



CHAPTER 4

***RESURRECTION
AND THE RENEWAL OF
THE UNIVERSE***



MANY people claim to believe in heaven and hell, but what do their lives teach? Our beliefs are always shown in the way we live rather than the words we speak.

Moses liked to teach doctrine in action. When we read Moses we have to look at how the people lived and the events that happened to them if we are to grasp the truth that is being taught.

When we read about Abraham we can clearly see his resurrection hope by the way he lived. Lot was much more confused. Abraham knew that investing in cities that had no future was a waste of time and energy. He wanted to bear witness to the great hope he had in Christ: the hope of a new creation, a heavenly home, a city with permanent, everlasting foundations made by the living God Himself.



A foundational choice

The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your seed I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. (Gen. 12:1-8)

Abram was told to leave everything that he had known and go to an unidentified destination. Right away he had to make a choice. The LORD had appeared before his very eyes and called him into a divine, but unseen future. On the other hand, he could settle for the seen, tangible, earthly situation he had right then. Given all the possessions and people with him we can well imagine he had a sizable stake in Ur of the Chaldees.

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Joshua tells us that he was part of a pagan family with all the hopes and dreams, practices and rituals of such religion:

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshipped other gods.' (Josh. 24:2)

The LORD who appeared to him promised Abram a very different future. Through him the whole earth would be blessed. He was told that the Messiah Himself, the Promised Seed, would be his descendant and the destiny of everybody in the world would be determined by Him.

Like Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob saw Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27).

They saw **everything** in a different way because they saw Him.

What did he set his mind and heart on?

What did Abram long for? What did he set his heart and mind on? Abram longed to see the day of Jesus Christ. He did see it and he was glad (John 8:56). In Genesis 15, the Word of the LORD showed Abram the night sky and promised that He Himself would be Abram's very great reward.

Abram rejected his earthly, passing home in favour of a heavenly, new creation home that Christ the LORD had promised him. He did find a new earthly home in the land of Palestine. He found a place to pitch his tent and moved about, like his sons and grandsons, in the place the LORD had guided him towards. But the very fact that Abraham,

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Isaac and Jacob continued to live in their tents rather than building houses and cities proved they were determined not to focus on this passing age.

When faced with the possibility of urban living in Palestine (Gen. 13:18), 'Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.'

If all they wanted was a stable, solid earthly home they could easily have travelled back to Ur of the Chaldees and lived a prosperous life in the up-and-coming Babylonian superpower.

They knew the LORD had brought them to that promised land, not to find a final home but so they could know Him and be part of His great everlasting future.

Living in tents in that way must have been a difficult choice when they had the resources to put down substantial roots for the remaining years of their mortal life. Yet, they were looking for a true, everlasting home: a city with foundations, built by God Himself.

Looking for a literal resurrection

They were utterly captivated by their resurrection hope. They knew the physical bodies they had in this passing age would be literally resurrected to everlasting life right here in a renewed earth.

It is vital to see how serious they were about burying their bodies. They wanted to make sure they were buried in the very land that the Seed Himself would be born in. They wanted to bear witness to the sure and certain hope that they had in Christ's resurrection.

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The whole of Genesis 23 is taken up with finding a place to bury Sarah in the promised land. After a hugely entertaining negotiation process:

Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site. (Gen. 23:19-20)

Notice that Abraham buried Sarah near to Mamre where he had camped for so long and where they had enjoyed that meal with the LORD back in Genesis 18. He wanted Sarah's body to be buried in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

Is death the end of the story?

The pagan and atheistic mindset says that once our bodies have died, that is the end of the story. They genuinely believe there is no possible future for this flesh and bone once death has taken hold. But Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph go to great lengths to proclaim that these bodies are to be taken seriously – even after death.

Of course bodies turn back to dust, whether slowly in the ground or rapidly in fire, but the way the Christian regards those remains is quite different. For us, those bodies will all be called back, re-formed by the God of resurrection. In so many ways we want to mark the places where we bury our loved ones – with gravestones, with plaques on the wall, with memorials, with trees planted at the spot. We want the world to know, and to remind ourselves, that these bodies are not finished – they will be required again.

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In Genesis 25 Isaac and Ishmael ensure Abraham is buried in the same way, making the same statement of resurrection hope:

Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. (Gen. 25:7-10)

If the Bible was concerned only with ‘the immortality of the soul’ – with our living on in some ghostly form in heaven – all this concern with burying bodies would seem very strange. Why be interested at all in a dead, decaying lump of flesh, unless the body has a definite future?

