Chapter 8

The Gospel According to Aslan

In This Chapter

- Uncovering the Christian gospel at the Stone Table
- Using Aslan to express God's role in the world
- Breaking through sin and evil in Narnia and the real world
- Sabotaging faith's potential
- Debating belief and unbelief
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When C.S. Lewis sat down to write *The Chronicles of Narnia,* he didn't dream up a master theological plan and then set about writing fairy tales that fit into that framework. He simply aimed to tell a good tale. However, because his Christian faith was such an integral part of him as a man and as an author, the Christian gospel "came bounding into it." Aslan the lion, who is symbolic of Jesus Christ, entered the scene first, but other fundamental Christian truths naturally became part of Narnia and its characters. As a result, all the story's major questions are answered by Lewis's Christian faith: How did Narnia begin? How is sin introduced into the enchanted world? How can traitorous Edmund be restored? How do the children and Narnians live "by faith" in Aslan? How active is Aslan in the lives of his followers? How is Narnia going to end?

In both this chapter and Chapter 9, you explore Christianity through Narnia-colored glasses. In doing so, you see that the Narnian Chronicles are packed with Christian truth that's just waiting to be discovered.

Many of the fundamental Christian beliefs covered in this chapter are discussed in greater detail in *Christianity For Dummies* (Wiley), which I also wrote. Check out that book if you want to dive deeper into these topics.

Aslan's Sacrifice: The Heart of Christianity

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* the battle of good versus evil plays out between Aslan and the White Witch, but it also rages inside the heart of Edmund. Edmund knows deep down that siding with the White Witch is wrong, but his pride, insatiable appetite for Turkish Delight, and desire for power win out. He betrays his brother and sisters and agrees to help the White Witch. Eventually, he realizes his horrible error and wants to leave the Witch and return to his siblings. However, the White Witch resists, protesting to Aslan, "[Edmund's] life is forfeit to me. His blood is my property." Her claim is based upon the Deep Magic that's at the heart of Narnia and "engraved on the scepter of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea."

Deep Magic played out

"Deep Magic" is a term used in the Narnian Chronicles to refer to laws imposed upon Narnia by the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. These laws are non-negotiable, and when they're broken, justice must be satisfied. "Deeper Magic" references Aslan's willingness to sacrifice himself to satisfy the demands of "Deep Magic."

The principle of Deep Magic is at the heart of Christianity in the belief that a perfect and holy God embedded his "holy character" into the fabric of this world. At the same time, he created free will, allowing each person to have a choice of whether to live in line with God's character or to rebel against it. (For more discussion of free will, see Chapter 15.) Christianity maintains that all people have sinned and fallen short of God's "Deep Magic" (Romans 3:23). Like Edmund's fate in the hands of the White Witch, the inevitable result of our sin is death — with Satan telling God that *our* blood is his property (Romans 6:23).

In many ways, Romans 6:23 demonstrates the tightly bound relationship between "Deep Magic" and "Deeper Magic" in the real world. This New Testament passage says: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The first part of this passage expresses "Deep Magic," and the second part of the passage conveys the sense of "Deeper Magic."

According to Christianity, given our undeniable sin, all would be lost if not for God; God loved you and I so much that he willingly stepped in and took the punishment that was due us. Or, as Romans 5:8 says, "But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Aslan makes the same sacrifice for Edmund when he chooses to lay down his life for the boy. For his part, Edmund needs only to submit to Aslan in return. Nothing more is required.

Aslan's Gethsemane

The events of the night before Aslan's slaying at the Stone Table resemble Jesus's evening in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion (see Matthew 26:36–46). Jesus took the disciples closest to him into the garden while he prayed about the events to come. He looked visibly troubled and sorrowful to the disciples.

Aslan's also deeply saddened and needs the companionship of Lucy and Susan, telling them, "I am sad and lonely. Lay your hands on my mane so that I can feel you are there and let us walk like that." Similarly, Jesus wanted his disciples to be a support to him and was hurt when they feel asleep during his time of need.

In the sickening scene at the Stone Table, the White Witch isn't content with killing Aslan; she wants to humiliate him as well. So after he's bound on the Table, she muzzles him and shaves his mane — which would seem to be the most disgraceful punishment for a lion. In similar disgrace, the Roman guards put a crown of thorns on Jesus's head and knelt in front of him, mocking him as a king. The religious leaders also got into the act, taunting Jesus as he was being crucified, saying, "He can save others, but he can't save himself" (Matthew 27:42).

Keep in mind, however, that Aslan initiates his sacrifice and is never forced into it. In the same way, Jesus Christ engineered the circumstances that put him on the cross. He wasn't condemned by the Jewish leaders and killed by the Romans so much as he *allowed* them to condemn and execute him. Only in truly grasping the voluntary nature of Christ's death does the extent of his infinite love for humanity become real to Christians.

Victory on the Stone Table

During Aslan's humiliation and slaying at the hands of the White Witch, Lucy looks at his face and sees that he's "braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever." The same reaction likely came from onlookers of Jesus's crucifixion, especially when they heard perhaps the most beautiful, graceful words imaginable from Jesus's lips: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

After Aslan dies, the Stone Table is broken into two pieces "by a great crack that ran down it from end to end." Here, Lewis echoes what happened to the curtain of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem at the moment Jesus died: The "veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split." (Matthew 27:51).

The White Witch is convinced of her coup d'état over Aslan and the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. So too, with Jesus's death, Satan would have thought he'd foiled God's plan to save the world. Yet, in the same way that there's a Deeper Magic that the Witch doesn't know about, Satan almost certainly didn't realize that if "a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead," death and sin would be defeated. That's what happens in Narnia given that Aslan's resurrected the night following his death, and that's what happened in real life when Jesus was resurrected three days after his death (John 20).

Lucy's and Susan's reactions to a resurrected Aslan sounds very much like the reactions of Jesus's disciples when they see him the first time. Lucy exclaims, "Aren't you dead then, dear Aslan? . . . You're not — not — a (ghost)?" Aslan replies, "Do I look it?" and then gives them a hug and kiss. Similarly, when Jesus first appears to a frightened group of disciples, he says: "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see that I have" (Luke 24:38–39).

Aslan's victory at the Stone Table is the turning point not only for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* but for the entire Narnia series. The White Witch is defeated, and the cure for the disease of sin begins to spread. In the same way, the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross is the crux of Christianity as well as the turning point for all human history.

Finding Jesus Christ in a Roaring Lion

By the time C.S. Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia,* he'd been a Christian for nearly 20 years, so his Christian beliefs and underlying theology were quite mature and developed. He'd represented Christ in his earlier fiction — as the "Man" in *The Pilgrim's Regress* and Maledil in the space trilogy — but Aslan is far more developed as a character (easily Lewis's most compelling portrayal of Christ) and is the very foundation of the Narnian Chronicles. As such, Aslan's a valuable window into Lewis's understanding of Jesus Christ.

On the impact of Aslan's character, former Lewis student Dom Bede Griffiths adds in *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal:* "[Aslan] has all of the hidden power and majesty and awesomeness which Lewis associated with God, but also all the glory and the tenderness and even the humor which he believed belonged to him, so that children could run up to him and throw their arms around him and kiss him . . . It is 'mere Christianity.'"

As you examine Aslan's role in the Narnian Chronicles, pay special attention to the qualities I outline in this section. Because of their parallels, understanding Aslan will help you better understand Jesus Christ.

