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## **The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle - A Dispensational Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The *Last Battle*, as the last book in the series of The Chronicles of Narnia, is an account of the final days and moments of the land of Narnia, the kingdom where Aslan the Lion reigns sovereign with steadfast justice and righteousness. Immersed in this setting is the parallelism with the biblical account of the last days of the world as registered in the book of Revelation in the New Testament. Even deeper, however, lies the resemblance that the story possesses with the dispensation of *Kingdom*, proposed by C. I. Scofield, a doctrinal theory which states that biblical and human history are divided into periods of time when God acts in a certain specific way, offering a plan of good to mankind and in the end bringing about His wrath and judgment when man would not comply with His divine commandments. The seventh and last dispensation in the Narnia series is *Kingdom*. It is also the end of Narnia as we know it, and the inauguration of the New Narnia, parallel to the New Heaven and New Earth.

**Keywords:** story, dispensation, kingdom, deception, battle, last days.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Last Battle (TLB) is the last story in the Chronicles of Narnia series and it is also a representation of C. I. Scofield's last dispensation, Kingdom—also known as the Millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Both the story and the dispensation have to do with future events as they contain numerous apocalyptic elements that give them a particular futuristic character. The story is about the last battle fought by Tirian, the last King of Narnia, against the forces of evil and darkness that run rampant in the last days of Narnia. In the dispensation of Kingdom, the last battle to be fought will be the battle of Armageddon, the final supreme conflict of the ages, according to what the New Testament states especially in the book of Revelation 16:16.

Interestingly, however, in the story and in the dispensation this last battle is not the last event to take place, but rather the distinctive mark of a new beginning. For Lewis it is a New Narnia, and for the New Testament it is new heavens and a new earth. This is testified by the apostle John when he says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no more sea," in Revelation 21:1. In both Narnia and the New Testament, then, the element of newness is present as an integral part of the narrative. A new era is inaugurated in both instances, one in which there is ample evidence for us to understand that it is a time of peace and contentment, and utter fulfillment of the prophecies.

It is the aim of this study is to prove that *The Last Battle* is equivalent to the dispensation of *Kingdom*, proposed by C. I. Scofield, given their striking contrasts and outstanding similarities that bring together the Narnia story and the dispensation of Kingdom in a special and remarkable way.

### **2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE NARRATIVE**

An outstanding aspect of the end times, according to biblical prophecy, is the fact that there will be people who will try to deceive the children of God into believing the lie. That deception will be carried out in such a way that it will create great disturbance and chaos. It will modify the whole world that will act in accordance with that lie. In the last days, as Matthew 24:24 states, "... there shall arise false christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." The depth and scope of the lie and deception constitute key elements in Narnia's Last Battle as well as in the Biblical account, as registered in the prophetic books and the book of Revelation in the Bible. The lie and deception are extraordinary in their magnitude and influence.

Deception then will be at the very epicenter of world conflict and chaos. In the Narnia story this deception is embodied in Shift, a very old Ape who inhabits Narnia in the last days. According to Lewis, Shift is “the cleverest, ugliest, most wrinkled Ape you can imagine” (TLB, 1). Shift wraps a lion skin around the body of his friend Puzzle, a nice honest Donkey who is easily intimidated and ordered about by Shift into doing the Ape’s bidding. In this manner the Ape uses the donkey to delude the creatures of Narnia into believing that Aslan the Great Lion, the King of Narnia, has returned. It is under this chaotic circumstance that the story finds its beginning. The narrative starts to unfold based on profound deception, the kind that has the potential of insidiously bringing about the total overturn and demise of a kingdom, in the story, and the apocalyptic end of human civilization in the dispensation.

Shift the Ape shows Puzzle in his lion disguise to the Narnians only at night so that they will not be able to notice that he is not really Aslan the Lion. During the day the Donkey with the lion skin is kept locked at a stable. Soon the Ape proclaims himself as the “Lord Shift, the Mouthpiece of Aslan” (TLB, 34) and all Narnians believe this to be true and accept it, nonetheless being an odd way for the Lion to present itself. The Ape then begins to require more and more of the Talking Animals of Narnia. He demands bigger nuts from the Squirrels, for instance, “and there mustn’t be any bad ones or any small ones among them” (TLB, 35). The squirrels, finding the situation very odd, since Aslan would have never acted in this strange way, ask Shift to let them speak to Aslan about this matter, if they might be allowed to see him.

