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NARNIA THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES

The writings of C. S. Lewis have been translated into over 30 languages. His books continue to sell more than a million copies a year. *The Chronicles Of Narnia* alone have sold over 100 million copies.

So what is it about the celebrated imagination of this controversial and widely loved former atheist and Oxford professor of English that has inspired spirituality and intrigued both children and adults for decades?

In the following pages, RBC Research Editor Dennis Fisher provides summaries and explanations for the *Chronicles* that we hope will introduce many not only to the world of Narnia but, more important, to the story behind the stories.

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NARNIA: THE FANTASY WORLD OF C. S. LEWIS

Imaginary lands of white knights, maidens in distress, and fire-breathing dragons may sound like a child's world of fairy tales and bedtime stories. But today, the wonder of fantasy is capturing the imagination of adults as well.

The last episode of *The Lord Of The Rings* film trilogy earned 11 Oscars and was the second highest grossing movie of all time. The *Star Wars* movies have generated billions of dollars by using stunning cinemagraphic effects to tell an ancient story that took place "long ago, in a galaxy far, far away."

The popularity of these films indicates that there's something in the human psyche that responds to a world of fantasy marked

by quest, struggle, defeat, and victory.

But do such stories interest us only because they reflect the common themes of the world we live in? Or do they also resonate with the spiritual reality of a world beyond our five senses?

*There's something
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Oxford scholar C. S. Lewis found echoes of a spiritual world in ancient stories that changed his life forever. After forsaking atheism to become a follower of Christ,

he developed the use of fantasy to parallel what he regarded as the ultimate reality. The series of stories he wrote is now known as *The Chronicles Of Narnia*.

THE MAN BEHIND THE STORIES

On November 29, 1898, Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, to Albert and Flora Lewis. While he was a small boy, his mother died of cancer. Some believe this heartbreak is what led Lewis to become an atheist.

But Lewis' voluminous reading and lively intellectual discussions with people of faith eventually caused him to doubt his denial of God. He began to wonder if there was more to life than he had thought.

Having read Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Lewis was struck by

how different mythologies repeated the themes of a dying and rising god. These varied stories seemed to either anticipate or echo the New Testament story of the Jesus of the Bible. Lewis concluded that Jesus' claims to be a king, His powers to heal, His wisdom, and His sacrifice, death, and resurrection were historically true and the ultimate story behind all stories.

Lewis saw that what makes the story of Jesus unique is that His miraculous life took place in real history. As he reflected on the historic reliability of the New Testament documents, Lewis found further reasons to recognize the reality of Jesus' life. Over time, his atheism began to crumble and he eventually became a Christian.

As a professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Oxford

University, Lewis wrote in a wide variety of genres: literary criticism, poetry, and formal defenses of the Christian faith. He also used a form of fantasy in writing the science fiction Space Trilogy (*Out Of The Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*) to illustrate Christian principles. In this Trilogy, he dealt with what he saw as the dehumanizing trends in modern science by dramatizing his arguments for moral absolutes that he had previously written about in *The Abolition Of Man*.

Lewis' creative writing skills did not stop with these genres. He became interested in writing fantasy on a level that even a child could understand. This desire seems to have come from a combination of experiences. In 1939, he and his brother Warren agreed to take several

children into their bachelor home during the bombing of London in World War II. This experience, along with the fact that he had once taken a special interest in a picture of a mythical faun carrying a bundle of packages in a snowstorm, became the seed thoughts of a children's story filled with Christian symbolism and literary allusions. The result, almost 10 years later, was *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*. Six other books exploring the fantasy world of Narnia would follow.

Lewis may not have intended to create seven children's books, nor did he plan to include insights from the Bible in each. But by the time he finished *The Chronicles Of Narnia*, that's what he had done.

Like his friend J. R. R. Tolkien, who wrote *The Lord Of The*

Rings trilogy, C. S. Lewis believed that well-written fantasy could provide fresh insights into the meaning of life. As David C. Downing observes in his book *Into The Wardrobe*:

Lewis believed that . . . all readers . . . share deeply embedded images and meanings that are evoked in myths, legends, stories, and even dreams. For Lewis, a well-constructed story draws upon these universal images and meanings. Much of the thematic richness of the *Chronicles* derives from Lewis' skill in drawing on mythic patterns—the god who dies and comes back to life, the voyage to the end of the earth, the flight to freedom, the rescue of captives from the underworld, the beginning and the end of all created things (p.34). On the basis of such

observations, Lewis created Narnia, a parallel world that could be entered by several different means—a wardrobe, magic rings, or an enchanted horn.

