



BEACHAM'S SOURCEBOOKS: EXPLORING C. S. LEWIS' THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

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SECTION III: ANALYSES OF THE SEVEN NOVELS OF NARNIA

Chapter 9: The Magician's Nephew

Overview

When he was asked in what order *The Chronicles of Narnia* should be read, Lewis always put *The Magician's Nephew* first. It explains the origin of Narnia, the origin of the White Witch, the origin of the Talking Animals and how they were set apart from "dumb" beasts, and how evil was brought into Narnia. Lewis notes, "It is a very important story because it shows how all the comings and goings between our own world and the land of Narnia first began." Of great interest is Digory Kirke's bringing Jadis, the White Witch, into the new world. Aslan is very unhappy about it, and He sets a task for Digory—that of bringing an apple from the Tree of Life back from a remote sacred garden.

The Geography of *The Magician's Nephew*

The events in *The Magician's Nephew* take place in a block of a London residential neighborhood in 1900, in the Wood Between the Worlds, in Charn near the end of its existence, and in Narnia during its first days of existence. The novel begins in houses that are wall-to-wall with each other from one end of a block to another, with all sharing one long attic in common. In front of the houses is a sidewalk lined with street lamps. It is an arm from a street lamp in front of the Ketterleys' house that will give rise to the lamp of the Lantern Waste in Narnia. The street is busy with horse-drawn cabs, and police officers patrol on foot. The depiction of the street resembles neighborhoods in London such as Kensington even today.

It is the long, shared attic that attracts the attention of Digory and Polly. As with the Pevensie children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Digory and Polly wish to explore. I don't think Lewis meant much by this; it is natural for children to want to explore their environment, and I think I would have been interested in the attic had I been there when I was the age of Digory and Polly. On the other hand, Lewis believed that people should respect the privacy of others. In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Aslan reprimands Lucy for using magic to spy on two schoolgirls; in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Digory and Polly get into a great deal of trouble because they open a door in the attic that leads into someone's home. Had they respected the privacy of Uncle Andrew's den,

which was the room beyond the door, evil would not have been brought into the world of Narnia on the very day of its creation.

The Wood Between the Worlds appears only in *The Magician's Nephew* in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It is a quiet place where evil magic does not work well, and it has tall trees and many ponds. It is a way station between worlds; jump into a pond and you end up in a new world. In contrast, Aslan's Country leads to all worlds and is a far more spectacular place. Perhaps the Wood Between Worlds is a part of Aslan's Country, acting as a place where people can go to Shadow worlds such as earth and the world of Narnia that are outside of Aslan's Country.

Charn is a desolate place, with little life. The city is intimidating with its high doorways and vast rooms and courtyards; it was built for people much taller than most human beings. The only person still living in Charn is Queen Jadis, who is awakened by Digory's ringing the bell. She is proud and cruel, and seems to believe that she has the right to kill anyone she pleases; in fact, she said the Deplorable Word with all the proper rites and killed every being on Charn's world except herself, rather than surrender her queenship to her sister. Charn serves as a warning to earth, for Aslan points out that earth could die as Charn has died. *The Magician's Nephew* was written soon after World War II, and millions of people had been killed in combat and by the byproducts of war such as disease and famine. Furthermore, the Germans, Italians, Fascist French, and Japanese had deliberately slaughtered millions of civilians. More than twelve million people were exterminated in German death camps; more than twenty million Manchurians died as Japan tried to clear the land for Japanese settlement. Thus, Lewis is mindful of how destructive evil can be when he has Aslan point to Charn as an example of what could happen on earth.

The depiction of a dead, cold, lifeless land probably comes in part from Lewis' experiences during World War I. Lewis did not just see "no man's land," he was immersed no man's land. The battles of World War I had made vast tracts of land uninhabitable; nothing lived in these dead cold places except soldiers and the rats that lived in the trenches with the soldiers. Lewis likely saw the French cities that had been made desolate by the conflict. He had ample firsthand experience for describing Charn.

When Digory, Polly, and the rest first land on the world that will become Narnia's world, it is cold, empty, and dark. It must have air, because no one chokes and everyone, except Strawberry, seems able to talk. Lewis describes the creation of Narnia with gusto: Aslan sings and a sea forms, stars light up the sky, the sun rises, hills and mountains take shape, and plants, from grasses to tall trees burst forth in abundance. The creative force generated by Aslan is so great that the arm of street lamp that Jadis throws at him quickly grows into a new street lamp. Gold and silver coins dropped on the ground sprout into gold and silver trees. A river comes to life, replete with the River-god; this is the Great River that flows through Narnia to the east coast.

Digory has brought evil into the world, against Aslan's hope the people of Narnia would have hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years of happiness before evil found its way in, so He is unhappy with the boy. Strawberry is turned into the winged horse Fledge and is given the gift of speech. At Aslan's command, he flies Digory and Polly westward into a tall mountain range, in search of a walled garden that has special trees with special fruit. The distance to the garden is about two days flying for Fledge, with time off for sleeping at night. The trio rest in a valley, there planting toffee and growing a toffee tree for food. There may be other such small valleys, but the mountain range is mostly steep sides and peaks.