“Well you won’t,” said the Ape. “He may be very kind (though it’s a lot more than most of you deserve) and come out for a few minutes tonight. Then you can all have a look at him. But he will not have you all crowding round him and pestering him with questions. Anything you want to say to him will be passed on through me: if I think it’s worth bothering him about. In the meantime all you squirrels had better go and see about the nuts. And make sure they are here by tomorrow evening or, my word! You’ll catch it” (TLB, 35-36).

This of course puts a hard strain on the squirrels which have never in their entire lives had anything like this happen to them. They have always been free and happy in the land of Narnia, as Aslan had established from the beginning of time. But little by little first and then openly the Ape brings out to light his scheme of deception in Narnia. When a Boar points out that Aslan “used to appear in Narnia in the old days everyone could talk to him face to face,” he receives the following words as an answer:

“Don’t you believe it,” said the Ape. “And even if it was true, times have changed. Aslan says he’s been far too soft with you before, do you see? Well, he isn’t going to be soft anymore. He’s going to lick you into shape this time. He’ll teach you to think he’s a tame lion!” (TLB, 36).

Shift is confident in himself to the point that he starts speaking more and more compromising things on behalf of Aslan. His deception goes deeper and gets to be more confusing to the Narnians. Times have certainly changed in Narnia. The nature of Shift’s deception now begins to tread very dangerous terrain.

“And now there’s another thing you got to learn,” said the Ape. “I hear some of you are saying I’m an Ape. Well, I’m not. I’m a Man. If I look like an Ape, that’s because I’m so very old: hundreds and hundreds of years old. And it’s because I’m so old that I’m so wise. And it’s because I’m so wise that I’m the only one Aslan is ever going to speak to. He can’t be bothered talking to a lot of stupid animals. He’ll tell me what you’ve got to do, and I’ll tell the rest of you. And take my advice, and see you do it in double quick time, for he doesn’t mean to stand any nonsense” (TLB, 37).

Shift has started to really like and enjoy the feeling of being in control. His new position and status give him the chance to openly manipulate the animals around. The situation also gets worse and worse as he goes on sinking deeper under the weight of his own lies and deception. Now he is not even an Ape anymore, he is a Man! And men are the only ones that can be kings in Narnia! Besides that, Talking Animals are not made to work like regular animals. They are Aslan’s special creation. But Shift puts the Talking Horses to work for the Calormenes, the inhabitants of Calormene. Those Calormenes start to cut down timber, the living trees, something no one would have ever done in the land of Narnia. Yet Shift in connivance with the Calormenes does so, all for the financial gain and no more.

“And now here’s another thing,” the Ape went on, fitting a fresh nut into its cheek, “I hear some of the horses are saying, Let’s hurry up and get this job of cutting timber over as quickly as we can, and then we’ll be free again. Well, you can get that idea out of your heads at once. And not only the Horses either. Everybody who can work is going to be made to work in future.

Aslan has it all settled with the king of Calormen—the Tisroc, as our dark faced friends the Calormenes call him. All you Horses and Bulls and Donkeys are to be sent down into Calormen to work for your living—pulling and carrying the way Horses and such-like do in other countries. And all you digging animals like Moles and Rabbits and Dwarfs are going down to work in The Tisroc’s mines. And—” (TLB, 37-38).

The deception is now growing and spreading to all of Narnia. It is deeply spiritual but it is now incorporating in the social and economic realms as well. A terrible fact related to Shift’s doings is that he has also betrayed Narnians by inviting the Calormenes—an old culture of people very different from Narnians—to begin infiltrating Narnia (Schakel, 104). Besides that, the Ape is also subjecting the Talking Animals into forced labor, something utterly against the nature of Aslan. It was never contemplated in His plans that Talking Animals should be put in a situation of being forced to work for free for people who were not precisely friends of Narnia. That is why they claim,

“No, no, no,” howled the Beasts. “It can’t be true. Aslan would never sell us into slavery to the king of Calormen.”