He designed this side-by-side existence so that the experience of time could be different than our own. In the world he created, a few days as we know them could span long epochs in Narnian time. As a result, the same children from our world could, in *The Chronicles Of Narnia*, witness the creation, the entrance of evil into the world, the rescue provided through a sacrificial death and resurrection, and the re-creation of a new world in its place.

SPIRITUAL TRUTH CLOTHED IN SYMBOL

In spite of the many Christian symbols built into the world of Narnia,

we must not jump to the conclusion that Lewis intended all the elements of *The Chronicles Of Narnia* to have a deeper, symbolic, allegorical meaning. Instead, Lewis considered Narnia to be a “supposal.” As Lewis explained in a letter:

[Aslan] is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, “What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?” (p.96, *A Field Guide To Narnia* by Colin Duriez).

This great “supposal” of how Christ might have behaved if He had become a lion in a land of talking animals allowed Lewis to repackage Christian themes in a fresh new way. Even though each character, place, and

event in the Chronicles does not necessarily have a symbolic meaning, the books do contain striking parallels with the spiritual principles of the Bible.

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Lewis showed that fantasy could provide mental images and ideas that parallel the story of Christ as the caring Creator, compassionate King, risen Savior, and faithful Friend. Because these images are so essential in understanding

The Chronicles Of Narnia, it's especially important to see how Lewis develops this fictional portrayal of Aslan, the great lion.

PARALLELS BETWEEN ASLAN AND CHRIST

Aslan is the creator and sovereign of the parallel world of Narnia. Even though Aslan is a lion, Lewis uses fantasy to give him personality and powers unmistakably characteristic of the New Testament portrait of Jesus Christ.

The Caring Creator.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory and his friend Polly use special rings to pass into other universes. In one instance, they are transported to a place where they witness the creation of a new world. In the darkness, a beautiful voice sings stars into existence followed by a newly created sunrise.

In the morning light, they

see that a mysterious lion is the singer. When Narnia's creation is complete, Aslan, the great lion and Narnia's creator, gives the gift of speech to animals and then celebrates with his creation:

“Creatures, I give you yourselves,” said the strong, happy voice of Aslan. “I give to you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars, and I give you myself” (p.71, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*).

The parallel between Aslan and Jesus Christ as Creator is clearly intentional. Lewis is obviously following the words of the gospel writer John who tells us: “All things were made through [Christ], and without Him nothing was made that was made” (Jn. 1:3). As the Jesus of the Bible is the powerful Creator of heaven and

earth, so Aslan is the sovereign creator in Narnia.

The Compassionate King. In *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, the four Pevensie children—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—discover entrance into Narnia through a wardrobe closet. Not long after their arrival, the children are greeted by a talking beaver. To their surprise, the children learn that animals in Narnia can talk. They are told by Mr. Beaver that Narnia is under the spell of a wicked witch who makes it “always winter and never Christmas.” Yet Mr. Beaver assures the children that there’s hope. They have received reports that Aslan, the great lion, “is on the move.” Having never heard of him, the children are strangely excited and fearfully curious. They wonder how safe they might feel in the presence of the great lion:

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you” (p.146, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*).

In portraying a lion as the king of Narnia, Lewis creates a parallel to the Bible’s messianic reference to the Lion of Judah. Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, says that at the end of the world the Lion of Judah will bring judgment on the earth by opening a sealed scroll. The apostle John declared: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” (Rev. 5:5). Like Aslan, the Lord Jesus isn’t safe (tame or under our control), but He is good.

The Risen Savior. In *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, Edmund is enslaved by the evil White Witch when he eats an enchanted candy called Turkish Delight. In a vain attempt to feed his craving, Edmund is willing to betray his brother and sisters to the White Witch. Aslan meets with the witch and offers to die in place of the traitor to satisfy, by some deep magic, a requirement of ancient Narnian law.

After suffering cruelly at the hands of the White Witch and her followers, Aslan is killed on a great stone table. But at sunrise, Aslan comes back to life and appears to Susan and Lucy. When Susan asks what it all means, he answers:

“It means,” said Aslan, “that though the witch knew the deep magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge

goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the table would crack and death itself would start working backwards” (p.185, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*).