The garden is entered only by Digory, who has permission to go through the gate in the wall. Climbing over the wall is forbidden, as is taking the fruit without permission, but Jadis does both, giving her eternal life along with eternal misery. Digory notices that the garden seems larger on the inside than on the outside, much as the stable in *The Last Battle* is. This may be a brief

glimpse of Aslan's Country, which is enormous on the inside.

Themes and Characters

Aslan pointedly refers to Digory as "Son of Adam" and Polly Plumber as "Daughter of Eve," and he gives Digory a task that echoes Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden. Digory must retrieve an apple from a tree in a garden far to the west of Narnia. Once there, he must enter it properly, through the gates, and he must take one apple without eating any of the fruit of the tree. Where Adam transgressed against God's commandment, Digory does not; he picks the apple, and although sorely tempted by the promise of eternal life that eating the apple would give him, he brings the apple to Aslan. It is flung into a river bank and grows into a barrier that will keep Jadis trapped in the northern wilderness for hundreds of years. This aspect of *The Magician's Nephew* may be Lewis' speculation about how matters might go were Adam to be tempted a second time; it also illustrates the ability of the sinner (Digory) to find his way into God's (Aslan's) good graces through obedience and trustworthy behavior.

Jadis, revived by Digory, had killed all the people of her home planet rather than lose her position as Queen. She has great magical powers, although they curiously do not work when Digory brings her to earth. A megalomaniac, she intends to make herself queen of earth; Digory manages to snatch her from earth, only to bring her to Narnia. She instinctively loathes Aslan, but in an example of His Higher Magic, she is unable to harm Him. In fact, her terrifying magic is useless even against the Higher Magic of the tree planted to protect Narnia. For all her destructive power, she is no match for the creative power of Aslan. She improperly enters the garden of the Tree of Life and eats of its fruit, making her immortal. But Aslan notes that with her immortality comes the bitterness of her learning that her evil heart will doom her to an eternity of misery.

The Magician's Nephew is interesting to study for its version of the creation story. Although Lewis was very suspicious of Darwinism (the theory of the evolution of species), he nonetheless studied and absorbed much that modern science has to offer. His imagination had no trouble encompassing the idea that the universe was not only composed of one galaxy of billions of stars—as was supposed until the discoveries of Edwin Hubble and others in the 1920s—but is composed of billions of galaxies with billions of stars each and possibly trillions of planets. He also was not *earth centric*, a phrase meaning a belief that the earth is the most important part of the universe. In Lewis' view, there could be a multitude of creation stories, with planets populated by their own unique peoples. This is the meaning of the Wood between the Worlds, which has many pools of water, each a conduit to a unique world.

Lewis says that in *The Magician's Nephew* he imagined how God might have created a world other than earth. The creation story for Narnia has some of the basic elements of the story found in Genesis. Note how the world that is to become Narnia appears when Digory, Polly, Uncle Andrew, and Jadis first land on it:

And it [the world] was uncommonly like Nothing. There were no stars. It was so dark that they couldn't see one another at all and it made no difference whether you kept your eyes shut or opened. Under their feet there was a cool, flat something which might have been earth, and was certainly not grass or wood. The air was cold and dry and there was no wind. (Chapter 8: "The Fight at the Lamp-Post")

This is not only a fine portrait of a nonliving world awaiting its Creator, but a fine conception of an

earth that was lifeless until God made it alive. Note how Genesis 1:1-2 describes it:

In the beginning God created the Heaven, and the Earth. / And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

This sounds very like the state of affairs for the world-yet-to-be when Aslan begins His singing. Thus *The Magician's Nephew*, more than anything else, is a story of creation, and of the power creation has over destruction.

Yet, note that what God creates, He gives to the people he creates, and in so giving, gives them the power to destroy His worlds. This is the lesson of Charn; it was annihilated by Jadis and the Deplorable Word. Aslan notes that it is gone, as if it never existed. This, He says, could happen to earth and to Narnia, and it is a source of dramatic tension throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*, for the series is about a frightful war between the forces of creation and destruction for the hearts of the people of Narnia's world, as well as those of the young people who come from earth to Narnia.

Chapter-by-Chapter Development of Themes and Characters in *The Magician's Nephew*

Chapter 1: The Wrong Door

As he does in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis gives us a mysterious building to explore. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it is great old country house; in *The Magician's Nephew*, it is a row of London town houses, all connected by a common attic stretching from one end of the city block to the other. When Digory and Polly begin their adventure, it appears that the strange attic will be the source of suspense and mystery, but Lewis takes a sharp turn. There is an abandoned house on the block that Digory and Polly hope to explore, but when they open the attic door, they come out of the attic one house too soon, into the attic of Digory's Uncle Andrew's house.

Digory begins *The Magician's Nephew* as a smart aleck. When Polly tries to apply some common sense to the mystery of the abandoned house by citing her father's view, Digory contemptuously says, "Pooh! Grown-ups are always thinking of uninteresting explanations." He is plainly a very immature young man, and one of the important aspects of the narrative of *The Magician's Nephew* is his growth into a responsible person.