More than just a man

When Lucy first hears of Aslan from Mr. and Mrs. Beaver in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, she asks tentatively, "Is — is he a man?" "Certainly not," is Mr. Beaver's emphatic reply. "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."

Jesus Christ, too, is far more than just a man or an angelic being that came to earth. No, he is none other than God himself. "I and the Father are one," Jesus said boldly in John 10:30. And elsewhere, he spoke that he always existed: "Before Abraham came into being, I am" (John 8:58). ("I am" is a reference to God's holy name used in the Old Testament — "I AM WHO I AM;" see Exodus 3:14.)

Over the years in Narnia, some try to dismiss Aslan as being something other than the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Likewise, one of the popular beliefs concerning Jesus Christ today is that he was a simply good moral teacher who lived 2,000 years ago, but he couldn't possibly have been God in the flesh. In *Mere Christianity,* however, Lewis emphasizes that a good teacher is the one thing that Jesus Christ could *not* have been. Given everything he claimed, Jesus was either a liar, a crazy man, or else truly the Son of God. (See Chapter 20 in this book for Lewis's full explanation.)

Son of God

The basic idea of the Christian "Triune" God (or Trinity) is that one God exists with three distinct identities: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Although they're unified, each of the members of the Trinity has a unique role and personality. See Chapter 16 for a more complete discussion of the Trinity.

The "God" of Narnia resembles, more or less, the Christian Trinity. Two members of the Trinity are obviously present in Narnia: The Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea is God the Father, and Aslan is God the Son. As for the third member, Lewis never clearly displays the Holy Spirit's role inside Narnia. Some have suggested that Father Christmas in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* plays this role because he gives gifts to Peter, Susan, and Lucy. Yet, that idea seems dubious

(since the gifts are given before Aslan's sacrificial death) and inconsistent (not every "believer" receives a gift). The albatross that leads the *Dawn Treader* away from Dark Island in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* certainly serves the function of the Holy Spirit. Yet, even here, Lewis implies that the albatross is actually Aslan.

The most obvious allusion to a Narnian Trinity is in *The Horse and His Boy* in an exchange between Aslan and Shasta. When Shasta asks Aslan who he is, Aslan (referred to here as "the Voice") repeats "Myself" three times, in three different ways, reflecting the different roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

> *"Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay: and then the third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it.*

(Also, note the parallel between "Myself" and Jesus Christ's use of "I AM", which is discussed in the "More than just a man" section above.)

Practically speaking, the God of Narnia seems to resemble *two-oneness* (Aslan and the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea) rather than *three-oneness* — with Aslan assuming some of the roles that Christians traditionally view as those of the Holy Spirit.

By and large, however, Aslan functions in a manner indicative of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Jesus came to the earth as a man to sacrifice his own life for the sins of the world. "I am the great Bridge Builder," says Aslan to Lucy in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader."* So too, Jesus Christ is also the only one who can build a bridge between God and his people. To paraphrase Hebrews 9:15, Christ is the great Bridge Builder, enabling people who believe in him to receive an eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom and set them free from sins committed against the "Deep Magic."

Aslan also carries out the will of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea just as Jesus Christ carries out the will of his Father. What's more, just as Aslan created the world (see the "Played a key role in creation" section below), so too Jesus always existed and participated in the world's creation.

Not a tame savior

As you read through *The Chronicles of Narnia,* you discover quickly that Aslan isn't a pushover. He's constantly described as "not a tame lion," and Lewis depicts him as both "good" and "ferocious." Several characters speak of this paradox:

- Mr. Beaver tells Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe:* "Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."
- When Aslan leaves Coriakin and Lucy in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Coriakin says, "It's always like that, you can't keep him; it's not as if he were a *tame* lion."
- Aslan speaks of his ferocity to Jill at the start of *The Silver Chair:* "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms."
- Lucy notes Aslan's dangerous potential in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when she says, "Terrible paws if he didn't know how to velvet them."
- At one point in *The Horse and His Boy,* Shasta faces Aslan and, according to the narrator, "A new and different sort of trembling came over [Shasta]. Yet he felt glad too."
- In *The Horse and His Boy,* Aravis proclaims to the Great Lion when she meets him, "You're so beautiful. You may eat me if you like. I'd sooner be eaten by you than fed by anyone else."
- The narrator in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* comments on Aslan's duality: "People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time."

Like Aslan, Jesus Christ isn't a "tame" savior. During his earthly ministry, he preached "turn the other cheek," loved the sick and downtrodden, never led a revolt, and voluntarily went to his death on the cross without resistance. Each of these actions certainly is an example of Christ's goodness, holiness, and amazing love for people, but one's mistaken to assume that Christ is only about goodness. In his years on earth, Christ was anything but a wimp when it came with dealing with the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day. Time and time again, he challenged them to get off their self-righteous behinds, so to speak, and start loving the God they claimed to be serving. Matthew 23 reveals Christ's ferocity, motivated not by venom but by a broken heart.

Aslan in the Willows

Kenneth Grahame's book *The Wind in the Willows* was highly influential to Lewis, and that influence is especially notable in Lewis's portrayal of Aslan. The Great Lion shares some traits with Grahame's character Pan, namely the ability to instill both love and fear in others. Note the paradox of these reactions in the following exchange: "When Rat and Mole approach Pan, the Mole asks Rat whether he is afraid. "'Afraid?' murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. 'Afraid? Of Him? O, never, never. And yet, and yet, O Mole, I am afraid.'"

The Book of Revelation gives Christians a dramatically powerful glimpse of what Jesus will be like in the future when he, like Aslan, takes care of business:

> *I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True. In righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has names written and a name written which no one knows but he himself. He is clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood. His name is called "The Word of God." The armies which are in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in white, pure, fine linen. Out of his mouth proceeds a sharp, double-edged sword, that with it he should strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He treads the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. He has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."* (Revelation 19:11–16)

As you read this passage, picture Aslan leading the Narnian armies against the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Miraz's army in *Prince Caspian*.

In depicting Aslan as a roaring lion, Lewis reveals his belief in Jesus Christ as a mind-blowing contrast of absolute goodness and absolute ferocity. Christ loved the sinners of the world so much that he was willing to die for them, but when he returns to the earth a second time, he will fiercely stomp out evil once and for all, just like Aslan does in *The Last Battle*.

There are two ways to interpret Lewis's description of Aslan as "not a tame lion." See the section "Isn't at our beck and call," later in this chapter, for further explanation of how neither Aslan nor Jesus is a "tame savior."

Ever compassionate

Aslan may not be a tame lion, but he has a deep love for the humans and Talking Animals of Narnia. In *The Magician's Nephew,* when Digory is scared about his mother's grave condition, Aslan comes alongside him and shares his grief. In fact, Digory struggles with his decision not to take a curing apple to his mother behind Aslan's back, but "whenever he remembered the shining tears in Aslan's eyes he became sure." Aslan expresses his love and compassion for "his children" in other ways as well; for example, in *The Horse and His Boy,* he touches Shasta's forehead with his tongue as a visible expression of his love.

