the ancient Near East with rulers, princes, and royalty (1 Kings 10:18-20; Ezekiel 19:1-9; Zephaniah 3:3). Israel responded by placing making Solomon’s throne resemble that of a lion (1 Kings 10:18-20), and they even wove the lion motif into the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 7:29, 36). Why did they do all of this? Because Judah was the leading tribe, the tribe of the lion who was always ready to fight and defend the nation from their adversaries per God’s prophetic directive.

With verses 10 through 12, Jacob turns and identifies Judah as the royal tribe of Israel, or the one through which her kings would come. Later in their history, Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Samuel 9:1-2), would be their first king; however, God would eventually reject this godless, carnal king and replace him with David from the line of Judah. This, of course, was to fulfill what God had promised prophetically through Jacob to Judah:

¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

The promise here is the right to rule and reign would always rest with this tribe and none other. Put differently, this prophecy did not mean there would be a perpetual king from Judah on a throne (2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 89:3-4, 20), but that kingship would never pass from this tribe to another. This regal truth would continue until it would reach its consummation in the coming of Shiloh. Who is this?

The NASB version makes Shiloh a noun and thereby causes us to think of a person. Taken in this fashion, *Shiloh*, which is a derivative of the word “peace,” dovetails nicely with Micah’s messianic prophecy that the coming ruler would be a peacemaker (Micah 5:4). If this view is true, then Jacob gives us a prophecy that promises that God would not abandon the continual right for a Davidic king to reign upon Israel’s throne until the Messiah would arrive on the scene to fulfill the very essence of the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7). The Jewish Talmud equates Shiloh with

one of the mighty names of the Messiah (Sanhedrin 98b), while the oldest Jewish commentary on Genesis also takes this interpretive stance (*Bereshit Rabba* 99). The Jewish *Targum Jonathan* even goes so far as to equate Shiloh with the Meshiha in its thoughts on this verse, and *the Targum Pseudo Jonathan* also states that verses 10 and 11 point directly to the Messiah.

This, however, is probably not the best interpretation. For one, the Messiah is never called Shiloh again in the rest of Scripture which is most interesting. An alternate textual reading, however, from the Samaritan and Masoretic Text manuscripts has *selloh* (or *sello*), which means “to whom it belongs.” This dovetails with Ezekiel 21:25-27 which reads:

²⁵ And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end, ²⁶ thus says the Lord God, 'Remove the turban, and take off the crown; this will *be* no more the same. Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high. ²⁷ A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I shall make it. This also will be no more, until He comes whose right it is; and I shall give it *to Him*.' (Ezek. 21:25-27 NAS).

Zedekiah was Judah's last king prior to the fall of the kingdom to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.. What God prophesies here through the pen of Ezekiel is that Zedekiah and the David royal line would be brought low and made a ruin until the coming of the one “whose right it [the Davidic kingdom] is.” That would be the Messiah, Jesus. This is how the Qumran text reads on its translation of Jacob's words, “until the messiah of righteousness, the branch of David, comes, for to him and to his descendants the covenant of the kingdom of the people has been given for the generations of eternity” (4Q252; column 5:3-4). The Jewish Targum Onkelos goes so far as to equate the noun Shiloh with the Messiah, and then it adds that the kingdom rightfully belongs to Him. Whichever view one takes, however, it is readily apparent this prophecy states that the Messiah would one day come to be the rightful Davidic king over Israel. Jesus was that rightful king and He was, in every sense of the word a young lion prepared to rule and reign.

Verses 11 and 12 of this great messianic prophecy speak eschatologically of the wonder and outright universal abundance of His reign when it is fully established.

¹¹ He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. ¹² His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk (Genesis 49).

When the Messiah reigns the earth will return to its prolific Edenic state. This is denoted by the tying of a young to a choice, costly vine. Really, nobody would do this in their right mind because the donkey would do what donkeys do. He would eat the grapes and the vine. By making this statement, Jacob underscores how in the messianic age, when the Messiah reigns supremely, there will be so much abundance that farmers and vineyard owners will think little of hitching a little hungry donkey to a lush and fruit laden grape vine.

The last part of verse 11 further details the wonderful abundance of the Messiah's reign in the kingdom age from David's throne. Again, nobody in their right mind would substitute costly wine for water for washing their clothes, but that is an apt description of the wealth of Christ's

rule. There will be so much abundance that a person could, if they wanted to, wash their clothes with expensive wine and nobody would think a thing of it. According to verse 12, there will be so much good wine to drink people's eyes will be "sparkling," which is a better reading of the Hebrew here for "dull" (תַּקְלִיל).¹ Also, milk, which was a precious commodity in ancient Israel and a sign of wealth, would be so readily available it will bleach the peoples teeth white. Dentists and orthodontists should be excited about this. Imagine, when the Lion from the Tribe of Judah appears the final time at the close of the tribulation, it is to reverse the curse and to bring Eden back to this beaten up, misused, and abused planet.