The sacrifice of Aslan to break the power of the deep magic of the witch finds a historical, real-life parallel in the New Testament gospel of Luke. There we find an account of the resurrected Jesus explaining the meaning of His own resurrection:

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and

to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name (Lk. 24:46-47).

The New Testament teaches that Christ's death and resurrection has provided redemption for all who believe (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Ti. 3:5). And, like Edmund, all of us are rebels in need of forgiveness (Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:18).

The Faithful Friend.

In *The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader*, Aslan tells Lucy and Edmund that they won't be returning to Narnia. They respond with tears but are assured that they will see Aslan again in their own world:

"But you shall meet me, dear one," said Aslan.

"Are—are you there too, Sir?" said Edmund. "I am," said Aslan. "But there I have another name. You must learn

to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there" (p.541, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*).

In this passage, Lewis uses Aslan to parallel the Jesus of the New Testament who said:

No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you (Jn. 15:15).

In these four portraits of Aslan, Lewis offers an imaginary parallel with clear portraits of Christ as Creator, King, Savior, and Friend. But what other biblical parallels can we find in *The Chronicles Of Narnia*? To answer that question,

we must turn our attention to each book in the series and examine the story behind the stories.

SPIRITUAL PARALLELS IN THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

Observing how characters respond to Aslan, the Christ symbol, is the key to finding the story behind the stories of Narnia. These relational insights are rooted in the dominant role of Aslan in the Chronicles. Narnia scholar Paul F. Ford observes:

The beholding of [Aslan's] beautiful face sustains one all one's days, and the recognition of that face with love and awe at the end of time opens out onto an eternity of joy. To be addressed by him as "dear heart"

or "little one" or by name is a lasting, cherished blessing; to be rebuked by him is an everlasting shame. Whom he praises with an earthshaking "well done" remains forever favored; whom he blames or punishes is humbled in the hope of an enduring change of heart. Though he is wild—that is, all-powerful and free—he delights to be at the center of the dance of those whom he has made; he welcomes the help of others, both beast and human, to accomplish his plans; and he is the very often unnoticed storyteller behind every person's story, guarding the privacy of each, keeping faith with all (p.55, *Companion To Narnia*).

Bound together by this overarching theme, *The*

Chronicles Of Narnia are comprised of seven books. Each contains a distinct chapter in the saga of Narnian history, with spiritual parallels to our own world:

- *The Magician's Nephew* provides us with the origins of Narnia.
- *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe* shows the rescue of that world.
- *The Horse And His Boy* explores issues of pride and prejudice.
- *Prince Caspian* illustrates different attitudes toward the nature of truth as it's contained in an ancient, imperishable story.
- *The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader* contains various portraits of opportunities and perils in life's journey.
- *The Silver Chair* shows the importance of following God's instructions in the midst of a world

dominated by a mixture of truth and lies.

- *The Last Battle* brings a climax to the series by showing us a dramatic picture of good overcoming evil.

With that background, let's take a step closer to the fantasy and wonder that has made *The Chronicles Of Narnia* a classic in English literature.

THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW

It's best to begin reading *The Chronicles Of Narnia* by starting with *The Magician's Nephew*. Although it was the sixth book published, it gives insight into the whole series. It describes, for example, the creation of Narnia, explains the entrance of evil, and foreshadows Narnia's eventual restoration.

Setting. This tale begins in England, takes us to the dying planet of Charn,

and then transports us to Narnia, a new world being created by a mysterious lion named Aslan.

Plot Summary. An eccentric magician tricks his young nephew and a little girl into using magic rings to go from earth to another world where they encounter the White Witch.

The two children briefly return to earth where they meet a cabby and his horse. Along with the magician and the witch, they are all then transported to a place where they view the world of Narnia being created.

Together the group watches as a mysterious lion sings stars, plants, and animals into being. After creation, this great lion tells the boy and girl that evil has entered his world with the White Witch who has come with them.

The lion then sends the children to acquire silver apples that will protect this

newly created land of Narnia from the evil influence of the witch.

Obediently, the children bring back the apples to the lion, who grants the boy permission to take one with him back to England. When the boy's dying mother eats the fruit, she is healed. The apple core is planted in the backyard and eventually grows into a tree. Later, after the tree blows down in a storm, its wood is used to construct a magical wardrobe that becomes a portal into Narnia in *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*.

Spiritual Parallels.

