

An Epic of Faith

In Disney's new film *Prince Caspian*, C.S. Lewis' unique vision of Christian redemption comes alive on the screen.

A new Chronicles of Narnia tale comes to the screen May 16, starring the same quartet of actors and actresses who played the Pevensie children in the smash 2005 hit *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. One of Disney's most successful live-action films ever, *Lion* grossed \$742 million worldwide.

Next comes *Prince Caspian*, which introduces a new character: 26-year-old actor Ben Barnes as the teenage prince.

The book *Prince Caspian*, first published in 1951, is the second one C.S. Lewis wrote in the Chronicles of Narnia series, but it's fourth chronologically in a timeline that begins with Narnia's creation in *The Magician's Nephew* and ends with its demise in *The Last Battle*.

Prince Caspian is a more ambiguous and thoughtful work, and its main theme, according to a 1961 letter penned by Lewis, is "restoration of the true religion after corruption." Trailers from the movie indicate the tale will be far darker than *Lion*. "It is a horror story in which the main motifs are dehumanization, bondage, tyranny, terror to the good accompanied by elevation of evil and desecration of nature," says Wheaton College professor Leland Ryken, co-author of the just-released *A Reader's Guide to Caspian*. "Most of all, it's hatred of Aslan."

As in *Lion*, the Pevensies are magically transported to Narnia by the blowing of a magic horn by Prince Caspian, the teenage heir to the throne of Narnia. Whereas the children have aged

only one year, 1,300 years have passed in Narnian time.

Wilderness has overtaken the castle of Cair Paravel, ancient seat of Narnian royalty. Human society on this flat planet has forgotten the era when Aslan, the Christ-like ruler of Narnia, once walked in their midst and animals could converse like humans.

An alien race, the Telmarines, ruled by the evil King Miraz, now occupies the land. The talking animals have been killed or driven underground, and talk of their existence is forbidden.

“King Miraz is trying to suppress any recollection of the old things,” says Stanley Mattson, president of the C.S. Lewis Foundation in Redlands, California. “For Lewis, the older things were, the more proven they are, the more tested they are. Miraz is the innovator. He is building a new social order that centers on himself.”

Caspian, the nephew of Miraz, grows up in this atmosphere and only learns the truth through his tutor, Dr. Cornelius, a dwarf. Plans are for Caspian to succeed Miraz—until one night when Miraz’s queen bears him an heir.

This event puts Caspian’s life in jeopardy, as Miraz wants his own son to have the throne. Caspian flees Miraz’s castle into the forest and providentially encounters the talking animals.

“The ruling elite had banished belief in Aslan, calling it fables and lies similar to how Western civilization has crossed out its Christian heritage, forgetting its core values,” says Devin Brown, author of the new book *Inside Prince Caspian: A Guide to Exploring the Return to Narnia*.

"Things are more complicated, and issues are not as cut and dried—nor as simple as they were in the first book. King Miraz has drained all the enchantment from Narnia.

"C.S. Lewis wanted to mirror the modern world a little bit, as it too is disenchanted. At least the White Witch [in *Lion*] was magical. The usurper here [King Miraz] is a two-bit despot."

When Caspian tries to marshal an army against Miraz, they are outnumbered. When presented a magical horn dating back to the golden days of Narnia, he blows it, hoping that somehow the four children will appear in their past roles as kings and queens of Narnia. He gets his wish, as at the end of the book Miraz is confronted by King Peter, who challenges Miraz to a duel to the death.

"In *Prince Caspian*, the leaders in the cosmic spiritual battle are Aslan and Miraz," Ryken says. "The story does not give us a single combat comparable to Aslan and the White Witch in *The Lion*, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

"Instead, in *Prince Caspian*, the battle is waged between followers of Aslan and Miraz. At key points, the struggle is not cosmic but unfolds on an inner stage of the individual human soul."

The children's part of the story unfolds with Peter and his siblings trying to make sense of why they have been transported back to Narnia. After they find themselves at a deserted Cair Paravel, they come upon Trumpkin, a dwarf sent by Prince Caspian. Relying on their sketchy memory of Narnian geography, the children strike out through the forest in what they hope will be only a two-day journey to the prince's side.

When they get lost, Lucy, the youngest and most spiritually astute of the children, sees Aslan motioning to them to change direction—but the others don't believe her. The next day they are even more lost.

Then occurs the most magical scene in the book: Aslan's midnight encounter with Lucy. "Aslan," says Lucy in one of the book's most famous quotes, "you're bigger."

"That is because you're older, little one," he answers. "Every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

Emily Wert, a Presbyterian from Atlanta who won an "ultimate fan of Narnia" contest sponsored by Disney, got to watch this scene being filmed on an elaborate indoor set in Prague.