Lying there quietly on the hay in that stone manger was none other than the lion cub, Jesus, the true Messiah from the regal line of David. And just as there will be peace among the animals when He arrives, peace between lions and lambs, there was peace in that place because the true Davidic Prince of Peace had finally arrived. The question is this Christmas quite clear: Is He your king yet? He awaits you to place your faith in Him so He can not only forgive your sin but become the true King on the throne of your life.

And He is already your king, then this Christmas we, as believers, look forward, despite the evil and immorality around us, to His arrival as the fully mature Davidic Lion who will rule and reign over His glorious and long-awaited empire. Oh, what a day that will be.

Moving from Jacob's somewhat cryptic prophecy about the Messiah in Genesis 49:8-12 where he likens that Messiah to a lion, we gain even greater insight in Revelation chapter 5.

Answers From Revelation 5

As before, we need to pause and quickly consider the surrounding context.

In Revelation chapters 4 through 5, John is transported through a heavenly door (Revelation 4:1-2) into the very throne room of God prior to the seven-year tribulation. God is seated on His special throne of judgment (Psalm 9:7; Daniel 7:13-14), lightning shoots forth from His ominous presence, thunder rumbles through the throng of angels and believers who are watching the event, and the animalistic-looking cherubim are constantly and rhythmically chanting:

ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.
(Revelation 4:8)

Which is translated, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." (Revelation 4:8).

As they chant, John notices an unusual looking scroll in the hand of God. It is written on the inside and the outside, and it is sealed with seven seals. Writing on both sides of a scroll simply revealed the fullness of the information it contained. What is the document? Well, based on the fact that God's wrath against sin and sinners is unleashed starting in Revelation 6, verse 1, we know it is God's final document detailing His plan for judging Satan, his menacing minions, and his misguided masses. But it is much more than this.

¹ **Holladay**, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT (HOL)* **Hol2521** תַּקְלִיל*:sparkling cs. תַּקְלִיל: sparkling Gn 49:2; oth.: dark. † (pg 103).

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Interestingly enough, Roman wills had to, by law, be sealed with seven seals. The wills of the emperors Vespasian and Augustus demonstrate this truth. According to Roman law, seven witnesses placed their seals upon the will in question, and the will could only be opened with these individuals, or appropriate representatives, present. As these seals were broken, a portion of the document was allowed to be read without disclosing the details contained in the rest of the work. Based on this historical reality John was well aware of he was probably looking at some form of a will. Let's pursue this further by looking back at what God taught in the Old Testament about the Promised Land.

Mosaic Law was clear that the land of Israel was God's completely, no questions asked. Leviticus 25:23 underlines this conclusion:

The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.

Furthermore, God gave Israel the land as an eternal possession. Several texts support this point.

= “. . . for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:16).

The land of Palestine was God's, and Israelites were the rightful tenants. This is clear. In addition, the Law specifically taught that since the land was theirs perpetually (Genesis 13:15), it could not be sold forever. In Leviticus 25:23, God stated:

The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.

If an Israelite became financially strapped, the Law did make provision for him to sell the land, but only for a time. Concerning this we read in Leviticus 25:

If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold. 'Or in case a man has no kinsman, but so recovers his means as to find sufficient for its redemption, then he shall calculate the years since its sale and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and so return to his property. 'But if he has not found sufficient means to get it back for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hands of its purchaser until the year of jubilee; but at the jubilee it shall revert, that he may return to his property (Leviticus 25:25-28).

Hence it was technically impossible for an Israelite to lose rights to the land.

Furthermore, Israelite tribes could not inherit, trade, or purchase another tribe's land because God had specifically given it to them. Numbers 27:8-11 addresses this concept:

“Further, you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. 'And if he has no daughter,

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then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. ‘And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. ‘And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his nearest relative in his own family, and he shall possess it; and it shall be a statutory ordinance to the sons of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses” (Num. 27:8-11).

The land was God’s and since He had giving Israel specific rights to it on a tribal basis and on an eternal basis, He didn’t want anyone to think they could tamper with the arrangement in order to alter it.

Going back to Leviticus 25, we learn another interesting concept about the land. Let’s pick up the Mosaic discussion in verse 24:

‘Thus for every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of the land. ‘If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold. ‘Or in case a man has no kinsman, but so recovers his means as to find sufficient for its redemption, then he shall calculate the years since its sale and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and so return to his property. ‘But if he has not found sufficient means to get it back for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hands of its purchaser until the year of jubilee; but at the jubilee it shall revert, that he may return to his property” (Leviticus 25:24-28).

From this we learn that a kinsman/redeemer (a “goel” in Hebrew, like Boaz), could pay a price to redeem the lost land and then it was his holding solely until the year of Jubilee when it was returned to the original owner.

In Jeremiah 32:6-9 we see the prophet acting biblically as the redeemer for a cousin who desires for him to act in his behalf.

