

**THE LIGHT FROM
BEHIND THE SUN:
A REFORMED AND
EVANGELICAL
APPRECIATION OF
C.S. LEWIS**

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CONTENTS

- Introduction 1
1. Lewis Gets It Wrong 3
 2. The Absence of Susan 9
 3. The Curious Presence of Emeth 33
 4. The Light From Behind the Sun 51
 5. The Tao of Lewis 77
 6. Undragoned—C.S. Lewis on the gift of Salvation 95
 7. Was C.S. Lewis Reformed? 119
 8. The Ransom Trilogy 135
 9. The Shadow of that Hyddeous Strength 143
 10. Hell and Damnation 163

11. Tongues of Angels **177**
12. Children without Chests **185**
13. Lewis and the Eccentric Creationist **195**

INTRODUCTION

I don't often use *the kingdom, the power, and the glory*. When I do, I have an idea of the *kingdom* as sovereignty *de jure*; God, as good, would have a claim on my obedience even if He had no power. The *power* is the sovereignty *de facto*—He is omnipotent. And the *glory* is—well, the glory; the 'beauty so old and new,' the 'light from behind the sun.' (*Letters to Malcolm*)¹

INTRODUCTION

This is a true miscellany. I have been reading Lewis for a number of decades, and once I became a writer, it should not be surprising I have been writing about him, also for decades. A few years ago, the thought occurred to me

1. *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer* (1964; New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 28. All citations of C.S. Lewis works in this book are from the first referenced edition unless otherwise noted.

that I should put everything I had written on Lewis between two covers, and so here we are. I wanted to do this as a way of honoring the intellectual debt I owe to Lewis. Although there are criticisms of him here, it would be fair to say that I owe more to Lewis in this regard than all other authors I have read put together—and this is saying something, because I owe *them* a lot.

The reader will be gracious to remember the disparate origins of these essays, and forgive a little repetition here and there. Where we noticed it, we gave it an editorial whack on the head, but I am sure some repetition got through anyhow. Some of it was addressed by combining or rearranging material, resulting in some significant differences from what was originally published. With all that said, please try to treat any repetition that you notice as something you needed to be reminded of (Phil. 3:1), and not an instance of us being tedious.

A portion of one of the articles was written for the magazine *Antithesis*. Another was a talk given at a Desiring God conference. One was a foreword to a book. Another was an article for the magazine *Credo*. Most of them were written for the blog *Blog and Mablog*. Special thanks should go to the owner of that blog, a fellow who has always treated me like a true gentleman.

DOUGLAS WILSON
NOT ANYWHERE NEAR OXFORD
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CHAPTER 1: LEWIS GETS IT WRONG

Those who have read me for a long time know that I am a C.S. Lewis junkie. I have read and reread him, and have been edified by him in ways beyond reckoning. If I were to calculate the impact that various writers have had on me—and there have been many who have—he would always come in first, and by a large margin.

Even where you find my caveats—as in his early accommodations with evolution, or in the atrocious things he says about some of the psalms—I find myself simultaneously appalled and edified. For example, in *Reflections on the Psalms*, he says this:

Still more in the Psalmists' tendency to chew over and over the cud of some injury, to dwell in a kind of self-torture on every circumstance that aggravates it, most of us

can recognise something we have met in ourselves. We are, after all, blood brothers to these ferocious, self-pitying, barbaric men.¹

But still, reading through that book, which I think his worst, I find myself instructed and blessed at every turn. So go figure.

The problem lies with those Christians, like myself, who do not recoil from the imprecatory psalms in the same way that Lewis does. Lewis thinks that these psalms are included in God's Word as a sort of object lesson, a "don't try this at home, kids" kind of thing. "The ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that it (if not its perpetrators) is hateful to God." (*Reflections on the Psalms*, 33).

As one of those who believe that we are to harmonize the imprecatory psalms with the rest of Scripture, and that we are to utilize them in our corporate worship and private devotions, I am afraid that Lewis would most likely regard me as a dangerous radical, as one who *likes* the permission to hate that such psalms seem to provide. I think he would find me on the wrong side of a caution he issued in another related respect.

1. *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 26.

CHAPTER 2: THE ABSENCE OF SUSAN

INTRODUCTION

There are two things that really bother evangelical friends of Narnia, and they both show up in *The Last Battle*. One of them is the presence of Emeth in Aslan's country, and the other is the absence of Susan in that same country. The character of Emeth is a striking one, and the problem presented by him a significant one, worthy of a full treatment, so we will deal with it in the next essay.