“None of that! Hold your noise!” said the Ape with a snarl. “Who said anything about slavery? You won’t be slaves. You’ll be paid—very good wages too. That is to say, your pay will be paid into Aslan’s treasury and he will use it all for everybody’s good” (TLB, 38).

When a Talking Bear complains and says they do not want the things Shift is proposing and say they just want to be free and hear Aslan himself speak,

“Now don’t start arguing,” said the Ape, “for it’s a thing I won’t stand. I’m a Man: you’re only a fat, stupid old Bear. What do you know about freedom? You think freedom means doing what you like. Well, you’re wrong. That isn’t true freedom. True freedom means doing what I tell you” (TLB, 39).

Of all the words Shift has spoken so far, the deceit is manifested at its utmost when a young lamb speaks to the Ape.

“Please,” said the Lamb. “I can’t understand. What have we to do with the Calormenes? We belong to Aslan. They belong to Tash. They have a god called Tash. They say he has four arms and the head of a vulture. They kill Men on his altar. I don’t believe there’s such a person as Tash. But if there was, how could Aslan be friends with him...?”

The Ape jumped up and spat on the Lamb... “Tash is only another name for Aslan. All that old idea of us being right and the Calormenes wrong is silly. We know better now. The Calormenes use different words but we all mean the same thing. Tash and Aslan are only two different names for you know Who. That’s why there can never be any quarrel between them. Get that into your heads, you stupid brutes. Tash is Aslan: Aslan is Tash (TLB, 40).

The spiritual deception has reached its climax now. The Talking Animals understand that at this stage they are at the total mercy of the Mouthpiece of Aslan, who is not just Aslan any longer, but Tashlan (TLB, 126), the name fusion of two opposing forces, evil and good. Tash is the evil god of the Calormenes and Aslan is the good King of Narnia, the parallel figure to Jesus Christ in the Bible. The Narnians have no way of knowing that this new reality is not true. The lie has fulfilled its objective—it ends up being believed as the truth. This is Shift’s spiritual, mental, and emotional malicious manipulation and efforts orchestrated to disrupt all normal order in Narnia. This is beyond darkness and treachery, and all for the personal material gain of Shift and the Calormene Chief.

### 3. CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES

In the dispensation of *Kingdom*, the warning about deception is emphatic and steadfast. That form of deception will be out of control for people in the end times. The Bible warns Christians about the authorities that will rule the world and the way those people will try to deceive the inhabitants of the earth. They will use subtle words, changing the truth into lies and getting people to act and do as they are told. The apostle Paul writes about the difficult end times and warns believers of the dangers that would surface as a result of lies. He begs them to stand fast in all things he had taught them before.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as if from us that the Day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means, for that Day shall not come, unless there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sitteth as God in the temple of God, showing himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

In this dispensation of Kingdom deception and deceit will be incarnated in the Anti-Christ, the person who, like Shift, will completely take the world by storm the way the Ape takes Narnia, and will install his own kingdom of control and dominion. He will openly oppose God and everything to do with Jesus Christ. The Anti-Christ is a powerful figure that will bring under his authority a world government, a new world order. The Old Testament contains numerous references to the end times, especially in the book of Daniel and of the prophets. There are many references of the reign of the Anti-Christ in the New Testament as well. As it has been seen so far, deception is a key factor that both the dispensation of Kingdom and The Last Battle have in common. They share the apocalyptic element.

Moreover, a very significant detail that can be found in the story is the appearance of evil by means of an “evil trinity.” This demonic entity is the exact opposite to the Holy Trinity, which is made up of the God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Bible and consequently in the dispensation of Kingdom. The satanic trinity, as Christians commonly refer to, is the association or coming together of three demonic figures that will take an active part in world events in the last days. This trinity is made up of the Anti-Christ, the Beast, and the False Prophet (Revelation 13; 19:20), the three empowered by Satan himself to provoke God and His divine plans (2 Thessalonians 2:9) in Bible prophecy.