The Magician's Nephew illustrates the biblical theme of creation. The song of Aslan brings wonder and awe as he creates sun, moon, stars, and all living things. These events track with what the Bible tells us when it says of Jesus Christ:

All things were made

through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (Jn. 1:3).

The apostle Paul provides a similar view of creation:

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible All things were created through Him and for Him (Col. 1:15-16).

This parallels the story behind the creation story of *The Magician's Nephew*. According to the New Testament, it was the King of kings who spoke into being galaxies, stars, planets, and life on our world. The song that the stars echo back to their creator in Narnia is reminiscent of Job's exclamation about creation, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7).

In addition, *The Magician's Nephew* also pictures the entrance of evil into a beautiful world, marring it with sin. This happens when the children inadvertently transport the White Witch to Narnia from her own dying world. Her twisted desire for power drives her to dominate the newly created world.

Those familiar with the story of the Bible will easily see similarities between the White Witch and the biblical record of Lucifer. According to Old Testament prophets, Lucifer seems to have been a beautiful but rebellious archangel whose own self-importance resulted in the spiritual disease of pride (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:14-15). Like the White Witch, Lucifer, also known as Satan, approached our original parents and tempted them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7).

Since then, a curse has plagued our relationships, our world, and our access to God (Gen. 3:8-24).

In this way, *The Magician's Nephew* sets the stage for the theme of rescue and personal restoration that is central to the plot of *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*.

THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE

This book, which is by far the most well-known of the series, is the first written and first published of the Chronicles. Lewis uses its pages to portray themes of evil, treachery, addiction, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and rescue.

Setting. The first part of the story takes place in a professor's country home in England. When four children play hide-and-seek, one of them discovers a mysterious wardrobe,

which eventually transports each of them to the magical world of Narnia.

Plot Summary. To protect them from London's bombing during World War II, the Pevensey children—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—are sent to stay in a professor's home. There they discover an enchanted wardrobe, which transports them to Narnia, a place where a witch has caused it to be “always winter and never Christmas.” The witch approaches Edmund, the youngest brother, and tempts him with enchanted candy and promises of power if he will betray his siblings.

At a key point in the story, the evil White Witch turns on Edmund and cites an ancient law of Narnia that gives her the right to execute him. She demands that Aslan turn the traitorous Edmund over to her so she can put him

to death. But Aslan offers his own life as a substitute for Edmund's.

After being killed on a stone table, Aslan comes back to life and enables the children to defeat the White Witch and restore his kingdom. Delegating his authority, the great lion puts the children on thrones as kings and queens of Narnia. Later, as young adults, they go back through the wardrobe to earth, only to find that little time has elapsed and they are children again.

Spiritual Parallels.

The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe beautifully illustrates the biblical theme of substitutionary atonement and redemption (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). In Narnia, the White Witch acts as an evil usurper who seeks to dominate her subjects and destroy all opposition. As a

personification of evil, the witch symbolizes how the devil personally tries to control our own world (1 Jn. 5:19; cp. 2:15-17).

In this story, the White Witch has heard of a prophecy in which two sons of Adam and two daughters of Eve break her spell over Narnia. In an effort to disrupt the prediction, she tries to ensnare Edmund, the youngest brother, by addicting him to an enchanted candy called Turkish Delight. The candy is a powerful picture of the seductive power of evil to capture and control the human heart. Edmund is willing to betray his brother and sisters if only to have another bite of the delicacy he craves.

The story behind this story is found in the Bible, which describes the inclination of a race of people who are enslaved

to their own wrongs. Without Christ's rescue they are prone to make choices "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3).

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Aslan, who reenters his rightful kingdom of Narnia to reestablish his authority, rescues Edmund from the clutches of the White Witch. Through an act of self-sacrifice, Aslan gives his own life in behalf of the traitorous little boy who followed his own desires and betrayed the trust of his siblings.

Aslan's sacrifice symbolizes the Bible's own drama of substitutionary atonement and redemption through the life, death, and resurrection of the King of kings. The Scripture portrays Jesus as the Sovereign Lord who rescues us from the sin of choosing our own selfish way instead of following Him (Mk. 10:45).

THE HORSE AND HIS BOY

This is the third tale in the chronological history of Narnia, even though it was the fifth book of the series to be published. The title *The Horse And His Boy* offers a humorous twist by portraying a horse as the owner of a human child. By developing this reversal of roles, Lewis illustrates the perils of personal pride in a fresh and new way. Each person or talking animal that struggles with vanity finds different ways of

dealing with it through Aslan's help.