It is the extraordinary good news of Jesus that stands over the bodies of the saints insisting that one day the body will be reconstituted and live on forever and ever. When we trust Jesus the way we look at our bodies is changed. As we look at our hands and feet, as we stare into the mirror and see that body through the years, we know that it will one day be transformed to glorious resurrection perfection and it will never again see decay.

The great burials of Genesis

In Genesis 35:8 Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, dies and she too is buried, this time at the oak tree near to Bethel. In Genesis 35:16-20 Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin and is buried

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at Bethlehem. Each of these great saints was buried at a place of great significance, as if they wanted to be raised on the last day right where all the action had taken place!

When Abel was murdered by Cain we are told that his blood cried out from the ground (Gen. 4:10).

These saints also wanted their bodies to testify to the resurrection even after they had left them behind.

In Hebrews 11, in the gallery of the faithful saints, Jacob does not get much mention but one of the two things singled out for him is the way that he made his burial arrangements:

Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.' 'I will do as you say,' he said. 'Swear to me,' he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff. (Gen. 47:28-31)

Jacob wanted to make sure that his body was in the promised land, buried in the place where the Promised Saviour would be born and minister, in the place he wanted to wake on resurrection morning.

His burial is a major event at the end of Genesis, running from Genesis 49:29 right through to 50:14. The whole senior government of Egypt is involved as his mummified body is taken, with great solemnity, to the burial plot near Mamre

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which Abraham spent the whole of Genesis chapter 23 buying. We can well imagine the words that Joseph spoke as they finally buried Jacob:

Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit His body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself.¹

The final verse of Genesis is a verse full of gospel hope and faith, a proclamation of resurrection hope. It is a testimony that this story has much more to come:

So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.
(Gen. 50:26)

Moses' mysterious burial

The burial of Moses himself is perhaps the most mysterious and incredible of all. If we think that all these burial concerns were just the cultural obsessions of some ancient people and do not have quite so much theological depth to them, then the burial of Moses turns us upside down:

Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed

1. From the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England.

him the whole land – from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, ‘This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, “I will give it to your descendants.” I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.’ And **Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is.** Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over. (Deut. 34:1-8)

The LORD was so concerned about the burial arrangements of His people that He buried Moses Himself! It is hard to imagine a greater affirmation of the importance of burying a body.

Other resurrection signposts

In the long litany of death in Genesis 5, Enoch was set up as a sign that death does not have to be the final word over the human body. In Genesis 5:3 we are told that Adam had a son in his own image and likeness. Tragically Adam’s own sin and death were also in that son. Each section ends in the same relentless way: ‘and then he died.’ Yet when we come to verse 21 the reign of death is interrupted and challenged:



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When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. (Gen. 5:21-24)

We know that Enoch himself was straining forward to that last day when Jesus returns in great glory to judge the world and apply His resurrection to the whole world:

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’ (Jude 14-15)

Enoch was taken away to that highest heaven, preserved as a statement that death would be defeated by the Coming LORD. It is amazing to think that there are at least two people in the highest heaven who were born as mortal, sinful human beings like us, whose bodies knew the suffering and decay that we experience – but who did not experience death. We will consider Elijah later!

In Deuteronomy 29:5 we are told that during the 40 years of wandering through the desert the clothes and shoes of the entire church community were immune from decay. It was a miraculous testimony to the life we will live in our resurrection future: a new creation freed from the bondage to decay, a future where things really do last forever.



Leviticus ends with this glorious vision of a world filled with the holiness and glory of God. All the way through the book we see how there was just a tiny space in the tabernacle that was defined as holy, the place where the LORD's presence was found. But in Leviticus 27 we are shown a vision of the church family dedicating fields, houses, animals and people to the LORD. It is as if the holiness of the tabernacle, the glorious presence of the LORD Himself, spills out and spreads across the world. (Remember that in Leviticus in the presence of the LORD there is no death or disease, no decay or sin).

The book ends with this yearning for that day of resurrection when the presence of the LORD will flood the whole world and 'cure' or cleanse the world of death, disease, decay and sin – forever.

The day of atonement

However, perhaps the most intense expression of this resurrection hope, the hope of a new heavens and a new earth, comes in Leviticus 16 – with the day of atonement:

Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. He is to take some of the bull's blood and

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with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover. He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. No-one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel. (Lev. 16:11-17)

A radical overhaul!