In the Narnian Chronicles, Lewis uses Aslan to depict the compassionate love that God has for all humankind. A great example of this love is found in the prodigal son parable in Luke 15. You probably know the story: A son selfishly

demands his inheritance before his father is even dead, throws the money away in a far-off country, ends up in desperate straits, and realizes he has no choice but return home. In Luke 15:20, Jesus says that the father sees him from off and "has compassion for his son." "Compassion" is a fairly commonplace word in modern English and therefore has lost much of the impact of the Greek word used in the original scriptures, which is more intense. Applied to Luke 15:20, when the father saw his son, "his innards were all cut up in compassion for the younger son." This parable, in effect, says that God's love is so deep for his children that his "intestines are all cut up" in his concern. This same compassion appeared throughout Jesus's ministry, such as when he healed the sick, forgave the sinners, fed the hungry, and spent time with society's riffraff instead of hobnobbing with the movers and shakers.

Fun-loving

Although he has plenty of serious and somber moments, Aslan's a fun-loving character throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia.* Soon after Narnia's created in *The Magician's Nephew,* he emphasizes the fact that life is meant to be enjoyed: "Laugh and fear not, creatures . . . For jokes as well as justice come in with speech." He plays with the children on a number of occasions, and after his resurrection, he tells Lucy and Susan, "I feel my strength coming back to me. Oh, children, catch me if you can!" (Lucy remarks that she never could decide whether playing with Aslan was "more like playing with a thunderstorm or playing with a kitten.") In *Prince Caspian,* Aslan invites children to get on his back and go for a ride, and in *The Last Battle,* he's among the crowd as they race "further up, further in."

Many people don't see Jesus Christ as fitting into this fun-loving mold. In fact, I think many would compare him to a Marshwiggle, always with a solemn view of life. But if you read "between the lines" of the Gospels, you see that nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus was a man of joy (Hebrews 1:9). In fact, during his time on earth, he must have had an infectious joy that made him fun to be with — look at the crowds that followed him constantly! What's more, those who were attracted most to Christ were the fun-loving sinner types; the stodgy, no-fun religious curmudgeons couldn't stand him.

Identifies with others

Aslan may be the Great Lion, but he identifies with other, normal lions. In fact, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* fellow lions love that Aslan refers to them collectively as "us lions;" they express their excitement,

saying, "Did you hear what he said? Us lions. That means him and me. Us lions. That's what I like about Aslan. No side, no stand-off-ishness. Us lions. That meant him and me."

Jesus is God in the flesh, but, like Aslan, he also identifies with *us humans.* Hebrews 2:14–18 speaks directly to this point (emphasis added):

> *[Jesus] himself **shared in our humanity**, that through death he might defeat the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Therefore **he had to be made like his brothers**, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.*

Literally exists

Within the world of Narnia, Aslan is a *real* lion. He's not a myth — he really exists. However, over the years, belief in Aslan as a real creature fades. In *The Horse and His Boy,* for example, Bree likes the idea of Aslan but writes off his reality. Therefore, when Aslan confronts Bree, he tells the horse, "Touch me. Smell me. Here are my paws, here is my tail, these are my whiskers. I am a true Beast."

Christians believe that Jesus is also a real person who was born some 2,000 years ago, was crucified, was resurrected, and ascended into Heaven to be with his Father. In the same way that Aslan responds to Bree, Jesus tells Thomas, a skeptic following Christ's crucifixion, "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27). Christianity rests on the fact that Christ exists today as a literal person and not as a mythical creature.

Having the limitlessness of God

The children who enter Narnia notice that the bigger they grow, the bigger Aslan becomes. Lewis uses this relationship to express how Christians' views of God grow and change. God can look small when you don't know him or when you first enter into a relationship with him. But, as you grow in your faith and discover more and more about him, the bigger he becomes in your eyes. God doesn't change, but your perspective does; your capacity to discern his greatness grows as well as your understanding of how meager you measure up in comparison.

Played a key role in creation

In *The Magician's Nephew,* Digory, Polly, and the gang arrive in Narnia before anything is created. In the ensuing moments, they witness Aslan creating the world of Narnia. Jesus, similarly, is creator of the world; according to Colossians 1:16–17, "For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things are held together."

Aslan as a Pointer to Jesus Christ

As Chapter 7 indicates, Aslan's presence in Narnia is a great "what if" — *What if* there was a world like Narnia that needed redemption? *What if* Jesus Christ came into that world like he did ours? What would Christ have been like there? As the Great Lion and son of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea, Aslan is Lewis's answer to these questions.

Although Aslan is Lewis's supposal of Jesus in Narnia, he isn't meant to replace Christ in the stories' fictional England. Instead, Lewis works from the idea that the Christian Son of God assumes the appearance of Jesus Christ in our world and the appearance of Aslan in Narnia. In *The Silver Chair,* Eustace alludes to the fact that Aslan is not limited to Narnia, saying, "They call him Aslan in that place." Aslan confirms his reach when he says, "There is a way into my country from all the worlds."

Aslan is intended as a pointer to Jesus Christ, for the English children returning to England as well as for the readers of the books. "For you the door into Aslan's country is from your own world," Aslan says. He tells Lucy at the end of *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* that in England he has "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."

Perhaps the most revealing evidence of Aslan as the Narnian incarnation of Christ is the significant change in Aslan at the end of *The Last Battle,* when the children are in real Narnia. The narrator says that as Aslan spoke to them, "He no longer looked to them like a lion." Clearly, Lewis imagines that in this new world, the children look at Aslan and see Jesus Christ.

How God Interacts with the World

C.S. Lewis's characterization of Aslan reveals the author's take on God as a being as well as his beliefs about how God interacts with the world. This section draws from the Narnian Chronicles to explore several of Lewis's beliefs about God's real-world interaction.

Varies his visibility

Aslan's always in charge of Narnia but, by design, varies his visibility in the country over the course of Narnian history. He's visible and hands-on during Narnia's creation, but he's largely quiet during the thousand years that follow. Then, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* rumors swirl that "Aslan is on the move." The children are told that Aslan is "the King but not often here, you understand." He returns to Narnia for all to see when he suffers a sacrificial death at the Stone Table and eventually defeats the White Witch. After the "Golden Age of Narnia," Aslan again lays low while the Telmarines conquer Narnia and squelch the teaching of Aslan. Yet, during Prince Caspian's day, Aslan returns to a hands-on role in the defeat of Miraz.

During the adventures of *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader," The Silver Chair, The Horse and His Boy,* and most of *The Last Battle,* Aslan is visible only occasionally to guide his followers, and he never takes up arms against an enemy. In fact, by the time of *The Last Battle,* Shift the Ape uses Aslan's quietness to his advantage: "He never does turn up, you know. Not now-a-days." However, at the climax of *The Last Battle,* Aslan returns to Narnia one last time, brings an end to the world, and establishes "real Narnia."

In the real world, God varied his visible presence over the ages. Reminiscent of Aslan, the Book of Genesis talks about God "walking with Adam" in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve's disobedience. During the Old Testament period, he had a hands-on role in the affairs of ancient Israel and communicated verbally to prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. However, God was the most visible when he came to earth as Jesus Christ. But, this visible presence was temporary; after his death and resurrection, he went to his Father, where he'll stay until his Second Coming on earth. Thus, for the past 2,000 years, God's role is more reminiscent of Aslan's subtlety in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* and much of *The Silver Chair* than his more visible presence in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or *The Magician's Nephew.*

In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Caspian comes closest to describing the way in which Christians communicate and interact with God today. He remarks, "Aslan has spoken to me. No — I don't mean he was actually here.