In The Last Battle the evil trinity corresponding to the Bible satanic trinity is the trio formed by Shift the Ape, RishdaTarkaan the Calormene warrior and Ginger the Cat. These three join forces in order to disestablish Narnia from the core. They begin creating spiritual confusion by changing the nature of reality and truth and end up creating such upheaval and chaos that there is no apparent possible solution. These three characters twist everything Narnians believe in. Thus, in the end, confusion makes them accept the lies that are so well orchestrated by this demonic trio. All three of them, however, find their tragic end in the hands of the demonic god whom they invoke —Tash, the unpleasant four-armed evil vulture-like god, who appears to prove that he is real.

What the three have seen they in the end reap. Ginger the Cat is changed into a dumb beast and no one ever sees him again after he is terrorized by the god Tash. The monster god Tash unexpectedly appears when he is called by the CalormeneRishdaTarkaan. Shift is swallowed by Tash and the Tarkaan is taken by the evil god to his kingdom of terror. Similarly, the Anti-Christ, the Beast, and the False Prophet will be utterly condemned by the victorious King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will be destroyed forever. The apostle Paul refers to the way Jesus Christ will destroy the Anti-Christ in the following terms:

“And then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming-- even him, whose coming is according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all the deceit of unrighteousness in those who perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10).

In the Bible the Anti-Christ, the Beast and the False Prophet will lead the world to somewhat similar circumstances as the “evil trinity” of Narnia. The forces of evil will operate on every level and the result will be, like in the story, complete confusion and change of the nature of the reality of things. As registered in the New Testament, the apostle John says in the book of Revelation:

“And I stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw that one of his heads was, as it were, wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed. And the world wondered after the beast. And they worshiped the dragon which gave power unto the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” And there was given unto him a mouth, speaking great things and blasphemies, and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in Heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:1-7).

Shift the Ape especially is portrayed as the one who blasphemed against Aslan to the point of likening Him to the evil Calormene god Tash, in whose honor Calormenes offered human sacrifices on his altar. The confusion that Shift plants in all faithful followers of Aslan brings about a chaotic state in Narnia. In regards to the final times, the Bible talks about the authorities that will rule the world and the way those characters will try to deceive millions with the subtle use of their words, changing the truth into lies and getting people to believe the lie and to embrace it. The people of the world will have to act and do as they are told, or else there is only death awaiting them. Just like Shift, Ginger, and the RishdaTarkaan ended up finding in Narnia.

These two approaches of the The Last Battle and the dispensation of Kingdom is a parallel reality to George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. This is the social science-fiction novel written in 1948, about the totalitarian regime of the Party, an oligarchical collectivist society in which life is a world of perpetual control and war, pervasive government surveillance, public mind control, and the voiding of citizens’ rights<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, the world of those times will be governed through deception and falsehood too. People will grow accustomed to believing lies, calling what is good evil, and calling evil good, as is registered in the book of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 5:20. A forced question under these circumstances can be “How can humanity be based and sustained in lies and deception? It is hard to understand, but apparently very possible.

There is yet another aspect that brings the dispensation of Kingdom and The Last Battle close together in a significant relationship. It is the fact that there comes a specific moment when Jesus Christ and Aslan, in perfect fairness, exercise their ultimate righteousness when they let the “just” into the New Narnia and the new heavens and new earth. Jesus says, for instance, in the gospel of Matthew,

“When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:31-34).

In regards to Aslan, He does the same with the millions of millions of living beings that come before Him. To the ones that look at Him with fear and hatred, “And all the creatures who looked at Aslan in that way swerved to their right, his left, and disappeared into his huge black shadow, which (as you have heard) streamed away to the left of the doorway. The children never saw them again” (TLB, 193). Matthew 25:41 finishes the subject saying that “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” Aslan also proceeds to deal with the just ones before Him. “But the others looked in the face of Aslan and loved him, though some of them were very frightened at the same time. And all these came in at the Door, in on Aslan’s right” (TLB, 193).