"Lucy was complaining about how the insects in the grass were freaking her out," she said, referring to actress Georgie Henley, 12. "The sets there were just amazing: very Tolkienesque."

At this point, Aslan orders Lucy to rouse her siblings to follow him on a nighttime walk in the opposite direction. Reluctantly, Lucy does so, but no one believes her, as only she can see Aslan standing off in the woods, waiting for them.

Finally her brother Edmund, remembering how right Lucy was—and how wrong he was—during the Lion adventure, admonishes the group to follow her through the moonlit woods. As the night wears on, Aslan becomes more and more visible to the rest of the children. Just before dawn, near the encampment of the besieged Caspian, he appears to them all, building up Lucy, Peter and Edmund for their efforts but admonishing Trumpkin and Susan for their lack of faith.

Art Lindsley, a senior fellow at the C.S. Lewis Institute in Springfield, Virginia, notes that *Prince Caspian* details incremental changes in the children's characters. Despite lapses in judgment, Peter continues to make headway in his leadership role; Edmund continues to grow in the humility he learned in *Lion*; and Lucy grows in holiness and purity.

But Susan has grown more fearful and faithless. Several incidents foreshadow her eventual apostasy as she will continue to veer off track even more in the following book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. In *The Last Battle*, she alone misses out on attaining heaven.

"The theme here is faith and trust," Lindsley says. "You have various levels of people in *Caspian*—those who believe from the beginning, like Lucy, and those who don't believe, like Miraz.

"Peter and the other children are at varying levels as they discover various things about themselves. Trumpkin is a 'Doubting Thomas.' He doesn't believe in Aslan until he sees."

Like several other scholars interviewed, Lindsley said *Caspian* was his least favorite book of the series. But he has learned to value its qualities.

"Now as I've really studied it," he says, "I see a lot of depth and richness there. The theme is the return to true faith, the reformation of Narnia."

One of the strangest episodes in the book comes after Aslan's meeting with Trumpkin and the children. The boys and the dwarf are sent off to help Caspian.

The girls go with Aslan on a spree through Narnia accompanied by Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and orgies.

The inclusion of a mythic god of the vine and mystic ecstasy is a strange one for a children's tale but not out of character for Lewis, Lindsley explains.

"To Lewis, the old myths are subservient to Christ or Aslan," he says. "One subtheme of this book is 'celebration,' and one of the things Lewis loved was dancing and great feasts. Here, Bacchus is tamed by Aslan, which goes to say, you can have passion without excess."

Ryken and co-author Marjorie Lamp Mead tackled this question in their book.

"Lewis was a specialist in Renaissance literature, and for Renaissance authors and readers, the mythological characters and stories of the past were old forms of loveliness that appealed to their imaginations," they wrote. "The fact that Lewis put Bacchus into Aslan's celebratory march shows that Lewis intended to Christianize this pagan god, making him respectable rather than debauched.

"At his most respectable, Bacchus came to represent liberation, nature, enthusiasm and celebration. It is also possible that Lewis intended to assert by narrative means that Aslan can redeem even the wildest impulses."

The time frame of Prince Caspian is the shortest of the Narnia books. The action takes place in one week, which allows the Pevensie children to briefly resume their roles as kings and queens in order to defeat Miraz and restore Caspian to the

throne. Finally, when the prince meets Aslan, the lion reveals that Caspian's ancestors too once came from Earth.

"You come of the Lord Adam and Lady Eve," Aslan says in another of the book's best quotes. "And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth."

"The themes are less overt, but more like the average Christian life," says Brown, an English professor at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. "Caspian is no one's favorite book, and it's the most underrated of the seven books."

"But on a day-to-day basis, we are dealing with people like Miraz and wondering on a day-to-day basis what to do. Also, the children are being asked to do more, and Aslan does less. Christ seems to want us to be His hands and feet in the world and helping out instead of being helped."

"The biblical parallels are not as clear in Prince Caspian, but the thread that runs through Caspian and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is that the selfish life leads ultimately to destruction. But the virtuous life lived for others is quite an adventure."

Despite the subtleties, Ted Baehr, publisher of Movie Guide and , predicts the film will be another box-office winner in contrast to The Golden Compass, an anti-Narnia book-turned-movie by Philip Pullman released late last year. Compass, a fantasy that glorified adolescent rebellion and encouraged children to get in touch with their inner "daemon," bombed at the box office, earning \$68.4 million domestically. It pulled in \$245.7 million overseas, but its \$314.1 million total was

still below projections.

