

Narnia: More Than a Fantasy

By Rod McDonald

The shape of Clives Staples Lewis' early life was full of ups and downs. His mother died before he was ten leaving him and his brother alone in a large house for hours, in their imaginary worlds of Animal-Land and India. The boys' imaginations were fueled by the memory of loss and a home rich with books which they read avidly.

At the age of ten Lewis began attending boarding and preparatory schools where innocence died and he was led into atheism. In the following years, apart from the daily pursuit of study, discourse, and the strengthening of his atheistic world view, another pursuit awoke.

Like a hidden stream, not satisfied with the former, characterized by the imagination of his youth, he began reading mythologies and longing for an elusive joy. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is an allegory of Lewis' personal, imaginary odyssey in the far-off country for which he longed. The story pictures his road from atheism to faith.

Lucy is first to discover the wardrobe and venture into and return from this new world. But Peter, Susan and Edmund are reluctant to believe her tale of the land of Narnia.

"Madness, you mean?" said the Professor quite coolly. "Oh, you can make your minds easy about that. One has only to look at her and talk to her to see that she is not mad . . . Logic!" said the professor half to himself. "Why don't they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth . . ." ¹

In a similar observation of prejudice against Christ Himself, C.S. Lewis writes, "You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." ²

Much more, this is a story of redemption—of the payment of one life for freedom from bondage to another. The story of Edmund, his treachery, his captivity to the white witch, and of Aslan's being sacrificed in his place, is an allegory of the greater reality that occurred in a place called Jerusalem many years ago.



As the White Witch affirms: "You have a traitor there Aslan . . . Have you forgotten the deep magic? The deep magic engraved on the stone table, engraved upon the scepter of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to kill."

Aslan with sorrow goes to the table, the place of execution, his great royal head drooped so that his nose nearly touched the grass. "Presently, he stumbled and gave a low moan." After being bound by a cruel mob, he was thickly surrounded "by the whole mob of creatures kicking him, hitting him, spitting on him, jeering at him." The climax of the story is observed by Lucy and Susan as they hear the witch's final words, "Despair and die," after which they hide their eyes from the cruel stroke of the stone knife.

But the following morning, "shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself." "There is a magic deeper still which she did not know. When a willing victim was killed in a traitor's stead, the table would crack and death itself would start working backward."

As a young man Lewis had stated, "A young atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully," and admitted that he had no more been searching for God than a mouse would search for a cat. Yet in the Trinity Term of 1929 he wrote, "That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me . . . I gave in, and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England." ³

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was dedicated to Lucy Barfield, Lewis' goddaughter, to whom he wished to give the best of gifts. He perhaps also hoped it would ward off the influences that led him at a young age into atheism and the loss of innocence.

"Bless me, what do they teach them at these schools?"

¹ Lewis, C.S., *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1978

² Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1952

³ Lewis, C.S., *Surprised By Joy*, C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd 1955