"The Wrong Door" is constructed so as to lure readers into the plot of *The Magician's Nephew*. The principle characters Digory and Polly and their situations are quickly sketched, followed by the surprise of Uncle Andrew's secret room, and then the remarkably evil behavior of Uncle Andrew. The key aspect of Uncle Andrew's contribution to the themes of *The Magician's Nephew* is laid out in the next chapter. In this chapter, he persuades Polly to touch a yellow ring and she immediately vanishes. Polly's disappearance shows that Uncle Andrew is probably the "magician" of *The Magician's Nephew*. It also shows that Uncle Andrew is villainous, because he has enticed a little girl into doing something dangerous that she probably would not wish to do if she knew the consequences. Further, it makes a fine cliffhanger: Where has Polly gone? Is she in danger? At this place in the novel, only Lewis knows.

Chapter 2: Digory and His Uncle

Lewis believed that there were certain moral laws that were universal in all cultures. In *The Magician's Nephew*, he defines evil partly by how it defies such laws. Thus, in this chapter, Uncle Andrew declares that rules of moral conduct do not apply to him because he is a great thinker: "Men like me who possess hidden wisdom, are freed from common rules." This is one of the major themes in *The Magician's Nephew*, with the evil Jadis proclaiming herself to be above all moral codes because she is a queen.

Uncle Andrew is revealed to be a megalomaniac (a person who fantasizes about having wealth, power, or omnipotence) and the magician of the title, making Digory the nephew of the title. Digory displays a couple of his positive characteristics, loyalty to a friend and enough insight into other people to recognize that his Uncle Andrew is a wicked, cruel magician. He may be impulsive, but he is self-assured and clear headed while facing down his despicable uncle.

Chapter 3: The Wood between the Worlds

"It's not the sort of place where things happen. The trees go on growing, that's all," says Digory about the woods between the Worlds. In this chapter Lewis tells about the organization of the Narnian universe and in so doing reveals some of the care with which he constructs his narrative. Digory's characterization gains added depth when he suggests that Uncle Andrew talked of only one world but that dozens of other worlds might exist. Digory shows himself to have the intelligence and imagination to recognize some of the complexity represented by the Wood between the Worlds.

Digory compares the woods to the tunnel under the slates at home: from the tunnel you can enter any of the houses in the row. The tunnel and the woods between the Worlds are similar to the attic that spans all the houses along the block? It too connects many places with one room, but when Digory and Polly opened a door in the attic, they emerged into a very bad place, where evil was afoot. Their stepping into a pool to travel to a world is much like their opening an attic door without knowing what was on the other side. In "The Wood between the Worlds," they again emerge in a bad place, Charn. This image of doorways or pools offering passage to other places is repeated in *The Magician's Nephew*. Of special interest is what happens when Digory knows where he is going when he reaches the western garden in Narnia; the results are very different when he has knowledge of what he is doing, rather than acting on impulse. Lewis said that "Digory was the sort of person who wants to know everything, and when he grew up he became the famous Professor Kirke who comes into other books." It is interesting to note that Lewis had already written *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by the time he wrote *The Magician's Nephew*, so he is able to make remarks that help tie the series of Narnia novels together. Such remarks also help give Narnia a history, as if it were a real place.

Chapter 4: The Bell and the Hammer

Is fear good or bad? This is the nettlesome question raised in "The Bell and the Hammer." In his determination to show no fear Digory does something very foolish. It is not so much his ringing the bell that is foolish as his ignoring Polly's warning and then hurting her just to satisfy his impulse. Had he listened to his fear, he might have avoided doing great harm. This is a curious idea, that fear can be good, but it is typical of Lewis to express a curious idea in order to make a point.

What Digory actually does when he hurts Polly is to ignore his heart; throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia* God speaks through the heart, and His voice is ignored only at great peril.

Digory impulsively ignores fear to enter a strange room, then to enter a strange pool, and then to ring a bell just because an inscription dares him to do it. When he thinks, he does better. He overcomes his fear to go to help Polly after a yellow ring whisks her away by considering his alternatives. Fear shows up in many characters when they do not understand their circumstances. Of special note is the fear Jadis and Uncle Andrew feel when they hear the singing of Aslan.

Chapter 5: The Deplorable Word

This is an important chapter not only for *The Magician's Nephew* but for the Narnian series as a whole. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis creates one of literature's most frightful and awesome villains. Jadis' claiming of Edmund as her lawful prey is just plain terrifying. Since *The Magician's Nephew* is meant to be the novel that introduces the major aspects of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the introduction of Jadis in "The Deplorable Word" needs to be carefully considered.

Given her awesome stature in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis' method of fleshing out Jadis' personality is an odd combination of utter evil and pathetic ridiculousness. She is over seven feet tall, carries herself proudly, and is a megalomaniac of grand proportions. She declares, "I, Jadis, the last Queen, but the Queen of the World." Her world is Charn, a dead and desolate place. The city that Digory and Polly explore is magnificent, built on a monumental scale. Once it teemed with people, but now it is dead. The horrible meaning of Jadis's statement is that she was about to be overthrown by her sister, and rather than lose the crown, she spoke "the Deplorable Word"—a word that if spoken a special way will kill everything on Charn: "It had long been known to the great kings of our race that there was a word which, if spoken with the proper ceremonies, would destroy all living things except the one who spoke it." By speaking it, Jadis made herself both the last queen and the Queen of the World, even though she is queen of the world because no one lives to challenge her rule.