What I would like to do here is address the troublesome absence of Susan from Aslan's country. What does it mean? Where does it fit in this story? Why does the apparent apostasy of Susan seem like a gaping narrational hole that doesn't fit with any part of the larger story? I want to argue that it does not seem to fit because it really

doesn't fit. My intention is to show that a final apostasy on the part of Susan is really a literary impossibility.

I want to begin by sketching the character of Susan, as she is represented in the Narnia stories, beginning with what I take as clear indications of her faithfulness and loyalty. She is a true daughter. I then want to move on to discuss her characteristic failings and temptations. One of the things Lewis does throughout the Narnia stories is show how his child protagonists are fully capable of sins and failures, and Susan is no exception. So when she stumbles, how does she stumble?

From that point I want to move on to discuss the prophetic importance of Cair Paravel, and the nature of Cair Paravel (and all of Narnia), and how it all relates to Plato. Bless me, what do they teach them in these schools? And then, I want to sum up what I think happened to Susan.

So we begin with these four children. "Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy."¹ We will end with the same four.

TRUE DAUGHTER

There are many indications throughout the stories that Susan is an honest and sincere follower of Aslan. She can stumble, but when she does, Aslan puts things right

1. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950; New York: Macmillan, 1970), 1.

again. “‘Welcome, Peter, Son of Adam,’ said Aslan. ‘Welcome, Susan and Lucy’” (*The Lion*, 124). She is welcomed by the lion, and all is right.

She and Lucy are the two witnesses of the death of Aslan on the Stone Table. “‘Please, may we come with you—wherever you’re going?’ asked Susan” (*The Lion*, 147). They accompany him there because he was hungry for the companionship. She clearly loves him: “‘The cowards! The cowards!’ sobbed Susan. ‘Are they still afraid of him, even now?’” (*The Lion*, 151).

And together the two girls are the first witnesses of the resurrection. They held vigil all night after his death, and in the morning at sunrise, the table cracked in two, and Aslan was alive again. The Deeper Magic had undone all the witch’s plans. “And he crouched down and the children climbed onto his warm, golden back, and Susan sat first, holding on tightly to his mane and Lucy sat behind holding on tightly to Susan” (*The Lion*, 161).

She was also the recipient of great gifts.

“Susan, Eve’s Daughter,” said Father Christmas. “These are for you,” and he handed her a bow and a quiver full of arrows and a little ivory horn. “You must use the bow only in great need,” he said, “for I do not mean you to fight in the battle. It does not easily miss. And when you put this horn to your lips and blow it, then,

wherever you are, I think help of some kind will come to you." (*The Lion*, 104)

She grew into a great and beautiful queen, which will be discussed in a moment, but her carriage was not like that of a Jadis at all.

And Susan grew into a tall and gracious woman with black hair that fell almost to her feet and the kings of the countries beyond the sea began to send ambassadors asking for her hand in marriage. And she was called Susan the Gentle. (*The Lion*, 181)

When she was courted by Rabadash, more than a few have been struck by the fact that she gave that kind of character the time of day. But there was an explanation. Will she have him? "The lady shook her head. 'No, brother,' she said, 'not for all the jewels in Tashbaan.'"²

But why had she even thought about it?

"That was my folly, Edmund," said Queen Susan, "of which I cry you mercy. Yet when he was with us in Narnia, truly this Prince bore himself in another fashion than he does now in Tashbaan. For I take you all to witness what marvelous feats he did in that great tournament and hastilude which our brother the High

2. *The Horse and His Boy* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 61.

CHAPTER 3: THE CURIOUS PRESENCE OF EMETH

INTRODUCTION

One episode in the Narnia stories has caused no little consternation for evangelical parents as they have read to their children, and that element of the story concerns the salvation of Emeth. In the previous chapter, I discussed the curious fact of Susan's absence from the heavenly regions in *The Last Battle*. A second curious fact has to do with Emeth's *presence* there, and with Lewis's reasons for including him.

As we consider this, it is important to get one particular distinction out of the way at the outset. In the minds of many evangelical believers, a "broad inclusion" of non-Christians in the heavenly kingdom is indistinguishable from theological liberalism. And with regard

to an ecumenical “comparative religions” approach, this instinct is quite correct. “We are all seeking after God, each in our own way” is a central aspect of the theological left, and as such must be rejected by all faithful Christians. The problem with that approach is—as the apostle Paul might put it—that a religion of God-seekers is an empty set. No one seeks after God (Rom. 3:11).

