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Telephone: 503 292 4352

• Internet: www.askelm.com •

E-Mail: askoffice@askelm.com

Magic in the Bible

by David Sielaff, February 2020

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Magic is real, it works, and has influence in our world. The Holy Scriptures are totally against any practice of magic from whatever source. Magic is effective only when spirits in the supernatural realm cause things to happen in the physical realm. In fact, that is the definition of magic. The Scriptural prohibitions against the use of magic are made for a serious reason. Dealing or trafficking with spirits in any way is idolatry, which is forbidden and foolish for people to do. Man should communicate only with God directly through one mediator and one mediator only, the man Jesus Christ.

I have no experience with magic, nor have I sought to practice magic in any way; my study of it has been academic. However, much can be known about the subject from the Bible and from those who suffered from practicing magic, and those who suffered from the results of magic. Those results are ultimately evil and worthy of God's promised judgments. Magic will cause difficulty for anyone who practices it, both in his or her life and in the lives of those around them. What the Bible says on the subject is determinative, although other sources can give us context about the subject of magic.

Definition of Magic

A useful definition of magic is found in *Webster's Dictionary*, 1913 edition:

"Mag'ic

1. A comprehensive name for all of the pretended arts which claim to produce effects by the assistance of supernatural beings, or departed spirits, or by a mastery of secret forces in nature attained by a study of occult science, including enchantment, conjuration, witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, incantation, etc.

Celestial magic, a supposed supernatural power which gave to spirits a kind of dominion over the planets, and to the planets an influence over men.

Natural magic, the art of employing the powers of nature to produce effects apparently supernatural.

Superstitious, or Geotic, magic, the invocation of devils or demons, involving the supposition of some tacit or express agreement between them and human beings.

2. Pertaining to the hidden wisdom supposed to be possessed by the Magi; relating to the occult powers of nature, and the producing of effects by their agency.

3. Performed by, or proceeding from, occult and superhuman agencies; done by, or seemingly done by, enchantment or sorcery. Hence: Seemingly requiring more than human power; imposing or startling in performance; producing effects which seem supernatural or very extraordinary; having extraordinary properties; as, a *magic* lantern; a *magic* square or circle.”

- [“Magic,” Webster’s Dictionary, 1913 edition](#)

Other practices are closely related to magic. “Sorcery” is defined in *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* as **“SOR’CERY, noun Magic; enchantment; witchcraft; divination by the assistance of evil spirits, or the power of commanding evil spirits.”**¹ Today two kinds of magic are categorized, (1) ceremonial magic and (2) magic presented by mediums and psychics. The Bible considers both to have the same source of power and does not distinguish between the two.

The number of terms for magic, divination, and demonology are too many to present in this article, so I incorporate them under the term “magic.” When there are many terms for a particular subject, it indicates that there was a deep interest in the subject, even though they all have the same source: spirit entities other than YHWH who are sought out, contacted, exchange items of value, or are worshipped.²

Magic Operates Through the “Agency” of Spirits

Modern dictionary definitions no longer state that spirit entities are involved in magic. However, they are involved in the practice of magic, even if the one practicing magic might not be aware of it. Spirit entities, not the magicians, make the spells, enchantments, incantations, divination (and other terms of use in magic) effective in their operation — when God allows them to work.

Thomas Witton Davies in [Magic, Divination, and Demonology Among the Hebrews and Their Neighbors](#) (1898) also identified the practice of magic as involving spirits:

“Magic may be briefly defined as the attempt on man’s part to have intercourse [interaction] with spiritual and supernatural beings, and to influence them for his benefit. It rests upon the belief ... that the powers in the world on which human well-being depends are controlled by spiritual agents, and that these agents are to be conciliated and made friends of by words, acts, and so forth, which are thought to please them. There is in this something analogous to religious worship and prayer.

Indeed, magic and religion have many and close affinities ... All magic is incipient [embryonic] religion, for it is an appeal to spirits believed to be more powerful and wise than man, and the methods employed to secure what is desired are no other than supplications to the goodwill of the beings consulted.”

- [Davies, Magic, Divination, and Demonology, 1–2](#)

Davies considers the practice of magic to be an amoral action, without right or wrong, outside of morality.³

James George Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough* (1890), also understood magic and religion to be the same thing, or so closely related as to be almost identical. **“It has also been said that religion consists of an appeal to the gods, whereas magic is the attempt to force their compliance.”**⁴ I make the distinction that magic

¹ This kind of magic is not to be confused with sleight of hand (prestidigitation).