She is a mass murderer on an enormous scale. She killed everyone just so she could call herself Queen. This makes her a truly evil enemy—someone who would defy Aslan rather than acknowledge His supremacy. On the other hand, Lewis undercuts her grand vision of herself, and in so doing invites us to observe her pathetic foolishness. He does this by paralleling her with a truly pathetic megalomaniac, Uncle Andrew. She tells Digory and Polly that "what would be wrong for you or for any of the common people is not wrong in a great Queen such as I." This attitude is exactly that of Uncle Andrew as we have seen in the first two chapters. But where Uncle Andrew's insistence that no moral rules apply to him endangers the lives of a couple of innocent youngsters, Jadis shows how the rejection of universal moral laws carried to its ultimate logical end results in horrors that defy full understanding. It is hard to imagine murdering billions of people all at once!

At the time Lewis wrote *The Magician's Nephew*, some readers thought that Jadis was his expression of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, but in Jadis, Lewis attains a more universal expression of his ideas of what constitutes evil. It is easy, these many decades later, to see her action duplicated by dictators in Cambodia by Pol Pot, in Uganda by Idi Amin, and by others who believe themselves to be above the moral laws of common people. They are all hateful, and when compared to Aslan (Christ), they are every bit as ridiculous and foolish as Uncle Andrew. With his presentation of Jadis in "The Deplorable Word," Lewis further develops his ideas of how evil may be founded in utter selfishness, as well as his belief that moral conduct may be found in respect for the lives of others. Both these themes have by now become central to the purpose of *The Magician's Nephew*.

Chapter 6: The Beginning of Uncle Andrew's Troubles

Lewis notes, "In Charn, she [Jadis] took no notice of Polly (till the very end) because Digory was the one she wanted to make use of. Now that she had Uncle Andrew, she took no notice of Digory. I expect most witches are like that. They are not interested in things or people unless they can use them; they are terribly practical." Uncle Andrew finds himself in the company of his own kind, but where he is a dabbler in the occult, she is a mighty practitioner. Much of the humor in this chapter derives from Uncle Andrew's receiving a taste of his own medicine. Lewis further develops his theme of evil grounded in selfishness by noting how practical witches are; they use people and do not respect them.

The notion of witches and witchcraft in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is taken primarily from the multitude of folk tales from many cultures that Lewis had read, but he did, in fact, believe the occult was a fact, and he regarded it as utterly evil. He even ascribed the insanity of an acquaintance to that man's dabbling in the occult. Thus, what Uncle Andrew has been doing is very dangerous and results in the bringing of great evil—Jadis—to earth.

Chapter 7: What Happened at the Front Door

It is important to note that the Narnia novels are not all is heavy thinking about morals and morality: all of the novels have abundant comedy. Thus, in this chapter not only the important work of showing how pathetic Jadis's monomania is, but entertaining comedy is presented. When Jadis's magic does not work in London, there is a hint of the humiliation to come, and Uncle Andrew's praise of her as a "dem fine woman" adds to the picture of her as someone who has seriously misjudged earth and its people. When Jadis appears, standing atop a hansom cab, seven feet tall and lashing a whip while her royal charger races along the street, she is at once a magnificent, amazing sight, and ridiculous. Her charger is Strawberry, a horse that spends its days pulling a cab along the streets of London. Her carriage is a wobbly, two-wheeled affair, and her airs of royalty are silly in a world that knows nothing about her. As for why her magic does not work, could it be that on earth Christ has already made His sacrifice, enabling people to draw on the Deep Magic of God and making the powers of the occult weak, even trivial?

Digory's Aunt Letty hints that Digory's mother is dying. "I'm afraid it would need fruit from the land of youth to help her now," she says to Digory. "Nothing in *this* world will do much." These remarks offer the foundation for Digory's behavior in the last few chapters of *The Magician's Nephew*, and help explain the ending.

Chapter 8: The Fight at the Lamp-Post

There is no telling what damage Jadis might have done on earth had she stayed in London very long, but she would have needed more than her ego, height, and great physical strength to make herself ruler of the world. The crowd gathered at the lamp-post hails her as "Hempress of Colney 'Atch" (Colny Hatch was an insane asylum) and even as she bows in recognition of their acclaim they burst into laughter.

But she might have preferred the rough indignity of a crowd on a London street to what

awaits her in the world she next visits. Weakened to the point of being crippled in the Wood between the Worlds, she manages to trick Digory into letting her grab hold of him when he, Polly, and Uncle Andrew leap into a pool. Where they end up is utterly desolate. There is nothing but darkness and the ground, to Jadis an empty world, nothing.

This marks the beginning of Narnia's creation story. Lewis said that he imagined God creating another world, and then imagined how that world's creation might progress—he did not think it would be identical to that of earth. For Narnia, it begins with a voice that turns out to be that of Aslan, a large golden lion, who by singing different songs creates the various elements of Narnia's world, from a sunrise to oceans to mountains to plants, especially trees, and to living creatures. Creating a whole world in minutes out of nothing must be a very challenging task, and Aslan explains that the newly created world is going through a brief period of ferocious fertility. Trees sprout up and are full grown in moments; the piece of the lamp-post, once on the ground, sprouts up into a full lamp-post. Coins dropped on the ground become golden and silver plants.