“And Jeremiah said, “The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle is coming to you, saying, “Buy for yourself my field which is at Anathoth, for you have the right of redemption to buy it.” “Then Hanamel my uncle’s son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the LORD, and said to me, ‘Buy my field, please, that is at Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for you have the right of possession and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.’ Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. ”And I bought the field which was at Anathoth from Hanamel my uncle’s son, and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver. “And I signed and sealed the deed, and called in witnesses, and weighed out the silver on the scales. ”Then I took the deeds of purchase, both the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the sight of Hanamel my uncle’s son, and in the sight of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, before all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the guard. “And I commanded Baruch in their presence,

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saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Take these deeds, this sealed deed of purchase, and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, that they may last a long time" (Jer. 32:6-14). "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

Again, from this we learn that once Jeremiah paid the price to redeem the land, it was his by legal right.

In addition, two deeds of purchase were drawn up to authenticate the deal. One copy of the title deed to the land was sealed with the buyer's signet ring and put in a place of safe keeping. The other document was shown to witnesses, who, in turn, signed their names to the back of the document, attesting to its authenticity. This document was left unsealed (Jer. 32:11, 13-14).

As you would guess, the open land document could be easily altered and changed in time, especially in a situation like Jeremiah's where the landowner wasn't going to take the land for some time. Jeremiah was prohibited from taking the land for two key reasons. One, at the time the land deal was cut he was already a prisoner (Jer. 32:2-3, 8-9). Two, his cousin's land was already 'owned' by Babylonians. This is why it was necessary to have a sealed original. By opening it at a later date . . . here after the Babylonians had been expelled . . . , all arguments regarding the land in question and who owned it would be quickly laid to rest.

To sum up, the kinsman\redeemer had two primary responsibilities where land was concerned. First, he had to pay a price to redeem it. Second, he had to take actual possession of it himself and rule over it.

Now I say all of this to say this: In Revelation 5:1 we encounter a parallel example of this ancient Mosaic code of land redemption. In God's right hand rests the seven sealed title deed to the earth. And the only kinsman worthy to open this document is none other than Jesus Christ, based upon the two-fold Mosaic premise that He paid the price for the land (with His blood) and He has power to live in it and rule over it. Hence, the scroll in God's hand is the irrefutable evidence that the land, i.e., the earth, belongs to Jesus and He has the absolute right, as the kinsman\redeemer, to take it, even if by force, for himself.

Keeping this all in mind, let's read what occurred when John saw this amazing, ancient scroll:

¹ And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. ² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. ⁴ And I *began* to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it;

He wept because he, in his humanity, didn't think anyone was qualified to FINALLY put the Devil down and finish God's kingdom program.

His sadness was terminated when an elder approached his these comforting words, ⁵ and one of the elders said to me, "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."

Ah, there it is . . . the fulfillment of Genesis 49:8-12. Shiloh, or the One who was/is worthy to open the scroll of judgment to reclaim His earth, was standing quietly right in front of the heavenly Father.

⁶ And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And He came, and He took *it* out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "And Thou hast made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." ¹¹ And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped (Revelation 5).

If we only had more time.

Please do not miss how the Messiah, Jesus, is rightfully pictured here as the Lion and the Lamb. As the Lion, He battled valiantly with Satan and sin at He walked the earth and then walked up Golgotha. As the Lamb, He willingly laid His holy life down on the cross to pay the redemptive price to not only secure members for His glorious Davidic Empire, but to also secure the title deed to all of the land which was rightfully His. Based on His mission, then, He was, and is, the only one qualified to take the title deed to the earth and open its seals of judgment.

Think of Christ's comparison with the Old Testament land model:

- (1) As God gave Israel the land forever, so God gave the earth to mankind for an eternal possession (Gen. 1:26-28; Isa. 24:5).
- (2) As the Israelites couldn't lose their land perpetually, so the earth couldn't be lost to the foreign usurper, i.e., Satan, perpetually.
- (3) As it was wrong for Israel to forfeit their land to an outsider, so it was wrong for man to forfeit his God-given land to the outsider, Satan.
- (4) As land in Israel could only be redeemed by one from the same tribe, so the earth can only be redeemed from one, i.e., Jesus, of the race of mankind.

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And just who is Jesus? He's the Lamb of God, and He's also a mighty Lion who will use His power in the not too distant future to bring lasting, eternal peace to this planet, along with abundance and Edenic conditions our limited finite minds can barely grasp.

No wonder redeemed people and angels before God's throne chant before Him when they see the Lion and the Lamb make His final move to bring peace on earth:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

What better thing could we do this Christmas Eve than join them in their chant? On my command, let us have the two sides to my left chant repeatedly . . .

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

Those on my immediate right I ask you to repeatedly chant the following when I give the sign:

To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.

To those who are in the balcony, your line is what the cherubim constantly say.

Amen.

Let us begin.

To you I say, Merry Christmas. To the Lord I say, "Thank you for being the Lion from the tribe of Judah. Truly you are the King of Kings and Lord of Lords."