² I am told Eskimos have a large number of terms for different snow conditions. A variety of terms is necessary for their well-being, and even their survival. For ancient peoples to have a large number of terms for supernatural contact likewise indicates interest and necessity.

³ New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., first published 1898 (reprint 1969), 1, 24. Davies argues against the idea that magic users attempt to compel **“spirits or deities, or the Deity, to do the will of him who utters the needful words, or performs the requisite acts”** (Davies, 3). However, this goes against human nature and I have no doubt that magic users attempt to gain power over the spirits, but often settle for a *quid pro quo*, something given or received for something of value. Human beings are created **“a little lower than the angels”** (Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7, 9). The biblical examples of King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:19–25, and the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:11–19 tell of attempts to compel spirits to yield results they were unable to give.

⁴ “Magic” in G. Gordon Melton, [Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology](#), Fifth Edition, Vol 2, M–Z (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 2001), 957.

operates within a personal (individual or small group) dynamic while religion operates within a communal or social environment. Furthermore, magic is most often done in private while religion is usually communal and done in public.

“It commonly refers to the ability to cause change to occur by supernatural or mysterious powers and abilities. In the twentieth century, magic has been more stringently defined as the ability to create change by an act of the will and the use of the cosmic power believed to underpin physical existence. ...

A highly developed magic system existed in ancient Egypt, as in Babylonian and other early cultures. From these cultures the medieval European system of magic is believed to have evolved. Greece and Rome also possessed distinct magic systems that were integrated into their religious practice and thus, like the Egyptian and Babylonian rituals, were preserves of the priesthood.”

• **“Magic,” [Encyclopedia of Occultism](#), 956, 957**

There is another way to look at the relationship of religion, magic, and other forms of mysticism.⁵ It is that all are connected. The difference is that various esoteric systems have means of communicating with or manifesting supernatural beings, differentiated by culture and nation. For example:

religious orders	call up	gods, angels and demons
magical crafts	" "	demons and spirits
spiritualists	" "	spirits of the departed
UFO contactees	" "	alien beings

On their part, the supernatural entities adapt their presentation to the cultural and situational expectations of the recipients. According to researcher John Keel, there is one phenomenon expressed and tailored to various human audiences. Scripture is consistent. Worship God or worship one that is not God.⁶

Unless YHWH is worshipped, all other worship is idolatrous, pagan, and worships evil supernatural entities that the apostle Paul calls **“principalities and powers”** (Romans 8:38; Ephesians 3:10, 6:12; Colossians 1:16, 2:15; and Titus 3:1). However ...

Magic Is Real, and It Works

Magic works because it operates in a manner somewhat analogous to computer programs. Many aspects of magic, like computer programs, need to be done with precision. That being said, magic is also diverse. Deviations or changes may give wrong results or no results. Words of some incantations must be made precisely, some in a specific language, or performed at a specific or “sanctified” place and at a particular time of the year, month, or day. The varieties seem to be endless. Shortcuts are often sought, although the purpose remains the same — to attract the attention and assistance of one or several spirits to fulfill the desire and request. Magic at times uses spells and various physical items as talismans to focus energies.

Magic is governed by laws and rules of operation depending on the spirit entities whose help is being sought, demonic personalities, or even one or more of the higher principalities, powers, or angelic beings. What they require varies with different cultures and peoples. Magic has many categories of practitioners, as

⁵ Mysticism is the experience of a supposed reality outside the senses. The means of a mystical experience might involve intuition, insight, visions, illumination, sometimes brought about through hallucinogenic substances. By *definition*, mysticism does not necessarily involve spirits or demons. In *practice*, mysticism eventually will involve spirits or an attempt by them to make contact by subtle means.

When I was interviewed on an Australian internet radio show, I spoke about ritual magic on the [“Oz Internet Radio Show, Part 2”](#) (You might want to read/listen to the [“Oz Internet Radio Show, Part 1”](#) as an introduction to ASK and what we believe about many subjects.)

⁶ Keel does not realize this, of course; he was an agnostic. See John Keel, *The Eighth Tower* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 78. Keel’s insight is expansive and all encompassing, and is only hinted at by others, yet the biblical worldview is true.

for example, the diviner or augur, whose functions and operations are entirely different from those of the witchdoctor or shaman, and those differ from the role of a trance medium or soothsayer. All receive knowledge or power from spirits. Magic has little power or effect when spirits do not cooperate or participate in the spells — or when their actions are opposed by God.