John writes (John 1:1-3), "In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, and the Word was God./The same was in the beginning with God./All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." In the present chapter, Lewis writes, "A voice had begun to sing." For Digory the noise "was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard." This voice makes the ground shake deep inside, and it gives rise to a young, magnificent sun. According to Lewis, "If you had seen and heard it, as Digory did, you would have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves who were singing, and that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing." The Song of Aslan parallels the Word of Christ. Lewis' achievement, here, is extraordinary. He takes the idea of Christ as the Word that created the world and hears It as a Song, that the act of creation was magnificent music, and makes the event come alive with vivid descriptions. One can imagine such a Song making plants and animals spring out of the earth, as they do in the next chapter.

Lewis also touches on one of the important *mysterries* of the Christian faith: that God and the Word were separate and yet the same, as John says in his second verse. Aslan creates the world of Narnia at His Father's behest, which means that Aslan and the Emperor-over-sea are two separate beings, yet Aslan's song comes from the power of His Father, something that is emphasized throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This makes Them One. Thus Aslan is a singer and an instrument of His Father, yet He also personifies the act of creation, a power that comes from the Father. This power unifies Father and Son. In *The Horse and His Boy*, when Shasta hears three voices in the fog of Archenland's mountains, Lewis adds the Holy Spirit to the mix, because the Holy Spirit is a separate presence in each faithful person and also a manifestation of God.

In the Bible, evil comes early in earth's history, with the destruction of paradise. In *The Magician's Nephew*, evil is present at the moment of creation. This angers Aslan, because he sees another paradise about to be spoiled. He uses Digory, Polly, and Fledge to help salvage at least a few hundred years of happiness for Narnia, but He already knows of the sacrifice to come.

Chapter 9: The Founding of Narnia

Here is found the theme of creation. The singing of Aslan frightens Uncle Andrew, but it seems to terrify Jadis, who flings the arm of the lamp-post at Aslan, striking Him in the forehead. He shows no sign of having noticed the blow. "The Witch shrieked and ran: in a few moments she was out of sight among the trees." "A spirited gel, sir. It's a pity about her temper," says Uncle Andrew of Jadis, once again missing the point of what he observes. Evil despises and fears Aslan's

power to create; it dwarfs evil's ability to destroy.

Lewis offers a wonderful account of the creation of living things. Animals burst out of humps in the ground, the "grassy land bubbling like water in a pot." The Lion says in "the deepest, wildest voice they had ever heard": "Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters." His words make the world come alive, with all sorts of animals and plants appearing. The thinking beasts and trees immediately gravitate toward Aslan.

Chapter 10: The First Joke and Other Matters

The undercurrent of this chapter is the revelation that Aslan is not a one-dimensional serious Lord. At the command that ended the previous chapter, "Out of the trees wild people stepped forth, gods and goddesses of the wood; with them came Fauns and Satyrs and Dwarfs. Out of the river rose the river god with his Naiad daughters." To some of the animals, Aslan gives speech, and in an awkward moment the Jackdaw is heard to cry "No fear!"—making the other animals laugh. "Laugh and fear not, creatures. Now that you are no longer dumb and witless, you need not always be grave. For jokes as well as justice come in with speech," says Aslan. This is important for developing Lewis' view of Aslan; he sees Him as having a sense of humor, as taking pleasure in the happiness and fun of His people.

While Digory, Polly, and the cabby enjoy what they see and marvel at Aslan, Uncle Andrew is frightened. Where the others hear animals speaking and making jokes, Uncle Andrew hears only growling and grunting: "For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are." In Lewis' view, the truth of God manifests itself for anyone who will make an effort to see it. He attributed his own years of atheism to an effort to deny the evidence of God's existence that was all around him. In *The Magician's Nephew*, his selfishness has set Uncle Andrew apart from those who recognize God. Trees have sprouted out of the ground; animals have burst out of the earth; the evidence of God's creation is all around him, but he chooses not to know it for what it is. Uncle Andrew has even persuaded himself that the Lion could not have been singing. Lewis notes, "Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed."

Chapter 11: Digory and His Uncle Are Both in Trouble

Aslan distinguishes between Digory and Polly and the people of Narnia by calling Digory "Son of Adam" and Polly "Daughter of Eve." Lewis will use these phrases to distinguish people of earthly ancestry from those of Narnian ancestry throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

In this chapter Lewis draws the strongest parallels between Narnia's situation and that of earth. Aslan says, "Evil will come of that evil [Jadis], but it is a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself." Here, Aslan predicts his sacrifice in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, paralleling the notion that Jesus knew ahead of time that he was to be sacrificed for the sins of humanity. Further, Aslan declares, "And as Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help to heal it." This recalls I Corinthians 15:21, which says, "For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead."

Aslan declares the Cabby Frank and his wife Helen the first King and Queen of Narnia, making them something akin to Noah and Noah's wife. As is the case with the descendants of Noah, the descendants of Frank and Helen spread out of Narnia and throughout their world, to

such places as "Archenland which lies yonder over the Southern Mountains." There seem to be plenty of humans for the descendants of Frank and Helen to marry without inbreeding.

Chapter 12: Strawberry's Adventure

Aslan proves Himself not only capable of fun and laughter, but of feeling grief, as well. When Digory pleads for help to save his mother's life, Lewis notes that great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. Aslan sends Digory and Polly on a mission to retrieve an apple from a tree in a walled garden in the Western Wild. This must be especially difficult on Digory, who must retrieve the apple to compensate for bringing evil to Narnia, even while not knowing whether Aslan will help his mother, who lives in another world.