“Every year, movies with good triumphing over evil win at the box office,” Baehr says. “The average person has a tough life, and they want good to triumph over evil. The top 25 films where good triumphs over evil average \$182 million in profits, and those that mention Jesus average \$200 million.”

With Caspian, he adds: “The faith angle is more explicit. Caspian is more of an apostle Paul type of story.”

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A return to true faith

The creators of Prince Caspian felt compelled to keep the classic Christian book true to C.S. Lewis’ literary vision.
By Clive Price

For Douglas Gresham, stepson of C.S. Lewis, the fact that film No. 2 of the Narnia chronicles is about to hit the big screen is an unfolding revelation. “I’m slowly watching a lifelong dream come true,” he told Charisma from his home on the European island of Malta.

“I started thinking about making movies, about the Narnia chronicles when I was in my early teens,” says Gresham, co-producer of Prince Caspian. “Now I’m in my early 60s. That’s a lot of years!”

The latest adventure is “not quite as blatant” in its spiritual content as the first film, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which took theaters by storm in 2005 and had a strong Christian message. “Prince Caspian is about a return to true honor and true faith after centuries of corruption,” Gresham says.

The first film earned \$742 million in its worldwide theatrical release and scooped numerous awards. Wide, sweeping landscapes were punctuated with colorful creatures straight out of Lewis’ story.

“Prince Caspian also has this strange and wondrous magic about it,” Gresham says, “which is all part of Narnia.” Lewis blended mythologies of various cultures—including the wild and wonderful Celtic folklore of his own homeland Ireland—to create a rich backdrop.

“Myth was something he felt was important,” Gresham says. “People in today’s world use myth as if it were lies. Myths were ancient man’s blind gropings for God.” Prince Caspian faithfully carries on that Lewis tradition.

Gresham was brought up on the Narnia stories. Now he works for the C.S. Lewis Co., and was co-producer on *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. “I feel I have inherited a somewhat sacred responsibility,” he says.

Gresham is already involved in preproduction on *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and *The Screwtape Letters*.

Education—as well as edification—is another aim of the Narnia films. “The movies stimulate children to read the books. There

isn't anything better you can do for a child than to stimulate their interest in reading," says Gresham, who has five children and nine grandchildren.

Englishman Ben Barnes, the actor chosen to play the part of Caspian, was just 8 when he read Lewis' classic stories for the first time. He went on to study *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* during his university years—where children's literature was an emphasis of his studies.

"I was such a big fan of the books. ... It's a little boy's dream that rapidly became the dream of a man in his mid-20s," he explains.

His character does go through a crisis of faith as part of the action, but the film does not resonate with any Christian background in Barnes' life. "I wasn't raised with any particular affiliation," he says. But he believes the story's values can still touch people deeply.

Producer Mark Johnson read the stories in his early 20s and wanted to be true to Lewis' vision. But the story had to be restructured, as it's told in flashback in the book.

"One of the real strengths of the chronicles is that each book is so different from the one that preceded it and the one that follows it," Johnson says. "It's not like making a version of the same film, or even a sequel. Some of the themes are still very much manifest—but there are also a lot of very new ones."

Johnson—who worked on *Rain Man* and other films—believes the themes of *Prince Caspian* are "open to many interpretations." He has what he calls a "very private" faith but thinks faith

is a key aspect of the story.

Perseverance and optimism are also significant elements. “It’s so much about what you can overcome,” he says. “It’s about questioning faith and regaining it—not necessarily a religious faith, but that’s a way anybody can read it.”

Johnson is concerned that filmmakers and theatergoers alike capture the sense of wonder that Lewis promoted through his writings.

“We go [to a movie] for the most primal and romantic urges,” he says. “We want to be told a story, we want something to believe in—and we want to be in awe.”

Clive Price is a writer based in England and a regular contributor to Charisma. He loves all things Irish and is a student of Celtic Christian history.

C.S. Lewis: In His Own Words

In author C.S. Lewis’ own words, here are the themes he gave his seven books of the Narnia chronicles:

The Magician’s Nephew: “Creation and how evil entered Narnia”

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe: “Crucifixion and Resurrection”

Prince Caspian: "Restoration of the true religion after a corruption"

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader: "The spiritual life, especially in the person of (the mouse-hero) Reepicheep"

The Silver Chair: "Continued war against the powers of darkness"

The Horse and His Boy: "Calling and conversion of a heathen"

The Last Battle: "The Antichrist, the end of the world and the Last Judgment"

Source: A letter to Anne Jenkins, March 5, 1961; from C.S. Lewis: A Biography by Walter Hooper and Roger Lancelyn Green (Harcourt, Brace 1994)