

The Worlds of Lewis and Tolkien: Christian Imagery in Narnia and Middle Earth

#1: An Introduction to Lewis and Tolkien

I. The Men

A. C.S. Lewis

- 1898-1963, born in Belfast, N. Ireland
- Staunch atheist, converted to Christianity at age 32
- Professor of English at Oxford and Cambridge
- Prolific author of fiction (*Narnia*, *Screwtape Letters*, *Space Trilogy*) and non-fiction (*Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, *Surprised by Joy*, *The Problem of Pain*)

B. J.R.R. Tolkien

- 1892-1973, born in Bloemfontein, South Africa to English parents
- English Professor and Philologist at Oxford University
- Best known for *Lord of the Rings*, but wrote numerous books on ancient languages and medieval literature

II. Their Friendship

A. Male Friendship

“Those are the golden sessions, when our slippers are on, our feet spread out towards the blaze, and our drinks at our elbows; when the whole world, and something beyond the world, opens itself to our minds as we talk; and no one has any claim or responsibility for another, but all are freemen and equals as if we had first met an hour ago, while at the same time an Affection mellowed by the years enfolds us. Life—natural life—has no better gift to give.” --C.S. Lewis

B. “The Inklings”

“On Thursday nights, they would meet in Lewis’s big Magdalen sitting-room [or The Eagle and Child Pub], congregating some time after nine o’clock. Tea would be made and pipes lit, and then Lewis would boom out: ‘Well, has nobody got anything to read to us?’ Someone would produce a manuscript and begin to read it aloud—it might be a poem, or a story, or a chapter. Then would come criticism: sometimes praise, sometimes censure. . . soon the proceedings would spill over into talk of all kinds, sometimes heated debate, and would terminate at a late hour.” —Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien Biography*

III. Their Works

A. Chronicles of Narnia—Lewis

- Series of seven fantasy novels detailing the adventures of children (most notably Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy) in the land of Narnia and their interaction with the king, Aslan, who is a lion and the son of the Great Emperor.
 - Written 1949-1954
 - Over 100 million copies sold
 - Made into major motion pictures
- Was Narnia written as an allegory of Christ? No (at least according to Lewis).
 - Lewis referred to his work as “a great supposal.”
 - “Suppose there were a world like Narnia and it needed rescuing and the Son of God (or the ‘Great Emperor oversea’) went to redeem it, as He came to redeem ours, what might it, in that world, all have been like?”

B. Lord of the Rings—Tolkien

- Series of three volumes, *Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*, prefaced by *The Hobbit* (and a back story told in *The Silmarillion*) which catalog the adventures of Frodo Baggins as he seeks to destroy the One Ring of power.
 - Written 1937-49
 - Over 150 million copies sold
 - Made into major motion pictures
- Was the LOTR written as an Allegory of Christ? No.
 - Tolkien had a “cordial dislike” of allegory
 - Tolkien calls LOTR a “fundamentally religious and Catholic work” but “the religious element is absorbed into the story and symbolism.”

IV. Their Legacy: The Importance of Fantasy

A. Fantasy Involves World-Building

- How is fantasy different than just fiction?
- How does world-building reflect the Christian worldview?

B. Fantasy Involves Epic Stories that Affect the Whole World

- The fantasy of Lewis and Tolkien is all-encompassing—like Christianity it tells a story that affects the fate of the entire world
- Thus, Lewis and Tolkien’s works are described as “epic,” “larger-than-life” or “numinous”
- The Gospel story is seen as “true myth” (see Tolkien’s “On Fairy-Stories”)

C. Fantasy Has a Unique Ability to Stir the Affections

- Why is fantasy such a powerful tool to teach us about God and Christianity? What can it accomplish that direct theological instruction cannot?
- In May, 1955, a mother of a nine-year-old boy wrote to Lewis concerned her son loved Aslan more than Jesus. Lewis’ reply:

“Laurence can’t really love Aslan more than Jesus, even if he feels that’s what he is doing. For the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really did and said. So that when Laurence thinks he is loving Aslan, he is really loving Jesus: and perhaps loving him more than he ever did before.”

Date	Week	Topic
October 7	1	An Introduction to Lewis and Tolkien
October 14	2	The Fall: Sin and Evil
October 21	3	Redemption: Christ in Narnia
October 28	4	Redemption: Christ in Middle Earth
November 4	5	Sanctification: Duty, Honor and Courage
November 11	6	Sanctification: Friendship and Loyalty
November 18	7	Glorification: End Times in ME and Narnia