Jesus Christ is nothing less than the logic and life of the universe and as such will not have any half-baked or temporary solutions to its problems.

He did not come to merely postpone death or provide some temporary comfort in the difficulties of this passing age. His great mission is to bring about such a profound revolution that there will be no death at all; a universe in which nobody needs comforting because there simply isn't any death, pain, sorrow or crying.

The radical revolution of Jesus begins right now and changes our living right here and now but it is geared towards the complete overthrow of this present order: a revolution that changes the character of existence itself across the whole universe.

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In one sense we could say that Jesus wants to tear up the laws of nature and write new ones.

A property dealer in London was selling an old warehouse. The property had been badly vandalised and had clearly been used as a squat. There was graffiti on the walls; the windows were broken; paint on the walls was discoloured and peeling; pools of dubious and dark liquids gathered suspiciously on the ground floor.

The property dealer, showing a prospective buyer around, was clearly very embarrassed. Trying to stand in a such a way that he was blocking the buyer's view of the very worst of the mess, he said, 'Look, I'm going to get someone in to fix the windows and give the place a lick of paint... and maybe someone could come and...'

The buyer interrupted him. 'Don't bother with any of that! I'm going to gut the whole lot and make it new.'

Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, the omnipotent Logos, has very grand plans for His inheritance. He is not in the business of patching up. He deals with resurrection and new creation rather than superficial makeovers!

When Jesus lived among us, He told us in all His words and actions that He was capable and determined to abolish this present darkness and bring about a renewed creation from which all our enemies are evicted.

He showed us that death, disease, demons and decay were all under His complete control. He could abolish them with a word. The chaos and darkness He originally dealt with at creation was proof. He showed that He alone was capable of throwing out the chaos, darkness and death and shutting them out for ever and ever.



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His mission is to not merely **improve** but to fundamentally change the whole of reality, from top to bottom.

But how?

Even assuming that God the Son has all the power and competence to accomplish such a mission impossible, just how is this to be done?

With that property developer we know he would need to gain legal ownership of the land and planning permission from the local authority. He would need to employ a team to obliterate the warehouse and get in architects and builders to construct something new. We understand the process. We can see what needs to be done to bring about a mini-revolution for an old warehouse.

But, what about the universe as a whole? **How** can the owner of the universe bring about such a purification and redevelopment of the heavens and the earth?

What needs to be done? What is the method of cosmic re-birth?

Everything planned in detail – in advance

Let's spend some time thinking through the most thorough explanation of all that the Son of God was going to do – Leviticus 16.

Everything that Jesus did after He became flesh was planned for and described in detail in advance in the Law. His work as the anointed King, Prophet and Priest was laid down and explained carefully so that it would be clearly understood both by Himself and the rest of us.



The two rooms of the tabernacle

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb. 9:11-12)

If we were to read these words without any knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures we might well feel a little ignorant. However, having come fresh from Leviticus 16 our minds are full of the background to what Hebrews 9 is talking about.

The tabernacle was the tent-structure that was the centre, geographically and socially and spiritually, of the ancient church in the Old Testament. The tabernacle was a simple structure that had two rooms: the larger Holy Place and the smaller Most Holy Place.

The smaller Most Holy Place contained the Ark of the Covenant (made famous for most people by Indiana Jones). The LORD sat enthroned on this Ark of the Covenant. That inner room was utterly inaccessible, utterly forbidden for any normal person. In fact, it was completely out of bounds for even the priests who constantly worked at the tabernacle.

Only the High Priest can enter

Only the High Priest was allowed into this inner room and then only once a year on the special day described in Leviticus 16 – the day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*.



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The inner room, the Holiest of Holies, was a small cube-shaped room with the Ark of the Covenant in it. It represented heaven, the throne room of the universe.

This is of deep importance if we are to understand the ascension of Jesus. The LORD gave this 3-D representation of the structure of the universe precisely so that we would be able to understand all that God the Son was going to do.

So, on just that one special day of the year the High Priest would symbolically go into heaven in order to make atonement:

He (the High Priest) shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.
(Lev. 16:15-17)

Waiting...

The high priest would symbolically go into heaven on that special day... perform his work of atonement for the tabernacle itself... and then everybody waited for him to come out again.





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Did you notice that? No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel (Lev. 16:17).