If this broad and inclusive approach were true, then Christ died for nothing. With a sorrow deeper than any man has ever experienced, Christ asked His Father to have the cup pass from Him if there were any other way (Matt. 26:39). If the Father could have said something like, “Well, the *Rig Veda* has some promising developments,” then why did Jesus have to die? Jesus had to die because there was no other way to save us.

The purpose of this essay is to take the salvation of Emeth as a starting point for a discussion of “who then can be saved?”—with that discussion occurring among conservative believers who accept the authority of Scripture, and the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ.

While it is quite true that Lewis shows more latitude on this question than the average conservative believer does, that difference of opinion we have with him is not in the same category as the difference we would have with a theological liberal. More is going on with Lewis, as I hope to show. Lewis says this:

CHAPTER 4: THE LIGHT FROM BEHIND THE SUN

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, one of the first books I wrote was published under the name *Persuasions*, and the subtitle was “A Dream of Reason Meeting Unbelief.” In that book, a character named Evangelist encountered various people on the road that leads to the Abyss and he engaged them in conversation, seeking to persuade them to turn and head in the other direction.

Now these were the pre-Cambrian days before the Internet, and theological book junkies like myself used to rely on monthly newsprint catalogs that would get the word out about books that might interest all the junkies out there. One of these fine publications was called Great Christian Books, and so we sent on a copy of my

book to them in the hopes that they would include it as one of their titles. They agreed to do so, which was a really big deal for me at the time. When I got my copy of that month's catalog, I eagerly looked up my book, and discovered that the good folks at Great Christian Books had written the copy for it. It read something like: "This small book is a fine introduction to Van Tillian apologetics...." I stared at that with something akin to consternation, and thought something like, "It is?"

I had heard of Van Til, but had not read him. So what was I doing running around writing little introductions to his apologetic approach? In haste I ordered a copy of *The Defense of the Faith*, probably from Great Christian Books, and breathed a sigh of relief after I read it. I guess I was Van Tillian. There are worse things, I suppose.

But where had I learned it? The element in my book that caused GCB to tag me as a Van Tillian was a method of argumentation that I had learned from C.S. Lewis, most probably from his book *Miracles*. This was odd, because there is a section in *The Defense of the Faith* where Van Til was quite critical of Lewis. And this in turn was understandable because there *are* a number of places where Lewis does in fact reason like an evidentialist, and reasoning like an evidentialist gave Van Till the jim jams. But there is also a great theme running through his work—his argument from reason—that I would regard as a high-octane presuppositional approach.

CHAPTER 5: THE TAO OF LEWIS¹

It must always be remembered that the Christian world has a distinct surplus of C.S. Lewis “wanna bees.” Things have gotten to the point where any expression of appreciation for the work of Lewis can be a potential embarrassment—not because of anything said or done by Lewis himself, but rather for fear of being taken for yet another rootless American evangelical enamored of apologetics with a British accent. Nevertheless, appreciation and criticism for Lewis are both in order in the area of apologetics.

What happens if we take the sum total of the citations from Lewis in the first part of this chapter, and discuss them in the light of the two basic apologetic

1. Originally published in *Greyfriars Covenant: Essays on Evangelism and Apologetics* (Moscow, ID: Greyfriars Hall Press, 2001).

“schools”—evidentialism and presuppositionalism? In much that follows, I will assume that the reader is familiar with the main features of that apologetic debate, and will content myself here with a brief summary.

The evidential apologist believes that there is a neutral place where a Christian may encounter an unbeliever, agree on some common ground rules, and reason from that neutral place to a faith in the God of the Bible. The presuppositional apologist, on the other hand, argues that there is no such neutral place, and that all reasoning presupposes, of necessity, the triune God of Scripture.

It is very clear that the elements of both are present in Lewis’s apology for the Christian faith, but more must be said about this. For if presuppositionalism is correct, both elements are present in *every* apologist’s presentation—from Alvin Plantinga to Josh McDowell, from C.S. Lewis to Norman Geisler. Given presuppositionalism, *everyone* is implicitly a presuppositionalist. This is because presuppositionalism holds that because of the necessary relationship between the Creator and all creatures, presuppositional thinking is *inescapable*. A creature must start all his reasoning with certain “givens.” In fact, this entire apologetic debate could be summarized as an attempt by presuppositionalists to convince evidentialists that they are not *really* evidentialists. This being the case, it is the purpose of this essay to show, not that Lewis