He wouldn't fit into the cabin, for one thing. But that gold lion's head on the wall came to life and spoke to me." Although you may not have an encounter with a talking lion's head, you can sense the same unmistakable presence of Jesus Christ when you pray to him in earnest. He may not "fit into your cabin," so to speak, but he's actually there.

Largely works through his followers

Aslan plays an active role in certain events of Narnian history, but he largely works through the children and Narnians and depends on them to carry out his will:

- Peter, Susan, and Lucy play pivotal roles in the defeat of the White Witch and her army in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.
- Caspian's cry for help doesn't bring Aslan to the rescue but instead draws the Pevensie children back into Narnia to help him in *Prince Caspian*.
- Eustace and Jill carry out Aslan's mission to save Prince Rilian in *The Silver Chair*.
- Eustace and Jill return to Narnia to help King Tirian in his battle against Shift the Ape and the invading Calormenes in *The Last Battle*.
- Aslan guides Shasta on his mission to warn Archenland of the coming invasion by Prince Rabadash, but he never gets involved in the actual battle. He lets the Archenland and Narnian armies handle that task in *The Horse and His Boy*.

Similarly, God took a hands-on approach to the world at specific times in history. By and large, however, since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1–2), God has tended to work through his followers (the Church, the worldwide "Body of Christ") to carry out his will in this world. But make no mistake: Just as Aslan is highly involved in the events of Narnia, so too does God guide and enable Christians along their ways.

Engineers circumstances

According to Proverbs 16:9, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." Supporting this truth, Acts 17:26 indicates the active role that God had in circumstances of the early church: "God determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." Finally, Paul

adds an exclamation point to the idea, saying, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

Heartily agreeing with these passages, Lewis portrays Aslan as a lion who engineers circumstances. You can see this truth throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia.* For example, Aslan preordains the meeting with the Pevensie children at the Stone Table, knowing full well what ultimately happens there. In *The Silver Chair*, when Eustace falls over the ledge, Aslan is on hand to blow him into Narnia. *The Silver Chair* also shows how perfect God's design can be; not only does Aslan use Scrubb and Jill to save Rilian, but he also engineers their arrival back to Experiment House to rescue Eustace and Jill from bullies, complete with Caspian to help save the day. Aslan's talk with Shasta in *The Horse and His Boy* best sums up God's active role in the world:

> *I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. I was the lion who you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.*

Because God is actively involved in the world, there's no such thing as luck. The Hermit in *The Horse and His Boy* speaks to this point, saying, "I have now lived a hundred and nine winters in this world and have never yet met any such thing as Luck." Shasta echoes the Hermit later that night, saying, "I must have come through the pass in the night. What luck that I hit it! — at least it wasn't luck at all really, it was *Him*. And now I am in Narnia."

Isn't at our beck and call

Aslan loves the children and Talking Animals of Narnia, but he isn't a magician waiting to do tricks at their beck and call. For example, in *The Silver Chair*, when Eustace and Jill talk about whether they can just ask Aslan to be transported to Narnia and away from Experiment House, Eustace has the right perspective: "It would look as if we thought we could make him do things. But really, we can only ask him."

In addition, Aslan doesn't do bargains, a fact that Digory picks up on in *The Magician's Nephew.* The narrator tells that Digory "had had for a second some wild idea of saying 'I'll try to help you if you'll promise to help my Mother,' but he realized in time that the Lion was not at all the sort of person one could try to make bargains with."

Similarly, God isn't sitting up in heaven waiting to perform magic tricks or make deals. Lewis struggled with this misconception in his early years; at age

10, he saw God as duty-bound to answer his prayers to heal his mom. As a result, his mother's death was a huge shock to him and left his faith reeling for years.

The fact that Aslan isn't a tame lion also reflects the truth of God's independence. You can't harness God and get him to perform for you like a lion in a circus. He's far too wild for that!

Doesn't do encores

Aslan isn't one to do a "reunion tour" to relive past glory. Lucy laments in *Prince Caspian,* "And I thought you'd come roaring in and frighten all the enemies away — like last time." Aslan responds, "Things never happen the same way twice." In the same way, God doesn't do encores; after he does something, he moves on and doesn't look back. However, like Lucy, human nature constantly fools us into thinking he just might bring back the glory days.

Always serves as the initiator

Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia,* Aslan is always the initiator, the one making the first move. In *The Silver Chair,* when Jill Pole wonders whether hers and Eustace's calls prompted Aslan to action, Aslan corrects her: "You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you." In this passage, Aslan mirrors 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us."

Along the same line, in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Eustace asks Edmund whether he knows Aslan. Edmund replies, "Well — he knows me." In this passage, Lewis echoes the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:9: "Now that you know God — or rather are known by God. . . ."

Stretches and disciplines

Aslan loves and has compassion for "his children," but that doesn't mean he's easy on them or handles them with kid gloves. In fact, he stretches, challenges, and outright disciplines the children and Narnians. Nowhere is this more evident than in *The Horse and His Boy.* Consider two examples:

- **God stretches.** Racing across the desert towards Archenland, Bree and Hwin are convinced that they're running their fastest. Yet, Aslan sees that their efforts aren't good enough and knows that if he doesn't act, the Calormenes will beat Bree and Hwin to Anvard. So, Aslan chases the two horses, and lo and behold, Bree discovers that he hadn't been running as fast as he thought. On a similar note, Ephesians 4:14–15 reminds

Christians that they're going to be stretched as well. Instead of remaining infants "tossed back and forth by the waves," Christians will "in all things grow up into" Jesus Christ.

- **God disciplines.** At one point in the story, Aslan actually jabs Aravis with his right paw. On first take, the action is out of character for Aslan and seems like a curious twist in the story. Yet, the narrator is quick to say that the ten scratches left Aravis sore but weren't deep or dangerous. You find out towards the end of the story that Aslan scratched Aravis because he believed she "needed to know what it felt like" (her selfishness at the start of the story leads to a servant getting whipped when Aravis runs away from Calormen). By having Aslan punish Aravis for her selfishness, Lewis merely echoes Hebrews 12:6: "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a child." Aslan knows that Aravis needs discipline in order to get over some of the self-centeredness that has always been a part of her life. It works!

Using Narnia to Examine How Humans React to God

Biblical Christianity holds that when all is said and done, people must choose whether or not to submit to God. It's a zero-sum game: There are no in-betweens. Therefore, we can hem and haw and use stall tactics, but in the end, our choice is either to love God and surrender our lives to him or hate God and cling to our own lives.

In Narnia, reactions to Aslan clearly indicate which of these two choices the characters have made. When the Pevensie children first hear about Aslan from Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, their reactions come from their hearts: "Each of the children felt something jump in his inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous." In *The Magician's Nephew,* the song Aslan "sings" during creation "made you want to rush at other people and either hug them or fight them." Uncle Andrew's and Jadis's reactions to Aslan fall into the second camp — hating God. They hate seeing Aslan in the newly created Narnia; Uncle Andrew's "mouth was open too, but not open with joy . . . He was not liking the Voice."

Yet, regardless of whether a creature loves or hates Aslan, everyone fears him:

- In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* Mrs. Beaver says, "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."
- After Aslan finishes telling the White Witch that he's taking Edmund's place at the Stone Table, she doesn't strut her stuff with glee, but rather she "picked up her skirts and fairly ran for her life."