Setting. The story takes place 14 Narnian years after the events of *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*. Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are still ruling Narnia. Most of the book occurs in the hot desert land of Calormen to the south of Narnia where the main characters escape and seek freedom in Narnia to the north.

Plot Summary.

Shasta, an infant prince of Archenland (an allied nation of Narnia that protects its southern border), is kidnapped and raised to boyhood by a fisherman in the land of Calormen far to the south. In that land, a high-born Calormene princess named Aravis is fleeing an unwanted arranged marriage.

Together, Shasta and Aravis flee to Narnia in the north on horseback. Their

horses are originally from Narnia and are therefore able to talk. On their journey, they hear of a plot to conquer Archenland and invade Narnia. Aided by a mysterious lion, the children and the horses are able to warn the nobles of Archenland and prevent the invasion.

Through these events, Shasta discovers his true royal identity. He later marries Princess Aravis and together they eventually become the king and queen of Archenland.

Spiritual Parallels.

In *The Horse And His Boy*, the talking stallion, Bree, struggles with issues of pride and vanity. He views himself as an experienced war horse and looks down on Shasta as if he were a human foal in need of riding lessons. And whenever the shy and wise mare, Hwin, expresses her opinions, the arrogant

stallion belittles her and claims superior skill and courage.

At a key point in the story, however, when this proud war horse hears the roar of a lion, he flees like a coward, leaving Aravis and Hwin unprotected. Later, when Bree meets the great lion face to face, the stallion admits that he has been a prideful and frightened failure. The lion praises him for recognizing his shortcomings.

Life has a way of exposing the flaw of personal vanity. Bree's actions are an illustration of Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." In contrast, a modest spirit before both God and man can become a carrier of wisdom to others: "When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom" (Prov. 11:2).

Lewis also traces an

arrogant spirit within the heart of Aravis, the young princess. Her growth in humility illustrates the biblical idea that one of the remedies to an exaggerated view of self is to take an interest in the gifts and accomplishments of others. The apostle Paul wrote:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

Because Aravis was high-born and accustomed to being served, she had become arrogant and demanding. But her interactions with the talking horses helped her to learn to esteem them as fellow rational beings—riding but never exploiting them.

Initially, Aravis looked

down on Shasta as a common horse thief. But after seeing his bravery and loyalty, she apologized for her condescending attitude.

Pride must give way to a teachable spirit if it is ever to be conquered. Pride is wrong because it ignores the truth that all natural abilities and spiritual gifts are given by God.

PRINCE CASPIAN

Prince Caspian was the second book written, as a sequel to *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*. But it's the fourth book in Narnia's chronological history.

Prince Caspian illustrates how an ancient story that is considered by some to be a fable may in fact be true. The story showcases the idea that just because a story is ancient doesn't mean that it has no basis in reality. In this book, the acceptance or denial of the

ancient story of Narnia will shape the heart and future of each character.

Setting. Many years have passed since the conclusion of *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, and Narnia has fallen under the cruel rule of a tyrant and his taskmasters.

Plot Summary.

In earth time, it has been only a year since the four children had visited Narnia through the wardrobe. Yet in Narnian time, over 1,000 years have passed. Old Narnians still cling to the ancient story of the great lion and how he established four children on thrones as kings and queens.

A tyrant named Miraz is now on the throne. He is the leader of a race descended from human pirates who stumbled into Narnia centuries earlier. His young nephew, Prince Caspian, hears stories of

Narnia's golden age from his nanny and longs for its return. But his uncle dismisses these stories as fairy tales.

Caspian, seeking to restore the old Narnia, blows an enchanted horn, which summons the four children from earth to help. When they arrive, they see a world where their own past reign is a distant memory. Working with the young prince and the great lion, the four children overthrow Miraz and replace him with Caspian as the ruler.

Spiritual Parallels.

Stories about the golden age of Narnia are denied by the tyrant Miraz and his taskmasters. Their contempt for the old stories of Narnia is directly linked to their fear of the possible return of Aslan, its sovereign lord. By contrast, when the four children return to Narnia, they recall vivid memories

of their own past. A recurrent theme in this book is the contrasting denial and affirmation of the ancient stories of Narnia.