Proper procedure is necessary in the practice of magic just as adherence to proper procedure was necessary for Israel in the operation of the Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices. Although sacrifices existed long before the Tabernacle, the structure and function of most temples around the world throughout history in many ways resemble the three-fold structure of the Temple/Tabernacle first presented in Eden. See Dr. Martin's article, "[Temple Symbolism in Genesis](#)."

The Role of Blood in Magic

Aleister Crowley (d. 1947), an English occultist, magician, and self-identified satanist, wrote in his 1929 book, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Book 4, Chapter 12, "Of the Bloody Sacrifice and Matters Cognate":⁷

"The first ethical lesson in the Bible is that the only sacrifice pleasing to the Lord is the sacrifice of blood; Abel, who made this, finding favour with the Lord, while Cain, who offered cabbages, was rather naturally considered a cheap sport. The idea recurs again and again. We have the sacrifice of the Passover, following on the story of Abraham's being commanded to sacrifice his firstborn son, with the idea of the substitution of animal for human life. ...

The blood is the life. ... For the highest spiritual working one must accordingly choose that [sacrificial] victim which contains the greatest and purest force. A male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory and suitable victim. ...

But the bloody sacrifice, though more dangerous, is more efficacious; and for nearly all purposes human sacrifice is the best."

• Crowley, [Magick in Theory and Practice, Bk 4, Chap. XII](#)

Magic in the Old Testament

Much of what Crowley writes is biblically true. The blood is intimately related to the life of an animal or a person as told in Genesis 9:3–6; Leviticus 17:11, 14; and Deuteronomy 12:23.⁷ Whether Crowley was writing in jest or not about human sacrifice (and who really cares), the Bible confirms his words. In fact, the people of Judah completely misunderstood what God required in the law. There are several other verses regarding this subject. One was written by David (or someone during his time) who tells of Israel's evils after entering the land God promised to them:

"But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils [demons], And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood."

• *Psalm 106:35–38*

The blood was effective in bringing the devils or demons into communication so an exchange could be made. The blood of the innocent was exchanged for something desired by the offerer of the sacrifice: wealth, information, power, whatever. This was done by both heathen and by idolatrous people and even kings of Israel. See 2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6; Isaiah 57:5; Jeremiah 7:31, 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20–21, 20:26, 23:37, 47.

⁷ In each verse listed, the Hebrew word is *nephesh*, better translated "soul." The "soul" of the flesh is in the blood. Someday we will fully understand what that means. Leviticus 17:14:

"For it is the life [soul] of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life [soul] thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, 'You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life [soul] of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eats it shall be cut off.'"

Evil spirits are called “devils” in the King James Version in Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Chronicles 11:15; Revelation 9:20. (We will return later to this topic in the section “Magic in the New Testament.”)

Note the article, “Magician” in *The Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible*, W.E. Mills, Gen. Ed. (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1994), 541:

“It was the Canaanite and Philistines inside the borders of Palestine as well as the Babylonians and Egyptians without who resorted to the use of numerous forms of magic and divination.

- **Laban practiced divination (Gen 30:27).**
- **Balak the Moabite hired the Mesopotamian magician Balaam to curse Moses’ group of Hebrews (Num 22–24).**
- **The Philistine magicians requested guidance as to how to treat the troublesome Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam 6:2).**
- **Isaiah referred to the ‘diviners from the east’ and ‘soothsayers like the Philistines’ (2:6).**

Any and all forms of magic and divination are forbidden by OT [Old Testament] law and are punishable by death.”

Here are other references to witchcraft, sorcery, or idolatry:

- **“You shall not suffer [allow] a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18).**
- **“He that sacrifices unto any god, save unto YHWH only, he shall be utterly destroyed” (Exodus 22:20).**
- **“You shall not eat any thing with the blood: neither shall you use enchantment, nor observe times” (Leviticus 19:26).**
- **“Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am YHWH your God” (Leviticus 19:31).**
- **“And the soul that turns after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them [the spirits], I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people” (Leviticus 20:6).**

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament translated as “magician(s)” in the King James Version occurs in Genesis 41:8, 24; Exodus 7:11, 22, 8:7, 18–19, 9:11. These all refer to the Egyptian magicians who were technically “sacred scribes” in the Hebrew, but they still duplicated some of the plagues in Egypt, and they did not do them by sleight of hand.

Magic, Divination, Idolatry, Before Entering the Promised Land

“When YHWH your God shall cut off the nations from before you, whither you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise.’

