

Notes on the Psalms of Ascent and C.S. Lewis' *The Horse and His Boy*

from John & Dyann Eglestons' Cedar Campus Work Crew family group, June-August 2005

Each week one of us reads aloud a chapter of this volume from the Chronicles of Narnia. Then, as the children are put to bed, we get to know one another better over a snack. Manuscript-style study of these psalms leads to prayer for each other's journeys at and beyond Cedar Campus. And to observations about shared themes, motifs or even wording between the two bodies of literature.

Did Jack Lewis have these psalms in mind as he wrote his story for children? Perhaps the aspects noted are common to tales and songs of journey. It seems to us his familiarity with the psalms (amid much other ancient literature) inevitably influenced his storytelling. He wrote the *Chronicles* as "supposals" rather than allegories, but the overlapping aspects deepened our appreciation for both the human and divine authors.

Ch. 1 "How Shasta Set Out on His Travels" / Ps 120 (repentance*): Going north as he had always longed to do, Shasta begins his escape from an abusive living situation after discovering he'd been deceived by his so-called father. "Save me, Lord, / from lying lips / and from deceitful tongues..." (v. 2). "Too long have I lived / among those who hate peace" (v. 6). United by their foreign identities and the opportunity to make a break with bondage, Bree and Shasta start the journey toward truth and freedom.

Ch. 2 "A Wayside Adventure" / Ps 121 (providence): One night after weeks of travel, Shasta and Bree face their first scare - and suddenly a much greater one. While they and Aravis and Hwin eventually understand that the fear of lions drove them together for mutual benefit, they cannot recognize the protection of the Lion's providence. "My help comes from...the Maker of heaven and earth" (v. 2). "The LORD will keep you from all harm..." (v. 7).

Ch. 3 "At the Gates of Tashbaan" / Ps 122 (worship): "I rejoiced with those who said to me, / 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" Bree, Hwin, Aravis and Shasta are glad to be making their escape to the north, but it is an alliance of convenience and joy is still a long way off. "Our feet are standing / in your gates, Jerusalem." They are about to enter a city devoted to the worship of the god Tash and to the service of an emperor called a Tisroc...but they seek another (relatively unknown) realm and ruler.

Ch. 4 "Shasta Falls in With the Narnians" / Ps 123 (service): Shasta endures contempt at the gates of Tashbaan. He and his party meet a mercy on a high street of the city that at first it appears to be a new and mistaken mastery...

Ch. 5 "Prince Corin" / Ps 124 (help): Empires like Calormen despise and try to "swallow whole" little nearby territories - nearly a quote. The Narnians plan their escape from the trap about to close on them. And Shasta escapes the temptation to play along as Prince Corin when the real one shows up.

Ch. 6 "Shasta Among the Tombs" / Ps 125 (security): Shasta's safety amid dangers real and imagined depends on a hospitable Feline.

Ch. 7 "Aravis in Tashbaan" / Ps 126 (joy):

Ch. 8 "In the House of the Tisroc" / Ps 127 (work): The Tisroc's permission for Rabadash's military mission is based as much on the expendability of this eldest son (a danger to his approaching old age) as it is on his greed for added territories. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (v. 1a). And the protection of Anvard, tenuously dependent on the reunited traveling companions, turns out to be sufficient to fend off the surprise attack by Rabadash. "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain" (v. 1b). Shasta and King Lune come briefly face to face as a long-lost but unsuspecting son delivers the warning and greetings from his brother. "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior / are children born in one's youth" (v. 4). Having lost his wife, Lune's quiver is fuller than he knows. "They will not be put to shame / when they contend with their opponents in [the gate]" (v. 5b, literally). As the hermit tells Lion-wounded Aravis, sometimes there is nothing to be done but to rest and wait. "...For he grants sleep to those he loves" (v. 2).

So far in *The Horse and His Boy* we've noted several instances of eavesdropping: by Shasta on Arsheesh and their guest; by Shasta on the Narnians in Tashbaan; by Aravis and Lasaraleen on the Tisroc, Rabadash and Ahoshta Tarkaan in the old palace; and by Shasta on Rabadash and his troops outside Anvard. Each of these overheard conversations proves to be a crucial turning point for the plot. If Shasta had not heard his "father" preparing to sell him, there would have been no start to his journey north. If he had not learned how to navigate the desert from Sallowpad the Narnian talking raven, he would have had no reliable direction past Tashbaan. If Aravis had not heard Rabadash's plan, there would have been no urgency to their desert crossing. And Shasta's hearing Rabadash way to Anvard prompted him to take the other path, not knowing it led over the mountain to Narnia and reinforcements. Predictably, the effects of overhearing the Tisroc's secret meeting differ between Aravis - who is confirmed in her opposition to the evil laid bare - and her friend who believes might makes right. It is also instructive to compare Rabadash's ambitions with those of Shasta and Corin, the two other princes.

Ch. 9 "Across the Desert" / Ps 128 (happiness):

Ch. 10 "The Hermit of the Southern March" / Ps 129 (perseverance):

Ch. 11 "The Unwelcome Fellow Traveller" / Ps 130 (hope):

Ch. 12 "Shasta in Narnia" / Ps 131 (humility): The psalm would seem to fit more with chapter 14.

Ch. 13 "The Fight at Anvard" / Ps 132 (obedience):

Ch. 14 "How Bree Became a Wiser Horse" / Ps 133 (community):

Ch. 15 "Rabadash the Ridiculous" / Ps 134 (blessing):

*Themes from Eugene H. Peterson's exposition of these psalms in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (20th anniversary edition, InterVarsity Press, 2000). Scripture taken from the *Holy Bible, Today's New International Version*TM TNIV[®] Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society[®]. All rights reserved worldwide.