The story behind this book is evident. Many people today deny the ancient stories of the Bible. They consider the record of Jesus Christ to

Many people today . . . consider the record of Jesus Christ to be a myth, a made-up series of implausible accounts that were embellished with miracles long after His death.

be a myth, a made-up series of implausible accounts that were embellished with miracles long after His death.

Within just a few decades of Jesus' life, the apostle Peter felt compelled to put in writing his own record as an eyewitness:

We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Pet. 1:16).

The apostle said that his view of Jesus' power and majesty were not based on invented stories but on what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration (vv.17-18; cp. Mt. 17:1-9).

Prince Caspian illustrates different attitudes toward truths contained in an ancient but imperishable story. How individuals respond determines their destiny.

THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER

The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader provides the fifth chronological tale of Narnia but was the third in the series to be published.

Several characters in this story picture the trials and rewards of life's quest, an adventure filled with both promise and peril. These complex characters show us that no one is exempt from danger or opportunity.

Setting. The story takes place aboard a Narnian sailing ship called the *Dawn Treader* and on a number of islands visited by the ship's crew.

Plot Summary. Prince Caspian of Narnia has become king. He sets out on a voyage to find seven lords of Narnia who disappeared while exploring the Eastern Sea. Edmund and Lucy, accompanied by their spoiled and

obnoxious cousin Eustace, are summoned from their world to help with the quest. They enter Narnia by falling into an enchanted painting of a sailing ship that becomes real.

Aboard the ship is Caspian, his crew, and the 2-foot-tall Reepicheep, the fearless and courageous chief of the Talking Mice. Together they visit various islands on their journey east. In the course of their adventure, they encounter slave traders, a dragon, a pool that turns everything into gold, and a sea serpent.

When the ship comes in view of the coast of Aslan's country, Reepicheep paddles toward it on his own little boat with eager anticipation.

Spiritual Parallels.

During their quest aboard the dragon-shaped sailing ship, the main characters illustrate a variety of motivations, temptations,

and victories on life's journey. How they respond to Aslan in the midst of their moral choices illustrates the perils and the rewards of a pilgrimage of faith.

In one compelling scene, Lewis illustrates the spiritual principle that true transformation can come only from the work of Christ in our lives and not through our own self-effort. On one of the islands, Eustace seeks shelter in a cave, not realizing that it's a dragon's lair filled with gold and jewels. When he sees the treasure, he greedily puts on a gold bracelet and stuffs jewels in his pockets. Eustace eventually falls asleep on his pile of loot, dreaming of his newfound riches. When he wakes up, however, he discovers that he's turned into a dragon!

After some time spent as a dragon, he has an encounter with a talking lion

who tells him to undress (remove his skin) and bathe in a well of water to ease the pain from the gold bracelet that was digging into his leg. Eustace tries three times unsuccessfully to scratch off his dragon skin until the lion tells him, “You will have to let me undress you.”

Having his skin ripped off by the lion’s claws is the most painful thing Eustace has ever experienced. But when the lion is done bathing him and dressing him with new clothes, he is not only a boy again but is transformed inside as well. When he is reunited with his cousins and the rest of the crew, they all notice his inner change.

On another island, a pool is discovered that turns everything into gold. Caspian becomes obsessed by the wealth that could be acquired by the king who owns that island. His greedy plans are cut

short, however, by an appearance by Aslan.

Here the fantasy world of Lewis the storyteller illustrates how unrestrained greed can lead to death. Lewis signals the effect of unchecked desire in the name that Reepicheep gives the island: Deathwater.

All of this echoes the story behind the story. It was Jesus who asked, “What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mt. 16:26). The life of faith is a journey in which we learn that eternal values far outweigh temporal gain.

Reepicheep the mouse joined the quest not only to help Caspian look for the seven lost lords, but also to seek Aslan’s country. At the end of their journey, when the ship arrived at the World’s End, he lowered his own little boat and enthusiastically rowed toward Aslan’s

country without fear or apprehension. This courageous warrior-mouse illustrates the “other worldly” orientation of the life of faith. The apostle Paul wrote, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Reepicheep’s life was filled with meaning, adventure, and joy in seeking his eternal home.

THE SILVER CHAIR

Although it was the fourth book to be published, *The Silver Chair* unfolds the sixth chronological tale of Narnia. It’s only one of two in the series in which none of the Pevensie children appear (the other being *The Magician’s Nephew*).