Aslan performs many miracles in *The Magician's Nephew*, and one of the most spectacular is the one he performs on Strawberry, whom Aslan renames "Fledge": "'Be winged. Be the father of all flying horses,' roared Aslan in a voice that shook the ground. 'Your name is Fledge.'" This is another example of Aslan's great creative power. From the air, the trio of Fledge, Digory, and Polly see some of the immensity of Aslan's creation, with "jagged mountains appearing beyond the northern moors, and plains of what looked like sand far in the south."

Chapter 13: An Unexpected Meeting

In a letter to a young reader named Patricia, Lewis says, "Jadis plucking the apple is like Adam's sin, an act of disobedience, but it doesn't fill the same place in her life as his plucking did in his. She was *already* fallen (very much so) before she ate it." (C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Children*, 1985, pp. 92-93)

Lewis had once thought he would become a great poet, which may be why he scatters verses through his fiction and nonfiction. In *The Magician's Nephew*, he places this one on the gate to the private garden:

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

The point of entering through the gates is that only those who are legitimately invited may enter the garden. This why the gates open easily for Digory, but Jadis must climb the wall. She is not welcome. The fruit may only be gifts; the theme of selfishness is implied, here. Taking the fruit for oneself results in a contradictory sort of disaster: having one's heart's desire while simultaneously finding despair. Jadis illustrates how this works by eating fruit that was not hers to take. She receives eternal life, but the evil in her heart makes that life a misery.

The garden seems to have a personality like Aslan's: quiet, with the pleasant sound of a fountain in the garden and lovely smells. "It was a happy place but very serious"; much like Aslan, who is happy and serious at the same time. Like the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, Jadis urges Digory to eat the fruit, and Digory is very tempted to do so: he longed to eat the fruit. But this is in the world of Narnia, not on earth, and Narnia veers away from earth's events when Digory resists temptation and retrieves the apple. Whereas he was an impulsive, unthinking youngster at the start

of *The Magician's Nephew*, he has become more thoughtful, taking the time to use his mind to think through the meaning of the verses at the gate, as well as his promise to Aslan. With this thoughtfulness comes power: He is able to resist a terrible temptation and to stand up to Jadis, who had frightened him. He may not know it, but he has through trials and intelligence become a dangerous adversary.

Chapter 14: The Planting of the Tree

Digory had warned Uncle Andrew that he would be punished for his evil deeds, and Uncle Andrew gets what he deserves. The Talking Animals mistaking him for either a dumb animal or a plant is funny; it also suggests how much Uncle Andrew has debased himself. Even the innocent people of Narnia do not recognize him as a thinking being. As far as Uncle Andrew is concerned, he is being manhandled by a bunch of wild animals; he does not understand their speech. In their turn, they call him "Brandy," because he is constantly saying that word. He has worked so hard at making himself stupid that he does not even understand the beautiful, loud voice of Aslan, who notes that "he has made himself unable to hear my voice." There is a world of wonders around Uncle Andrew, and he sees none of its miraculousness and beauty.

Aslan is forgiving, and once Digory has planted the silver apple, He tells Digory to take of the fruit of the tree to his mother. It is notable that while Jadis's evil magic fizzles on earth, Aslan's Deep Magic seems to work everywhere. He needs no magic rings to bring Helen from earth to Narnia, and He plainly expects a magical apple from Narnia to work on earth. The point is that Aslan's power is universal, for all creation is His.

Chapter 15: The End of This Story and the Beginning of All the Others

Most of this chapter is devoted to setting up the rest of the novels in the Narnia series, but there is an allusion to the affairs of the people of earth:

"When you were last here [the Wood between the Worlds]," said Aslan, "that hollow was a pool, and when you jumped into it you came to the world where a dying sun shone over the ruins of Charn. There is no pool now. That world is ended, as if it had never been. Let the race of Adam and Eve take warning."

Lewis avoids being preachy through almost all of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but he may be forgiven for being a little bit preachy, here. He began *The Chronicles of Narnia* just as World War II broke out, and wrote much of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* during the war. He also had served in World War I, during which he was not only gravely wounded but had seen men, friends of his, literally blown to pieces, including one who was standing right beside him. Given the terrible evils perpetrated during both wars, Lewis has Aslan point out that humanity needs to improve its behavior, to take warning from the fate of a world in which everyone but one died in its last war.

"The Apple of Life" Aslan gives to Digory offers a connection between *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Eating the apple cures Digory's mother—it is like a miracle, says her doctor, and that is what it is. It is also further proof that Aslan's power extends over earth as well as Narnia. Where Digory buries the apple core, a tree quickly grows. A storm blows the tree over, and Digory, now grown up, has it made into a wardrobe. He inherits the great

big house in the country (the same as in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), and in it he puts the wardrobe. This wardrobe was made from a tree that had its origins in the Tree of Life, a part of the Deep Magic that works everywhere in the universe, including earth. Thus it has magical powers that Lucy Pevensie discovers in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. This makes for an elegantly smooth transition from one novel to the next.

