

**INTRODUCTORY COMMENT** (by the author of these talks 😊): These talks are dedicated to the memory of a brilliant C.S. Lewis scholar, a faithful student of Scripture, and a true man of God, who taught me how to always be "surprised by joy," Rev. Paul Beighley, who is now experiencing "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." Until we meet again at the throne of God, my brother.

## FINDING GOD IN NARNIA

### WEEK 1: Introduction: How to read *The Chronicles of Narnia*

“Once there were four children, whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy.” With these words, C.S. Lewis introduced millions of readers to his mythical world of Narnia, the focus of this study.

Before we begin, as I showed you earlier, there are two main ways in which to read *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Chronicles), either in the order they were published or the order in which the stories take place. As Paul Ford explains in his *Companion to Narnia*, C.S. Lewis began by writing a redemption story, the book entitled *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (LWW). After this, he then tried to write a Narnian creation story, but was unable to complete it at the time. It was only after he had involved himself in the transformation stories of several characters that he was able to tell the story not only as Narnia’s beginnings but also of its consummation.

C.S. Lewis once said that the test of a good story is whether it is often reread. Paul Ford explains that *The Chronicles*:

[They] have surpassed that test for millions of readers [including me]. Most of us who have fallen under Lewis’ spell of the LWW have not only stayed to hear or read the story of Narnia from its beginnings to its second beginning, *The Last Battle* (LB), but find ourselves returning again and again, perhaps every few years, to appreciate its real beauties. Each reader brings to *The Chronicles* his/her own story and comes away with expanded horizons and renewed vision.

The *Chronicles*, like the Bible, contains the story of the creation and fall of the world, the coming of Jesus Christ into that world (to include His death and resurrection) and the ultimate victory of Jesus over the forces of evil, followed by His glorious recreation of a new world. However, it can be hazardous to look for allegories, that is one-to-one correspondences between religious concepts and the events in the story. C.S. Lewis denied that they were in fact allegories.

What might Christ become like [said Lewis] if there really were a world like Narnia, and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as he eventually did in

ours. The incarnation of Christ in another world is mere supposal, but granted the supposition, He would really have been a physical object as He was in Palestine, and His death on the stone table would have been a physical event no less than His death on Calvary.

Though these stories are not allegories in the traditional sense, there are deeper meanings behind them. (The most obvious and striking example is Aslan's death and resurrection.) Lewis wrote that

The whole Narnian story is about Christ. That is to say I asked myself supposing there really was a world like Narnia and supposing it had gone wrong and supposing that Christ wanted to go into that world and save it (like ours), the stories are my answer.

Lewis continued this thought by explaining that since Narnia is a world of talking animals, Jesus Christ would become one of them, just as he become a man when he entered our world. "I pictured Him becoming a lion there, because the lion is supposed to be the king of beasts, and because Christ is called The Lion of Judah in the Bible. Also I'd been having strange dreams about lions when I began writing the work."

As we progress, we'll come across Biblical or theological themes in the stories, with each lesson having as its title a line from one of the seven volumes in the series. Other than the fact that all of these themes are present in one series, there will not be anything else that ties them together. Think back to the earlier Lewis quote that I told you as you think about how to read the stories. Remember that the whole of scripture is His story! He was there in the beginning, carrying out His father's creative decrees, and he will be there in the end, conquering His foes and giving an invitation to join Him in His father's house. As Lewis wrote, apart from the dreams of lions he'd been having prior to his writing, "I don't know where the Lion came from or why He came, but once He came, He pulled the whole story together, and soon He pulled six Narnian stories in after Him."



Discussion question: What are you looking forward to learning from reading *The Chronicles of Narnia*?

NEXT WEEK: After a week's break, we'll start our journey to and through Narnia by discussing the first book (chronologically) in the series, *The Magician's Nephew*. It would be a good time, given our hiatus, to read the text. It's just 100 pages or so in the Harper Collins edition.