The Silver Chair illustrates the battle that is constantly being waged against the forces of evil for the control of our minds. It also pictures the enslavement that occurs when the half-truths, distortions, and lies of the evil one are not replaced

with the truth. This book teaches the eternal lesson of moral discernment and the need for courageous commitment.

Setting. *The Silver Chair* primarily takes place in the land of giants, gnomes, and the evil queen of Underland to the far north of Narnia. The story occurs at the end of King Caspian’s reign as he is preparing to die.

Plot Summary.

Prince Rilian, the son of the elderly king of Narnia, has been kidnapped and missing for 10 years. King Caspian wants desperately, before he dies, to find his long-lost son.

To help with the search, Aslan transports Eustace (from *The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader*) and Jill, one of his school friends, to Narnia and commissions them to go on a quest to find Prince Rilian. He gives Jill specific instructions and

signs that they are to follow, regardless of what their logic tells them.

The boy and girl are joined on their journey by Puddleglum, a tall green creature called a marsh-wiggle. Their journey brings them into the underground kingdom of the evil queen, where the kidnapped prince is under a strong spell of amnesia. He can only remember his former life for an hour each night. But he can't escape because he is always bound to a silver chair during this hour when his memory returns. On one such occasion, the prince evokes the name of Aslan, and the children understand their shared loyalty to the great lion and free him from the chair.

The evil queen of Underland tries to mix truth and falsehood with her soothing voice to bring the prince and his rescuers back under her control.

But they overcome her enchantment and kill her—after she turns into her true form as a poisonous serpent.

The prince returns to see his father, who soon dies.

Eustace and Jill are then transported to Aslan's country where they see the dead King Caspian brought back to life and rejuvenated to his youthful self after Aslan uses a great drop of blood from his paw.

Spiritual Parallels.

When Aslan sent Jill and Eustace to find Prince Rilian, he gave Jill four signs to look for along the way. She was to memorize them and review them daily. But Jill's lack of attention to Aslan's command almost cost them the successful completion of their quest.

Jill's tendency to forget parallels our own journey in life. The Bible admonishes us to remember and to follow God's counsel and

instruction. This is the key to experiencing His presence and goodness in our lives (Ps. 119:9-11; Jn. 14:21).

The evil queen of Underland used alluring lies and deceptions to confuse Prince Rilian and his rescuers and to bring them under her control. In a similar way, evil often questions truth and affirms lies. Satan's method in the Garden of Eden was to question what God said, deny it, and then replace it with his own false claims (Gen. 3:1-7).

Jesus said of this same deceiver: "When he [Satan] speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (Jn. 8:44).

Just as Prince Rilian and the children overcame the wicked queen by affirming the truth and the reality of Aslan, so affirming the truth that God has revealed in Scripture is the best defense

against the enemy of our souls (Eph. 6:10-18).

Affirming the truth that God has revealed in Scripture is the best defense against the enemy of our souls.

At the end of *The Silver Chair*, Jill and Eustace are transported to Aslan's country, where they witness the resurrection and transformation of King Caspian. This parallels the truth that followers of Christ are promised a new and indestructible body beyond the grave (1 Cor. 15:42-54).

The King of kings and Lord of lords "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21).

THE LAST BATTLE

The Last Battle provides a conclusion to the tales of Narnia. This book shows evil masquerading as good. The story ends in an epic battle, the defeat of evil, and the creation of a new world.

This last book of the Chronicles also deals with the ultimate reality of death and hints at what those who are in Christ will experience beyond the grave. Whether transformed into a new state to enter a new world, or experiencing death to get there, *The Last Battle* points the way into a joy-filled eternity.

Setting. *The Last Battle* takes place during the final days of Narnia. It's been over 200 years since King Rilian died, and now Tirian, the seventh king since Rilian, is on the throne. Aslan hasn't appeared in Narnia for many years.

Plot Summary. A devious ape named Shift finds an old lion's skin and persuades his simple-minded follower, a donkey named Puzzle, to wear the skin to look like Aslan. The ape then forms an alliance with Narnia's traditional enemies. Together they set out on a brutal policy of cutting down talking trees and enslaving talking animals—all by order of Shift, who claims to be the mouthpiece of Aslan.

Tirian, the present king of Narnia, hears what's happening in his kingdom and can't believe that Aslan would command such treatment of his loyal subjects. When he goes to investigate, he's captured and cries out to the real Aslan for help. Aslan transports Eustace and Jill (the boy and girl from *The Silver Chair*) from their world to help King Tirian escape and put a stop to the atrocities taking place.