Vocabulary for *The Magician's Nephew*

Chapter 1: The Wrong Door

do a sum: do an arithmetic problem

I'm game: I'm willing

We'd better bunk: an archaic phrase meaning run away or run and hide

duffer: stupid person

Chapter 2: Digory and His Uncle

paid out in the end: to be punished for one's evil deeds

Chapter 3: The Wood between the World

pluck as in never had the pluck: courage or daring

gassing about it: talking excessively (a mildly insulting phrase)

Chapter 6: The Beginning of Uncle Andrew's Troubles

be decent: be honorable or unselfish

we'll call it Pax: we'll stop fighting

Pax: peace

eye-glass: monocle

dem: damn

Chapter 7: What Happened at the Front Door

sal volatile: smelling salts

hansom: a horse-drawn carriage with two wheels, a covered seat, and a seat above and behind, where the driver would sit; commonly used as taxicabs in London before the advent of automobiles; Jadis must have been quite a sight standing seven-feet tall on top!

trams: streetcars

footpath: sidewalk

Chapter 8: The Fight at the Lamp-Post

drop of spirits: an alcoholic beverage

Chapter 9: The Founding of Narnia

Yeomanry: Uncle Andrew is probably referring to a cavalry unit in the Territorial Army

Chapter 11: Digory and His Uncle Are Both in Trouble

It's a fair treat: It's delightful

chap: man

use it hardly: be cruel to it

Chapter 12: Strawberry's Adventure

curvetted: A horse is said to *curvet* when it leaps in the air with all four legs off the ground, with the forelegs returning to earth before the hind ones; *curvet* also means to prance; either way, Fledge is enjoying himself.

rum go: odd sight.

tuck in: eat heartily

Chapter 13: An Unexpected Meeting

herb called honesty: a European and Asian plant with fragrant, purple flowers and seed pods that are flat, white, and paperlike.

What's your game?: What's your scheme or plot? The phrase implies that someone is trying to dupe someone else into doing something stupid or wrong.

References to the Bible in *The Magician's Nephew*

The passage from *The Magician's Nephew* is first quoted, followed by the relevant passage in the Bible. A transliteration of the 1611 edition of the King James version of the Bible is used for the Biblical quotations. Comments then follow.

Chapter 8: The Fight at the Lamp-Post

1. And really it was uncommonly like Nothing. There were no stars. It was so dark that they couldn't see one another at all and it made no difference whether you kept your eyes shut or opened. Under their feet there was a cool, flat something which might have been earth, and was certainly not grass or wood. The air was cold and dry and there was no wind.

Genesis 1:2: And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Comments: Lewis is following the creation pattern outlined in Genesis. He is trying to convey what creation would be like to someone actually witnessing it.

2. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Sometimes he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was,

beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.

Genesis 1:2, conclusion: . . . and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Comments: The song is Lewis' way of depicting God's Spirit moving across the world; it is a way of making the passage in Genesis concrete.

3. One moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of light leaped out—single stars, constellations, and planets, brighter and bigger than any in our world.

Genesis 1:14: And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven, to divide the day from the night: and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years."

Comments: What Lewis describes seems well suited to the idea of creating a night sky that will provide signs and help identify seasons. These are the literal signs of the constellations that help ships navigate and which change throughout the year. The signs are also symbolic of God's power and will.

4. If you had seen and heard it, as Digory did, you would have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves who were singing, and that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.

Job 38:7: When the morning star sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

Comments: Lewis here draws a parallel with a time of innocence, when the universe itself seemed to sing for joy.

Chapter 9: The Founding of Narnia

5. Can you imagine a stretch of grassy land bubbling like water in a pot? For that is really the best description of what was happening. In all directions it was swelling into humps. They were of very different sizes, some bigger than mole-hills, some as big as wheelbarrows, two the size of cottages. And the humps moved and swelled till they burst, and the crumbled earth poured out of them, and from each hump there came out an animal.

Genesis 1:24: And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kind," and it was so. (See also Genesis 2:19, quoted in number 7, below.)

Comments: Lewis brings imagination and color to the idea of earth bringing forth animals. This is an example of his imagining how creation might look on another world.

Chapter 11: Digory and His Uncle Are Both in Trouble

6. And as Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help to heal it.

I Corinthians 15:21: For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead.

Romans 5:19: For as by one mans disobedience many were made sinners: so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous.

Comments: This is more than just a parallel with a Biblical passage; it is an example of Aslan and God's fairness and compassion. Those who have sinned are given the chance of redemption.

7. You shall rule and name all these creatures, and do justice among them, and protect them from their enemies when enemies arise. (Aslan speaking to the Cabby.)

Genesis 2:19: And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought *them* unto Adam, to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof.

Comments: Even though the Cabby, a Son of Adam, is from earth, not Narnia, in Narnia as in Eden, man is charged with naming the animals, implying a supremacy over the animals.

Chapter 12: Strawberry's Adventure

8. 'My son, my son,' said Aslan. 'I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet.'

II Samuel 18:33: And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would I have died instead of you.

Comments: Digory is surprised by Aslan's tears, but Lewis refers to a famous scriptural passage to clarify; the passage is about overwhelming grief. It also suggests the sacrifice Christ will make by dying for God's children, as well as Aslan's sacrifice for Edmund in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Chapter 14: The Planting of the Tree

9. 'Well done,' said Aslan in a voice that made the earth shake. (Aslan here praises Digory for bringing Him an apple from the Tree of Life.)