None of the priests were allowed into even the outer room while the High Priest was in the inner room. When the High Priest was doing his priestly work in the Most Holy Place **no other priestly work was permitted**. The whole assembly of Israel simply had to wait, offering no sacrifices of their own, attempting no priestly work of their own.

They waited for him to emerge again.

Jesus takes His own blood into heaven for us

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb. 9:11-12)

Jesus the divine High Priest took His own blood into heaven. He has gone in, through the curtain to the 'inner room' of the creation, into heaven. That is what happened at the ascension of Jesus.

In the symbolic day of atonement the High Priest would re-emerge from the inner room after a fairly short time. But we are still waiting for the real, divine High Priest to emerge from the real inner room, heaven itself.





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Our great High Priest, the one who represents us all, the one who embodies the whole creation, has gone into the Most Holy Place, the throne room of heaven and we are waiting for Him to come back out.

While we are waiting for Him, we need to keep Leviticus 16:17 in mind. There is no more priestly work to be done; no priestly work allowed. We are not permitted to offer any sacrifices of our own. The sacrifice of the High Priest is all-encompassing and sufficient.

If we were to try to make some other sacrifice or try to approach heaven in some other way it would show that we were not trusting and waiting for *the* Great High Priest to come back.

How will He come out?

It is not until verse 28 of Hebrews 9 that we hear about the way He will come out of heaven.

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Heb. 9:28)

His blood has made atonement for the heaven and the earth. When He re-emerges He will cleanse and renew the whole creation.

C. S. Lewis speaks of the ascension of Jesus in this way:

The Bible says – Jesus says – that He **goes** ‘to prepare a place for us.’ This presumably means that He is about to create that whole new Nature which will provide the environment or conditions for His glorified humanity and, in Him, for ours...





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It is not the picture of an *escape* from any and every kind of Nature into some unconditioned and utterly transcendent life. It is the picture of a new human nature, and a new Nature in general, being brought into existence. We must, indeed, believe the risen body to be... different from the mortal body: but the existence, in the new state, of anything that could in any sense be described as 'body' at all, involves in the long run a whole new universe. **That is the picture – not of unmaking but of remaking.** The old field of space, time, matter and the senses is to be weeded, dug and sown for a new crop. **We** may be tired of that old field: **God is not.**²

In one very real sense, our whole life now is a life of waiting, of yearning, of daily praying 'Your Kingdom come'. Yes, there is much for us to do as we hold out the word of life to those who don't know what is happening, to those who still rebel against Him. We show the way, the truth and the life of Jesus as we serve others, as He would do. We care for the needy and love one another. Yet, the heart of what is happening to the universe right now is **waiting**.

As the disciples watched Him wondrously entering into the heavenly inner room, the time of special waiting had begun, the time of the last days. There is nothing more to be done now except for the High Priest to re-emerge and return to the earth to renew the heavens and the earth.

Our man in heaven

In an election the great hope is to send a man to the centre of power, from where he can sort everything out. I've been

2. C.S. Lewis, 'Miracles', Harper One, London, 2015, p. 149.





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looking at election slogans from across the world, and the common aspiration in so many is the idea that if we can only get ‘our man’ into the seat of power then everything can be changed.

‘Making the world a better place’.

‘A chicken in every pot’.

Way back in ancient Rome, Cato the elder rallied support by endlessly shouting the simple, brutal slogan: ‘Carthage must be destroyed’. (I love Cato for that!)

With a very different tone – ‘a kinder, gentler nation’. Perhaps the most blunt is simply this – ‘If you want a better world, send me to government’.

We do have a man that represents us. He has gone to the government of the universe with a clear and guaranteed manifesto. ‘Our man’ has gone into the control room, the source of the life and power of the universe. The God-Man who has joined Himself to this created universe has gone to the source of the universe to put the whole thing right.

If the mission of God the Son is to get Himself a bride and prepare His creation as the family home for all eternity then He must get to the source, the foundation, the centre in order to make it all what He wants it to be: a place where death, pain, sorrow and sin have been abolished from every last corner.

So, we await the moment when He will re-emerge from behind the curtain, bringing with Him the whole life and power and light and glory of that heavenly realm. He will come and make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of God and He will burn away all the powers of evil.

Our great High Priest will re-emerge from that inner room and extend to the whole universe the life that we have



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seen so wonderfully and gloriously lived among us 2,000 years ago – a life that has no place for death, disease, sin, pain or confusion.

‘The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.’

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 least they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.³

3. C.S. Lewis – *The Last Battle*.