- Frank the Cabby's reaction to Aslan in *The Magician's Nephew* is, "Glory be! I'd ha' been a better man all my life if I'd known there were things like this."
- In *The Magician's Nephew,* the children have a mixture of fear and attraction when they see Aslan. The narrator says "They were terribly afraid [Aslan] would turn and look at them, yet in some queer way they wished [he] would."
- In *The Last Battle,* when he enters real Narnia, Puzzle the donkey is scared about what happens next, saying "What I'll do if I really have to meet Aslan I'm sure I don't know."

Similarly, for Christians, a healthy fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7) and wisdom (Proverbs 16:6). But the wicked flee from the holiness of God (Proverbs 28:1 and Revelation 6:15–17).

Just as reactions to Aslan reveal much about how different characters relate to God, characters who are tainted with sin can't seem to look into Aslan's eyes. There's just something about his holiness and greatness that instinctively makes them want to turn away. The evil White Witch avoids looking directly into Aslan's eyes during their meeting at the Stone Table. In Digory's first encounter with Aslan, he "dared not look into the great eyes," yet something amazing happens to Digory after he avoids temptation and is restored by Aslan: "This time he found he could look straight into the Lion's eyes. He had forgotten his troubles and felt absolutely content."

Finally, when people understand who Aslan is, they see his greatness and glory. At the end of *The Silver Chair,* Eustace and Jill see Aslan as "so bright and real and strong that everything else began at once to look pale and shadowy compared with him."

Dealing with Sin, Evil, and All Things Yucky

Narnia and our world rest upon the same stuff: right, wrong, and a free choice between the two. The central plot of each Narnian story incorporates these principles by dealing with temptation and sin, the effects of sin, and the portrayal of evil in different characters.

Sin is any deliberate action, attitude, or thought that goes against what's known to be right. Sin includes

- Physical sins that you act out.
- Spiritual sins that are hidden within your heart.

- "No-no's," the things you shouldn't do but do anyway.
- "Should have's," the things you should do but don't.

In addition, like when Jadis eats the apple, sin can be something you do that isn't inherently wrong but becomes wrong when it's done "at the wrong time or in the wrong way."

Temptation is the attraction of choosing wrong over what you know to be right. By itself, temptation isn't a sin, but giving into temptation results in sin. *Evil* is another word for sin, but you can also think of it as a quality acquired by people who sin over and over again in defiance of God.

Viewing sin through Narnian eyes

In the Narnian Chronicles, Lewis gives a vivid picture of what sin is and how it manifests itself in the lives of the characters.

Sin is deliberate disobedience

Lewis portrays sin as "deliberate disobedience." When Edmund makes the decision to side with the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* he knows exactly what he's doing. Edmund "managed to believe, or to pretend he believed, that she wouldn't do anything very bad to them . . . deep down inside him he really knew that the White Witch was bad and cruel." In *Prince Caspian,* Susan knows better "deep down inside" when she refuses to believe that Lucy has seen Aslan. But Susan's desire to get out of the woods is stronger than her desire to obey Aslan. Lucy, however, gives perhaps the best example of deliberate disobedience in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader."* In spite of her conscience telling her not to, she decides to say a spell from the Magician's Book anyway: "I will say the spell. I don't care. I will." The narrator adds that Lucy says "'I don't care' because she had a strong feeling that she mustn't."

Sin can be rationalized, but never excused

When I am convicted about a sin I am planning or have already committed, my natural reaction is to attempt to justify and rationalize my actions. This self-defense mechanism shows up in Narnia as well. For example, before Lucy sins by reading the "mind reading" spell from the Magician's Book, she justifies her upcoming action by saying that because she didn't say the "beautifying" spell, she should certainly be allowed to say this one. Likewise, in *The Magician's Nephew,* Digory rationalizes the sin of taking a magic apple back to his mother. You can see the wheels spinning in his mind when he says, "The notice on the gate [not to steal the apples] might not have been exactly an order; it might have been only a piece of advice — and who cares about advice?"

Sin is "me-first"

In *The Great Divorce* (see Chapter 11), Lewis presents a common quality of all the inhabitants of Hell: They're self-absorbed and unwilling to get out of themselves. This me-first mentality exists in Narnia as well. Before turning into a dragon in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Eustace experiences the self-absorbed nature of sin. He can't get out of himself, even when the wrongness of his feelings and actions is so obvious. In writing in his journal, Eustace whines, "Caspian and Edmund are simply brutal to me. The night we lost our mast . . ., though I was *not at all* well, they forced me to come on deck and work like a slave." In *The Magician's Nephew,* Uncle Andrew has the same attitude when he can't get the rings from Digory or Polly to exit Narnia; "But what about *me*? . . . No one thinks of *me,*" laments Andrew.

This me-first attitude is even stronger when people are tempted. When Jadis tries to entice Digory into taking an apple back to his mother, she says, "What has the Lion ever done for you that you should be his slave?" Self-absorption also causes people to blame others for their own sins; in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* for example, Edmund "thought more and more how he hated Peter — just as if all this had been Peter's fault."

Sin is "mine, mine, mine"

The sinful nature in you and I wants ownership over something or someone else, just like a toddler crying out "mine, mine, mine" for a toy. In *The Screwtape Letters,* Screwtape talks about how the idea of ownership plays right into Satan's hands: "The sense of ownership in general is always to be encouraged."

In *The Magician's Nephew,* Queen Jadis reflects the evil nature of ownership when she speaks of Charn: "I was the Queen. They were all *my* people. What else were they there for but to do my will?" Similarly, in his rage over Susan's refusal to marry him in *The Horse and His Boy,* Prince Rabadash of Calormen cries out, "I must have the barbarian queen."

Facing the consequences of sin

Sin has its consequences, and the many results of sin are made evident in Narnia. Sin leads to

- **A dead-end.** One of the great ironies of the Gospels is that Judas betrayed Jesus in exchange for thirty pieces of silver. Yet when he realized the horror of what he'd done, the silver lost any value, and he threw it away. This dead-end nature of sin is reflected in the Judas-like character of Edmund. He betrays his siblings for Turkish Delight, but instead of receiving his desired dessert, he gets a hunk of dry bread from the White Witch. (I bet the stuff was yucky low-carb bread, too!)

- **Despair.** Etched over the gates of the garden where Digory picks the apple in *The Magician's Nephew* are the words:

  Come in by the gold gates or not at all,
  Take of my fruit for others or forbear,
  For those who steal or those climb my wall
  Shall find their heart's desire and find despair.

  Jadis may think she's getting her heart's desire when she eats the apple, but she really only finds despair. In fact, she ends up loathing the tasty fruit forever. As Aslan says, "Length of days with an evil heart is only length of misery."

- **A hardened heart.** The Apostle Paul says in Romans 1 that continued unrepentant sin will lead to a hardened heart. When Uncle Andrew is in the newly created Narnia, his horror over Aslan and the Talking Animals reflects this spiritual bankruptcy. Aslan even says, "But I cannot [talk] to this old sinner, and I cannot comfort him either; he has made himself unable to hear my voice. If I spoke to him, he would hear only growlings and roarings."

- **Stains.** Sin even has a physical impact in Narnia. When Jadis eats the apple in *The Magician's Nephew,* the juice creates a horrible stain around her mouth. In addition, her face in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* "was deadly white, white as salt." Likewise, some sins in the real world can manifest themselves physically.