Matthew 25:21: His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Comments: The passage in Matthew refers to the servant who turned a few talents into many; given opportunity, he has made himself a better man. So, too, has Digory developed his own resources of intelligence, wisdom, courage, and fortitude.

Ideas for Discussion and Projects for *The Magician's Nephew*

Overview

1. Lewis says that *The Magician's Nephew* is a very important story because it shows how the connections between our own world and the land of Narnia first began. Does the novel answer all your questions about why people from earth are found in the world of Narnia?
2. Although Lewis says that *The Magician's Nephew* is the first book to read in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, some readers believe that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* should be read first because it was written first. Present your ideas for both arguments.
3. Why would Aslan be angry at Digory for bringing Jadis to Narnia? Was this Digory's fault?
4. What is the significance of Digory's faithfully bringing the silver apple to Aslan?
5. Lewis said that *The Chronicles of Narnia* was in part his speculation about how God might interact with a world other than earth. Discuss the parallels and differences *The Magician's Nephew* between God creating the earth and Aslan creating Narnia.
6. In what ways does Digory mature during *The Magician's Nephew*? What qualities does he possess at the novel's end that he did not have at its start?
7. In what ways does Jadis represent the idea of *destruction*? How is she like or unlike the wicked witches in *The Wizard of Oz*?
8. Why would Lewis make Jadis appear evil and ridiculous at the same time?
9. Lewis regarded writing as fun, and he urged young people to write stories for pleasure. Try doing what he does in *The Magician's Nephew*, and write a story of the creation of another world of your own invention.
10. Where does the creation of Narnia resemble Genesis? Where does it differ from Genesis?
11. What can Aslan's power to create do that Jadis's evil powers cannot?
12. Is a lion an appropriate parallel to Christ? Explain your answer.

Chapter 1: The Wrong Door

1. What does the behavior of Digory and Polly tell us about their personalities? What aspects of their behavior will be important in later chapters?
2. How does Lewis try to capture and hold the interest of readers in *The Wrong Door*?

Chapter 2: Digory and His Uncle

1. What does Uncle Andrew do and say that shows that he is a bad man? How will his bad traits result in his being punished in the end?
2. What moral laws does Uncle Andrew violate in this chapter?

Chapter 3: The Wood between the Worlds

1. Why do Digory and Polly enter the pool that takes them to Charn?
2. The Wood between the Worlds has many pools. Write a story in which someone uses the pools to visit other worlds. What would the worlds be like? Would they offer adventures like those in Charn and Narnia?

Chapter 4: The Bell and the Hammer.

1. In Chapter 3, Lewis points out that Digory likes to acquire knowledge, and this characteristic may explain his wanting to ring the bell, but why would he hurt Polly in order to do so?
 2. Does his ringing the bell make Digory responsible for Jadis?
- ### Chapter 5: The Deplorable Word

1. Why would Jadis be proud to be the queen of an unpopulated world?
2. Does Lewis trivialize mass murder in this chapter?

Chapter 6: The Beginning of Uncle Andrew's Troubles

1. In what ways is Jadis terribly practical?
2. Why does Uncle Andrew admire Jadis?

Chapter 7: What Happened at the Front Door

1. What is comical about this chapter?
2. What does Jadis's behavior reveal about her?

Chapter 8: The Fight at the Lamp-Post

1. What happens at the lamp-post that ties in with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*?
2. Why is Jadis almost crippled in the Wood between the Worlds?

Chapter 9: The Founding of Narnia

1. Why would Lewis choose to have Aslan sing Narnia into being?
2. What is the order in which the new world is created?
3. Why does Aslan not do something about Jadis when she throws the piece of lamp-post at Him, hitting Him in the head?

Chapter 10: The First Joke and Other Matters

1. Why does Lewis make a point of laughter being part of Narnia's creation?
2. What are the important differences among the points of view of Digory, Polly, the Cabby, and Uncle Andrew?
3. What does Lewis mean by "Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed?"

Chapter 11: Digory and His Uncle Are Both in Trouble

1. What does Aslan mean by "And as Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help to heal it?"
2. Why does Aslan emphasize that Digory and Polly are outsiders by calling them Son of Adam and Daughter of Eve?
3. Why does Aslan declare the Cabby Frank and his wife Helen the first King and Queen of Narnia? Is this symbolic?

Chapter 12: Strawberry's Adventure

1. Why are there tears in Aslan's eyes? What does this say about Him?
2. Why does Aslan rename Strawberry? Is there a meaning behind the name "Fledge"?

Chapter 13: An Unexpected Meeting

1. Why does Digory not eat the silver apple when Jadis tries to persuade him to do so? How does he resist eating the apple when its smell makes him very thirsty and hungry?
2. Would the Digory of Chapter 1 have eaten the apple? What changes have occurred in him that makes it easier for him to resist temptation?

Chapter 14: The Planting of the Tree

1. Why do the Talking Animals of Narnia think Uncle Andrew is a dumb beast or a plant?
2. Why would Digory and his mother have been miserable if he had taken an apple from the Tree of Life without Aslan's permission?

Chapter 15: The End of This Story and the Beginning of All the Others

1. Are you satisfied with how *The Magician's Nephew* ends? Is there anything missing?

2. Why would Aslan want the rings disposed of?

3. Write a story about what would happen if some people accidentally dug up the rings. They might be construction workers or children playing a game.