You shalt not do so unto YHWH your God: for every abomination to YHWH, which he hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.”

- ***Deuteronomy 12:29–32***

Later, in Deuteronomy chapter 18 another warning is presented with an extensive list of examples of activities forbidden by the Law of YHWH. Most of them are occult and several of them involve spirits:

“When you are come into the land which YHWH your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that

makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire [human sacrifice], or that uses divination, or an observer of times [consulting clouds], or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits [mediums],⁸ or a wizard, or a necromancer.⁹

For all that do these things are an abomination unto YHWH: and because of these abominations YHWH your God does drive them out from before you.

You shall be perfect [flawless] with YHWH your God. For these nations (which you shall possess), hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for you, YHWH your God has not suffered [allowed] you so to do.

[YHWH then gives a Messianic prophecy through Moses¹⁰ ...]

YHWH your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like unto me; unto him you shall hearken.”

• *Deuteronomy 18:9–15*

Why are such things done by the Israelites — or by any nation or people? God is sovereign and He makes His will known to His Creation when, where, and how He chooses. He has chosen not to reveal Himself to the nations, but He has revealed Himself to His chosen people Israel. As the apostle Paul wrote:

“... that which may be known of God is manifest [made plain] in them; for God has shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal [eonian] power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”

• *Romans 1:19–20*

Those God has not called often try to obtain information from whatever source possible. They do not realize that true information is impossible to obtain unless God allows them to receive it. So they try to bypass God by contacting supernatural beings through other means — non-Christian religions, charismatic Christian groups, or magical practices, all because YHWH will not communicate with them.

There were many instances when YHWH did communicate with nations and individuals when He saw fit to do so. God communicated through His prophets to inform nations about His intentions. One example was when the Hebrew prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh, capital city of Assyria, so those pagans would repent of their sins (they did so temporarily). Another example: God sent Jeremiah to all the nations of the world, to tell them to submit to the coming yoke of Babylonian domination. Some nations obeyed Jeremiah’s warning, others did not obey. Those nations ceased to exist and almost disappeared from history.¹¹

⁸ The single Hebrew word translated in the King James Version as one or several **“that have familiar spirits”** in Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11; 1 Samuel 28:3, 7–9; 2 Kings 21:6, 23:24; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 33:6; and Isaiah 18:9, 19:3, 29:4. A better translation is a single word (as in Hebrew) “medium.”

⁹ A necromancer is a person who seeks information from the dead. This information comes from spirits impersonating the dead.

¹⁰ See Dr. Martin’s article, [“Mosaic Prophecies for the End-Time”](#) where other prophecies of Moses for our near future are identified.

¹¹ Jeremiah fulfilled this commission from God, with mixed results. Some nations heeded, others did not. See Dr. Martin’s article, [“The Prophetic Birth of Our Civilization,”](#) originally written in 1975. For me, it is one of the most fascinating prophecy articles that Dr. Martin wrote. (Read Jeremiah 27:8–11, two pages below.)

YHWH's protection of His people Israel was known among all Gentile nations. They knew from:

- proclamations and fulfillment from prophets of YHWH about judgment and doom to neighboring kingdoms oppressing or attacking God's people,
- Gentile individuals who received blessings or healings from YHWH,¹²
- correspondence between Gentile rulers and the Kings of Israel and Judah,¹³
- travelers and caravans passing through Judea and spreading news of God's blessings, and
- God's public rescues and physical salvation of His people Israel or Judah from destruction.¹⁴

The nations around Judea knew full well about YHWH's power: when the people of Israel entered and conquered the land of promise, during the powerful reigns of Kings David and Solomon, and several times during the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God intervened or rescued His people Israel from total destruction, in spite of their evil. Eventually, however, God had to allow those same nations to punish Israel.

Writing about a future Assyrian assault on the Kingdom of Judah, the prophet Isaiah wrote about the foolish leaders of Judah who sought solace from gods other than YHWH:

“And when they shall say unto you, ‘Seek unto them that have familiar spirits [mediums], and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? [or] for the living to the dead?’

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

• *Isaiah 8:19–20*

In Isaiah chapter 19 YHWH pronounces judgment upon Egypt because of its influence over Judah. Civil war was prophesied for Egypt, which weakened it for conquest by Assyria.

“And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbor; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom.

And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they [the Egyptians] shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits [mediums], and to the wizards. And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, says the Lord, YHWH of hosts.”