- **Lasting consequences.** When a child or Talking Animal disobeys Aslan and is repentant, Aslan always forgives them. But at the same time, sin has lasting consequences that the character has to deal with. For example, Lucy confesses her sin to Aslan over the "mind reading" spell that she shouldn't have said. Aslan is quick to forgive her, but she still has to deal with effects of her action. By reading the spell, Lucy spoils a friendship she previously held dear; "I don't think I'd ever be able to forget what I heard her say," laments Lucy.

The faces of evil

In a letter to an American named Mr. Kinter, Lewis wrote, "We are born knowing the White Witch, aren't we?" Indeed, people of all shapes, sizes, countries, and religions have an instinctive understanding of right and wrong. And so in reading *The Chronicles of Narnia,* we see wrong personified in characters like the White Witch Jadis, the Green Witch, Uncle Andrew, King Miraz, and Shift the Ape.

Evil is portrayed in the White Witch Jadis and the Green Witch as a mixture of incredible beauty on the outside, but with coldness, sternness, and hatred

lurking underneath. In so doing, Lewis gets at a key component to sin — it looks great from the outside, but the inside is nothing but a bunch of nasty stuff.

The evil characters invariably see themselves as innately superior to others. Before the adventures in *The Magician's Nephew* begin, Uncle Andrew boasts, "Men like me, who possess hidden wisdom, are freed from common rules." Jadis echoes these sentiments, telling Digory, "What would be wrong for you or for any of the common people is not wrong in a great Queen such as I."

Not surprisingly then, non-evil people are to be used by evil ones — or to use Screwtape's words from *The Screwtape Letters*, treated as "cattle that can finally become food." Sounding much like Weston in the space trilogy, Uncle Andrew says, "I am the great scholar, the magician, the adept who is *doing* the experiment. Of course I need subjects to do it *on*." Similarly, Queen Jadis ignores Polly in Charn because she wants to make use of Digory. But in England, Jadis ignored both of them because she wanted to use Uncle Andrew. The narrator in *The Magician's Nephew* describes Uncle Andrew and Jadis: "They are not interested in things or people unless they can use them; they are terribly practical."

Fooling Ourselves: Three Ways We Do It

Within *The Chronicles of Narnia,* Lewis provides compelling insight into the ways in which people fool and deceive themselves from accepting Christian truth.

Dwarfs: Jaded and skeptical

In *The Last Battle,* the Dwarfs' jaded skepticism offers a revealing look into human nature. The Dwarfs are taken in by the false Aslan that Shift the Ape dresses up to fool the Narnians. Later, when King Tirian approaches the Dwarfs to join his fight against Shift and the Calormenes, the Dwarfs want nothing to do with him or his battle. Griffle the Black Dwarf sums up their feelings by declaring, "I don't know how all you chaps feel, but I feel I've heard as much about Aslan as I want to for the rest of my life." He continues, "We're going to look after ourselves from now on and touch our caps to nobody . . . Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs."

More than anyone in *The Chronicles of Narnia,* the Dwarfs personify the cynicism and skepticism of postmodern culture. Many today are doubtful of any claims of truth and scoff when they hear of scandals in the church or see so-called "Christians" living like pagans every day but Sunday. Griffle speaks

for these people when he says, "You must think we're blooming soft in the head, that you must. We've been taken in once and now you expect us to be taken in again the next minute. We've no more use for stories about Aslan, see!"

Cynicism usually springs from being hurt, deceived, or disappointed — sometimes by Christians or at least people who call themselves Christians. The effects of this treatment can be heartbreaking. To use today's vernacular, pain sucks — but it's not a viable excuse to turn away from God. Instead, how you react to pain or disillusionment is all that matters. The disillusioned Dwarfs have a choice — to seek the truth, even when the path to it is challenging, or to shut down completely and rely wholly on themselves. Sadly, they choose the latter option.

Try as he might, even Aslan can't do anything to change their minds. First he tries to frighten them with a long growl, but they dismiss it, believing it's someone on the other side of the Stable just trying to scare them. "They won't take *us* in again!" they exclaim. So Aslan tries to bless them by preparing an incredible feast of the fanciest foods and wine imaginable. But, in their disbelief, the Dwarfs can't taste the meal as it really is and dismiss it as animal feed. In the end, they declare in defiance, "We haven't let anyone take us in. The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs."

Just as Aslan tries to convince the Dwarfs of his existence, God often acts in the world to get people to turn to him. He sometimes uses hardship and difficult circumstances to sober people up and shake them from their comfort zones so that they realize their need to look to him. So too, he showers them with love and blessings to get them to look toward the source of those blessings.

In what are perhaps Aslan's most lamentable lines in the entire Narnia series, he says of the Dwarfs: "They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they can not be taken out." With this characterization of the Dwarfs, Lewis warns people in postmodern society to heed the self-defeating choice of the Dwarfs.

Dufflepuds: Foolish

In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* the children, Caspian, and his *Dawn Treader* crew have a rather entertaining encounter with the Dufflepuds (also called Monopods or Duffers). The Dufflepuds are invisible, one-footed creatures living on the Island of the Voices that Lucy makes visible after she says a spell from the Magician's Book. The Dufflepuds are humorous, but their function is serious: They provide insight into the tendency that humans have towards foolishness, particularly towards our relationship with God.

The Dufflepuds' scatterbrained view of Coriakin (the lord over the island and the Dufflepuds) reflects, in many ways, humans' view of God. Coriakin remarks, "One minute they talk as if I ran everything and overheard everything and was extremely dangerous. The next moment they think they can take me in by tricks that a baby would see through — bless them!"

Humans have a tendency to believe, consciously or unconsciously, that we can somehow beat God, ignoring the fact that he's the one, not us, enabling victories. An example of this point in Narnia comes after Lucy speaks the spell that makes the Monopods visible again. Clueless as to the role that Coriakin plays in the transformation, the Chief Monopod says, "We've beaten him this time."

Bree: Prideful and vain

In *The Horse and His Boy,* Bree is a Narnian stallion that was taken from his homeland as a young colt to serve in the Calormene army. Bree starts the story looking like he'll be a hero, but he ends up as one of the most pitiful characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia.* Bree is a case study in how pride and vanity can completely fool someone. A celebrated war horse, Bree talks in a "superior tone" and looks down upon both Shasta and the more ordinary talking horse Hwin. Yet, when the going gets tough, he's outdone by both Hwin, who sets the pace in their race toward Archenland, and Shasta, who shows bravery by retracing his course through danger to recover Aravis.

Yet, instead of taking his humble pie and learning from it, Bree clings to his pride and feels sorry for himself because he thinks he's lost everything. The Hermit of the Southern March, however, corrects him: "You've lost nothing but your self-conceit . . . If you are really so humbled as you sounded a minute ago, you must learn to listen to sense. You're not quite the great horse you've come to think, from living among the dumb horses." The Hermit then alludes to Romans 12:3 ("Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought") when he tells Bree, "But as long as you know you're nobody very special, you'll be a very decent sort of Horse."

Bree, however, is slow to learn. When he and Hwin get their chance later in the story to go to Narnia, Bree wants to wait until his tattered tail is grown out again to "make a good impression." He's also overly concerned about whether it's proper for Talking Horses to roll around on the ground, which he loves to do. Hwin simply rolls her eyes over the war stallion's silliness.