There is a joyful moment when Aslan calls Puzzle the Donkey, who is very ashamed of finally meeting Aslan after the disastrous end that came to Narnia as a result of his being dressed as a lion, and presented to the Talking Animals as Aslan himself. “The Lion bowed down his head and whispered something to Puzzle at which his long ears went down, but then he said something else at which the ears perked up again” (227). Puzzle has been forgiven. He never meant to take Aslan’s place, anyway. It was all thought of and made up by Shift the Ape. In the end the whole scheme fails utterly and Shift comes to his demise. He, as the proverbial saying goes, reaped what he sowed.

#### **4. THE NEW NARNIA AND THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH**

Once Jesus Christ and Aslan have gathered to themselves all the ones that were His real children, the new time begins. This is now the New Narnia, and the New Kingdom of Heaven. The apostle Peter refers to this topic and says “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

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<sup>1</sup>George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, <http://www.overlockers.co.uk>

That time is still to come for the ones that believe in Jesus Christ, the Conqueror who rose from the dead. In Narnia, however, the night has fallen with the dying of the sun, the waters have covered everything, and the door has been shut and locked by Peter the high King with a gold key. A new time has begun and it is now the New Narnia.

The time has now come for the total enjoyment of the new things. The Old Narnia is just a shadow of better things which are finally real. This is the time of harvesting what has been sown before. Jill admits that “Our world is going to have an end some day. Perhaps this one won’t” (TLB, 110), referring to Narnia, to which Jewel the Unicorn responds that “all worlds draw to an end, except Aslan’s own country” (TLB, 111). The New Narnia is Aslan’s country, the place where Digory and Polly had flown to once in The Magician’s Nephew, mounting on a Flying Horse to the Garden with a gold gate. This is the ultimate consummation of the times and the beginning of a new reality, a new dimension of life, eternal life.

In the dispensation of Kingdom this new time is what the Bible calls “eternity,” the time when Christ will reign forever with perfect justice. Lewis describes that New Narnia as a country in which “they all lived happily ever after” (TLB, 228).

“And as he spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning 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” (228).

The same dimension can be perceived in the writings of Revelation in the Bible, in which there are also new things that will be much better than they were in the past. God “will make all things new” (Revelation 21:5a) is the promise that will be literally fulfilled at the right time. The apostle John, wrote, for instance,

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.’ And He that sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said unto me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’ And He said unto me, ‘It is done! I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the Water of Life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son’” (Revelation 21:1-7).

The Last Battle and the Dispensation of Kingdom contain an element of finality manifested by the creation of “new things” that will be enjoyed and celebrated forever when everything is finished. As Lewis would say, in a way that resonates high with children “The term is over: The holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning” (TLB, 228). A new day has dawned in Narnia, and in the New Testament the new day is still to be dawned. It will be a morning in which things will be put to right with justice and mercy. Christ the Lord will ultimately gather to Him all the ones who believed in Him, obeyed Him and loved Him during their life on earth.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The story of The Last Battle and the dispensation of Kingdom have to do with future apocalyptic events. Both settings are characterized by profound deception and lying that subvert the system in Narnia and on earth in the final days. That deception and lying, however, are completely destroyed at the final moment by truth and everything that truth stands for —righteousness and mercy, grace and love. All these special attributes will be enjoyed forever in the New Narnia of the Chronicles, and in the new heavens and new earth of the New Testament. The correspondence of this last story in the Chronicles to that of the dispensation of Kingdom and is undeniable because of the elements that bring them together.

This approach by C. S. Lewis of setting *The Last Battle* inside the frame of reference of the Kingdom dispensation is undoubtedly a novel model of doing literature. This would be similar to writing a piece of literature setting it in any past moment of human history taking into account the events occurring at that specific time and adapting the present work inside those past events. In this particular case, however, what distinguishes *The Last Battle* is the fact that the story is set in a model of futuristic or apocalyptic literary style. The differences and similarities that *The Last Battle* share with the dispensation of Kingdom, as seen from the book of Revelation in the New Testament, are the elements that highly enrich the story. *The Last Battle* in Narnia corresponds to the dispensation of Kingdom.

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