A great battle for Narnia follows and is won by Aslan's army. The children despair as they see Aslan command their beloved Narnia to come to an end.

Aslan then judges the inhabitants of Narnia before inviting the children and his other loyal subjects into a new Narnia that he has created. The children are delighted to find that the new Narnia actually feels much like England and the old Narnia—but that it is inexpressibly better.

Spiritual Parallels.

The Last Battle borrows many themes from the Bible's view of the future of our world. Shift's name indicates his manipulative nature. Clearly the one in control over the Aslan impostor, he refers to himself as "Lord Shift, the mouthpiece of Aslan." The purpose of Shift's devious plan becomes obvious as he opposes the real Aslan's

will and promotes himself.

Once again we hear echoes of the story behind the stories of Narnia. The devil, described in the Scriptures as the enemy of God, is in the business of imitating God. His goal is to "be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:12-15; cp. Ezek. 28:14-16). One day in the future, human history as we know it will come to an end. Just prior to the end, Satan will try to control the world with his own human substitute, the Antichrist, and his mouthpiece, the false prophet, who will deceive the world "with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2 Th. 2:9).

Shift the ape was not satisfied with the lie that a donkey in a lion's pelt was the real Aslan. He made other false claims. When he was questioned about his relationship with the followers of the false god Tash, he replied:

Tash is only another name for Aslan. All that old idea of us being right and [them being] . . . wrong is silly. We know better now. [They] use different words but we all mean the same thing. Tash and Aslan are only two different names for you know who (p.685, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*).

This kind of false teaching is heard in many different forms today. It's often said that, "We all worship the same God but only by different names." But the Bible says, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Narnia's last battle is suggestive of the final conflict between God and Satan that the Bible calls Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21). After this titanic struggle, evil will

be overcome and followed by the final judgment (Rev. 20:10-15).

Then, just as Lewis' old Narnia was swept away and replaced by a new one, our heaven and earth will be destroyed and replaced. The apostle John, in the last book of the Bible, saw "a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

Just as Lewis' old Narnia was swept away and replaced by a new one, our heaven and earth will be destroyed and replaced.

The new Narnia was filled and overflowing with life. Those who entered

were invited to “Come further up, come further in!” (p.760, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*). This is a picture of the future adventures all those who enter the new heaven and earth will have with their King of kings and Lord of lords.

AN ONGOING STORY

The story behind *The Chronicles Of Narnia* is a love story. By watching Aslan, we are reminded of the heart of the One who died for us and rose bodily from the dead to be declared as the King and Savior of all who will trust Him. The Bible proclaims that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Creator, King, Savior, and Friend.

The Chronicles help us appreciate with a fresh understanding the real story behind the stories. For

example, when Aslan gives his life for the traitorous Edmund, it gives us a different perspective of Christ’s personal sacrifice for our own redemption.

As various Narnian characters are helped by the great lion in dealing with sins of pride and lust, we find in Christ a longsuffering Lord who graciously transforms the yielded heart into greater obedience.

Finally, the anticipation of a new Narnia helps us recapture the anticipation of being with the Lord Jesus in a new world where new adventures await us.

That’s the message of *The Chronicles Of Narnia*, and that is why they will endure in challenging the mind and stirring the hearts of children and adults alike.

At the end of the last book we hear the great lion say:

“The [school] term is

over. The holidays have begun. The dream is ended. This is the morning.” And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before (p.767, *The Chronicles Of Narnia*).

SUGGESTED READING

The Chronicles Of Narnia
by C. S. Lewis (New York:
Harper Collins, 1982).

Inside Narnia by Devin
Brown (Grand Rapids:
Baker Books, 2005).

*Finding God In The Land
Of Narnia* by Kurt Bruner
and Jim Ware (Carol Stream:
Tyndale House, 2005).

*A Family Guide To
Narnia* by Christin
Ditchfield (Wheaton:
Crossways, 2003).

Into The Wardrobe
by David C. Downing
(San Francisco: Jossey-
Bass, 2005).

A Field Guide To Narnia
by Colin Duriez (Downers
Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

Companion To Narnia
by Paul F. Ford (San
Francisco: Harper San
Francisco, 2005).

Knowing Aslan
by Thomas Williams
(Nashville: Thomas
Nelson, 2005).

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