Although Bree's humbled by the events that transpire in *The Horse and His Boy* and has a face-to-face encounter with Aslan, even at the story's end, he clings, to some extent, to his pride and vanity. Lewis shows how self-defeating this choice is for Bree. After all, his dream during his time in Calormen was to

return to Narnia. And yet, because of his vanity, the narrator says that when Bree went into Narnia, "He looked more like a horse going to a funeral than a long-lost captive returning to home and freedom."

Belief versus Unbelief in Narnia

Lewis believes that in an increasingly secularized society, the debate between naturalism and supernaturalism is one of the primary philosophical battlegrounds. The issue is a key topic in three of his major apologetic works: *Mere Christianity, The Abolition of Man,* and *Miracles.* The tension between supernaturalism and naturalism shows up time and again in *The Chronicles of Narnia.* Within Narnia, supernaturalism is expressed as believing in Aslan, the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, and a world beyond Narnia. Naturalism is portrayed as unbelief in all these things, essentially that Narnia is all there ever was, is, or ever will be.

Lewis sprinkles unbelief and skepticism throughout the seven-book series. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* you see a book in Mr. Tumnus's home called *Is Man a Myth?* In *The Horse and His Boy,* Bree says smugly of Aslan, "It would be quite absurd to suppose he is a real lion." In the same book, Prince Rabadash comments on the recent thawing of Narnia's Long Winter, "I am rather of the opinion that it has come about by the alteration of the stars and the operation of natural causes."

Nowhere is the battle between belief and unbelief more obvious than in *Prince Caspian.* The underlying theme for the entire story is the choice that each person or creature makes: to believe in Aslan and old Narnia or to dismiss these stories as fairy tales. King Miraz tells Caspian that belief in old Narnia is "all nonsense, for babies," but Doctor Cornelius counters that the stories that Caspian has heard of old Narnia are all true and that Narnia "is not the land of men. It is the country of Aslan."

Before his encounter with the Pevensie children, Trumpkin the Dwarf is a skeptic. He says to Caspian, "Do you believe all of those old stories? . . . But who believes in Aslan nowadays?" Caspian isn't so sure: "Sometimes I did wonder if there really was such a person as Aslan: but then sometimes I wondered if there were really people like you. Yet there you are."

Nikabrik the Black Dwarf and Trufflehunter the Badger offer the greatest contrast in perspectives. Nikabrik is the most vocal and hostile skeptic in the book. "I think the Horn . . . and your great King Peter — and your Lion Aslan — are all eggs in moonshine," dismisses Nikabrik. He writes off Aslan's resurrection by saying, "You'll notice that we hear precious little about anything he did afterwards. He fades out of the story. How do you explain that, if he really came to life? Isn't it much more likely that he didn't and that the stories say nothing more about him because there was nothing more to say?"

In contrast, Trufflehunter remains faithful to Aslan regardless of what anyone says. When Nikabrik argues that the call to High King Peter, Queen Susan, King Edmund, and Queen Lucy has failed because they either haven't heard, can't come, or are enemies, Trufflehunter has a different perspective. He adds, "Or they are on the way."

In *Miracles,* Lewis writes that "we all have Naturalism in our bones . . . its assumptions rush back upon the mind the moment diligence is relaxed." This idea crops up in *The Silver Chair* when the Green Witch tries to convince Scrubb, Jill, and Puddleglum that the Overworld (Narnia) is just a dream. "There never was any world but mine," she says. "There is no Narnia, no Overworld, no sky, no sun, no Aslan." Fighting the spell that the Green Witch is trying to place on them, Puddleglum explains why he doesn't believe that Underland is *all* there is:

> *The made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one . . . Four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world.*

Future Glory: Looking Through a Heavenly Spyglass

In the first six books of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (that's all but *The Last Battle*), you get glimpses of something beyond death for Narnians, of Aslan's country awaiting his followers. Reepicheep's solo journey to the utter east is the most memorable example, although even by the end of *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* you never really know what happens to him. In his final installment of the Narnian Chronicles, Lewis focuses on issues of death and life after death. What's more, he doesn't just have a quick, obligatory "they live happily ever after" wrap-up at the end of *The Last Battle.* Instead, he spends considerable time after the climactic battle telling you exactly *why* and *how* they truly lived happily ever after.

Experiencing death as a gateway

Like it or not, death is the gateway to Heaven (and Hell), both in real life and in Narnia. Lewis adds in *C.S Lewis, Letters to Children:* "The only way for us to [get to] Aslan's country is through death, as far as I know; perhaps some very good people get just a tiny glimpse before then." Even though death is the Great Unknown for those of us still living, Lewis provides a window into what it must be like for a Christian to actually experience it. The Friends of Narnia

(Eustace, Jill, Peter, Edmund, Lucy, Lord Digory, and Aunt Polly) are all sent to the real Narnia by way of a railway accident that kills them. Edmund describes what it was like for him on the station curb when the accident occurred: "There was a frightful roar and something hit me with a bang, but it didn't hurt. And I felt not so much scared as — well, excited." Lord Digory, who was on the train, says things were much the same for him, but with a difference because he's older — he "stopped feeling old."

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis paints a similar picture when the Patient is killed by a bombing raid during World War II. According to the devil Screwtape, the Patient's experience was "sheer, instantaneous liberation." Screwtape then laments over how good death is for the Patient:

> *One moment it seemed to be all our world; the scream of the bombs, the fall of houses, the heart cold with horrors . . . the next moment all this was gone, gone like a bad dream, never again to be of any account . . . Did you mark how naturally — as if he'd been born for it — the earth-born vermin entered the new life? How all his doubts become, in the twinkling of an eye, ridiculous? I know what the creature was saying to itself! 'Yes. Of course. It was always like this . . . How could I ever have doubted it?'*

Submitting to final judgment

Within *The Chronicles of Narnia,* Lewis never gives specifics on the eternal fate of unbelievers. They're away somewhere, presumably in Hell, but they're not part of real Narnia. (The narrator says "The children never saw them again. I don't know what become of them.")

However, Lewis does describe what Christians call the "final judgment," which will take place at the end of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:11–15). In a story reminiscent of Jesus's parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46, the creatures that pass through the Stable door at the end of *The Last Battle* all have to face Aslan. They then go to his right or left depending on their faith, or lack thereof.

Finding out what Heaven and its inhabitants are like

In *The Chronicles of Narnia,* Lewis provides some of the most descriptive, captivating images of Heaven in all modern literature. His vision of Heaven doesn't involve harps, puffy clouds, and wimpy angels because he knows that those stereotypical images have no biblical basis. Instead, Lewis's depiction of Heaven is reflective of his knowledge of who God is and what kind of place he wants his children to inhabit for eternity.

A place of unlimited adventure and unlimited security

In this world, adventure and security are opposites; you can't embrace one without abandoning the other. As a result, many people gravitate toward one of these two extremes. Some people live for the rush of adrenaline that accompanies closing a major business deal or climbing a 14,000-footer in Colorado. Others simply thrive when they feel safe and secure in their quiet suburban houses and get enough adventure from ordering Chinese take-out on a Friday night.

Lewis's real Narnia is a world that offers "secure adventure" (or is it "adventurous security"?). For example, when Eustace and Lucy jump into the Caldron Pool and head straight for the Great Waterfall, Eustace says, "This is absolutely crazy." Lucy replies, "Isn't it wonderful? Have you noticed one can't feel afraid, even if one wants to? Try it." The two are actually able to swim up the waterfall, and if you can imagine swimming up Niagara Falls or Angel Falls, you can guess at how terrifying that is. But as Eustace and Lucy experience in real Narnia, "It was only gloriously exciting."

Even Aslan's cry "further up, further in" implies the mixing of adventure and security. He's calling for everyone to move further up in the mountains to experience wonder as they head deeper into Aslan's country and closer to his comforting and protective arms.

What's more, the adventure and security never stop growing. "The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets," says Mr. Tumnus. This snowball effect is the gist of what Aslan tells Caspian in *Prince Caspian:* "Every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

A place of reunion

Reunions are a real drag when you don't enjoy being with the people you're seeing. However, when you're reunited with someone you love, there's hardly anything better than rekindling that relationship. Heaven is a place where Christians are reunited — forever — with spouses, parents, children, friends, and other loved ones. In real Narnia, King Tirian is reunited with his father, King Erlian. The Pevensie children rush toward their mother and father — who were killed in the railway accident — in "new England" (not to be confused with America's New England, although some New Englanders may contend that they indeed live in Heaven).

Besides family, however, Narnia's faithful are all present and accounted for in real Narnia, enjoying each other's company and reveling in old stories together. In the final chapters of *The Last Battle,* Lewis mentions many of the Narnian "faithful" by name, including Reepicheep, Puddleglum, Rilian, Rilian's mother, Ramandu, Caspian, Trumpkin, Trufflehunter, Glenstorm the Centaur, King Cor of Archenland, Queen Aravis, Prince Corin, Bree, Hwin, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, and Mr. Tumnus.

Taking a symbolic view of reality

C.S. Lewis was highly influenced by such classical philosophers as Plato and Aristotle. These influences surface within *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the Platonic idea of symbolism, the idea that our physical world is a copy of an invisible world. Lewis writes in *The Allegory of Love,* "The world which we mistake for reality is the flat outline of that which elsewhere veritably is all the round of its unimaginable dimensions."

Plato's concept of symbolism is what led Lewis to the term *Shadowlands,* which he uses to describe Earth: Earth is but a shadow of what Heaven will be like. Lewis's perspective on this reality plays out in *The Last Battle.* When Peter, Edmund, Lucy, and the Narnians enter the real Narnia, they marvel at its beauty. Lucy tries to describe how this new place is different from the old Narnia, but she doesn't have the words. Lord Digory sums it up by saying it's "more like the real thing." He then adds, "[Narnia] was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world."

"More real" than earth

When some people think of Heaven, they see it as a blissful place that's somehow less real or less tangible than the soil of good ol' planet earth. Yet, one of Lewis's most firmly held beliefs about Heaven is that the earth is but the Shadowlands for a far more real and tangible world to come (see the sidebar "Taking a symbolic view of reality"). When a Narnian comments that real Narnia is "like Narnia," Digory corrects him by stating that it's "*more* like the real thing." Lord Digory expresses Lewis's ideas on earth and heaven when he contrasts old Narnia and real Narnia:

> *[Old Narnia] was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia, which has always been here and always will be here: just as our world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world . . . All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream . . . It's all in Plato, all in Plato. Bless, what do they teach them at these schools!*

A place where good things never end

When you "get lost" in *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Lord of the Rings,* or any other fantastic book, you likely look upon the final page with dread because you know that as soon as you read it, your adventure ends forever. For a contemporary book or film, you can always hope for a sequel, but for the Narnian Chronicles or the Ring series, there's no hope: Lewis and Tolkien have long since passed away! Narnia and Middle-earth will never again come to life at the hands of their creators (okay, "subcreators" is more accurate, if you read

Chapter 6). Yet, imagine for a moment the unbridled joy if you were to discover a storehouse of Narnian adventures that Lewis wrote but never published. What's more, suppose you were to find more books than you could possibly read in your lifetime. Then, to top it off, imagine that each story is better than one before. That's Heaven, according to Lewis.

All good things on earth have an ending, but not in "real life" (Heaven). Consider the remarkable contrast between the start of *Prince Caspian* and the end of *The Last Battle.* When *Prince Caspian* begins, the Pevensie children are at the train station dreading their return to boarding school. The narrator says that "everyone felt that the holidays were really over and everyone felt their term-time feelings beginning again, and they were all rather gloomy and no-one could think of anything to say." At the end of *The Last Battle,* however, this symbolism is turned completely around when Aslan tells the children, "The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

Filled with creatures designed for eternity

When the children and Talking Animals arrive in real Narnia, they're all amazed to find it's what they were made for. Jewel the unicorn exclaims, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now." The following sacred qualities apply to those living in real Narnia:

- **Everyone's in the prime of their lives.** On arriving in real Narnia, Digory's gray beard turns golden blond. In fact, Jill remarks that Digory and Polly, both forty years older than she on earth, now look so much younger than back in England: "I don't believe you two really are much older than we are here." So too, King Erlian, Tirian's father, looks to his son as "young and merry as he could just remember him from very early days."
- **Everyone's in tip-top physical shape.** Physically, whatever ails humans on earth is made new in real Narnia. For example, Edmund's knee was sore, but it feels perfect in real Narnia.
- **Everyone's free from the constraints of time.** Time as we know it is different in real Narnia. Lewis depicts this reality in *The Last Battle* by having Father Time awaken and assume a new name.
- **Everyone's free from the bondage of sin.** Sin doesn't exist in Heaven, but people aren't automatically turned into robots either. What's different in Heaven is the way people look at sin. Aslan speaks to this point when he tells Caspian at the end of *The Silver Chair,* "You cannot want wrong things any more, now that you have died, my son." In other words, people in Heaven don't sin because they see sin for what it really is — that sin is, for example, the Green Witch as a horrid serpent, not her beauty queen façade.

Welcoming the unexpected: Surprised by Emeth

Perhaps the most provocative part of *The Last Battle* is the presence of Emeth the Calormene in real Narnia. After all, Emeth worshipped Tash, the false god of the Calormenes. So why does Aslan allow him into his kingdom?

Backing up a little, biblical Christianity is built on the understanding that Jesus is the one and only means for people to receive salvation and redemption from God. After all, he's the one and only person who can bridge the gap between God and man (John 14:6, 1 Timothy 2:5–6, Acts 4:12).

However, the Bible is largely silent on how God deals with people who've never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some Christians believe that salvation rests on explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ, while others maintain that God, in his mercy, makes some allowances for people who've never heard the gospel. Given the story of Emeth, it's clear that Lewis believes God redeems earnestly seeking "pagans" like Emeth. Writing in *Mere Christianity,* Lewis explains this position:

> *The truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him. But in the meantime, if you are worried about people on the outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain on the outside yourself.*

For his part, Emeth is as surprised as everyone else and certainly didn't expect to be in Aslan's country. When he first sees Aslan, Emeth thinks he's nothing more than an appetizer for the Great Lion. He's obviously stunned when Aslan welcomes him, saying "Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me." Aslan explains himself further:

> *Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted . . . For all find what they truly seek.*

The story of Emeth is based on the passage from Proverbs 8:17: "If you ever surely seek me, you shall ever surely find me." Lewis explains his position best in *C.S Lewis, Letters to Children:* "Anyone who devotes his whole life to seeking Heaven will be like Reepicheep and anyone who wants some worldly thing so badly that he is ready to use wicked means to get it will likely behave like Nick-i-brick." In the end, Emeth resembles Reepicheep far more than Nikabrik.