• *Isaiah 19:2–4*

Later Isaiah wrote about a future siege of Jerusalem and how desperate the people would be to learn any message of comfort and hope, even if it meant violating the Law of Moses:

“And you shall be brought down, and shall speak out of the ground, and your speech shall be low out of the dust, and your voice shall be, as of one that has a familiar spirit [a medium], out of the ground, and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.”

• *Isaiah 29:4*

Isaiah prophesied God's judgment against Babylon, before Babylon was a threat to the Kingdom of Judah:

“Yet these two shall come to you in a moment, in one day: Bereavement and widowhood; Suddenly they come on you with your many enchantments, With the plentifulness of your

¹² Such as YHWH healing the Syrian military leader Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1–18. Reports of Naaman's miraculous recovery became known throughout Syria, the land of Israel, and far beyond.

¹³ Remember the fame of Solomon's wisdom and greatness (1 Kings 4:29–34) and his correspondence and interaction with King Hiram of Tyre (2 Kings chapter 5). The same thing happened during Hezekiah's reign.

¹⁴ YHWH's salvation of Israel from Egypt, through the wilderness, and conquest of the land promised to Abraham's descendants, were widely known. Destruction of the Assyrian army besieging Jerusalem (2 Kings chapter 19) was likewise known around the world and attracted the notice of Babylon who sent envoys to Judah to both praise and spy on Jerusalem (2 Kings chapter 20).

charms exceedingly.

Stand now among **your charms** and among **your many enchantments**, With which you have labored from your youth; Perhaps you shall be able to benefit; Perhaps you shall terrify. You have tired yourself with your many counsels; Let them stand now and save you, **The astrologers and the stargazers**, those who **inform by the new moons**, From the things that are coming on you.”

• *Isaiah 47:9, 12–13, Concordant Literal Old Testament*

“But draw near hither, you sons of the **sorceress**, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do you sport yourselves? against whom make you a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? are you not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, **slaying the children** in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks?”

• *Isaiah 57:3–5*

“And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and **that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon**, that nation will I punish, says YHWH, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, **until I have consumed them** by his hand.

Therefore hearken not you to your prophets, nor to your **diviners**, nor to your **dreamers**, nor to your **enchanters**, nor to your **sorcerers**, which speak unto you, saying, ‘**You shall not serve the king of Babylon**’:

For **they prophesy a lie unto you**, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and you should perish. But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, says YHWH; and they shall till it, and dwell therein.”

• *Jeremiah 27:8–11*

“And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the **sorcerers**, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, says YHWH of hosts.”

• *Malachi 3:5*

“And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the **magicians** and **astrologers** that were in all his realm.”

• *Daniel 1:20*

“Then the king commanded to call the **magicians**, and the **astrologers**, and the **sorcerers**, and the **Chaldeans**, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. ...

The **Chaldeans** answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any **magician**, or **astrologer**, or **Chaldean**. ...

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, ‘**The secret which the king has demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king.**’”

• *Daniel 2:2, 10, 27*

“Then came in the **magicians**, the **astrologers**, the **Chaldeans**, and the **soothsayers**: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.”

• *Daniel 4:7*

Later after Nebuchadnezzar died and Daniel was old, Belshazzar, King of Babylon, needed answers about text written by a disembodied hand on the wall of his banquet room (Daniel chapter 5).

“There is a man in your kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your

father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar your father, the king, I say, your father, made master of the **magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.**”

• *Daniel 5:11*

All the verses in Daniel reference occult practitioners. The religious leaders of the many temples in Babylon who “communicate” with pagan gods through various means are not counted on these lists.

Magic in the New Testament

In several accounts in the Gospels and Acts there are encounters with spiritual beings. Satan confronted Jesus to tempt Him (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13). In His ministry evil spirits confronted Jesus several times. The apostles also had encounters with evil spirits after Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Note what the apostle Paul wrote:

“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, **they sacrifice to devils** [*diamonion*, demons] and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils [*diamonion*]. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils [*diamonion*]: you cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils [*diamonion*].”

• *1 Corinthians 10:20–21*

The term “magic” occurs four times in the New Testament. Two times it refers to the practices of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9, 11), and two times it refers to the practices of a person in Ephesus (Acts 13:6, 8).

Let us look at Simon Magus first:

“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used **sorcery**, and **bewitched** the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘**This man is the great power of God.**’ And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had **bewitched** them with **sorceries.**”

• *Acts 8:9–11*

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain **sorcerer**, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus [son of Jesus]: Which was with the deputy of the country [a Roman Procounsel], **Sergius Paulus**, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

But **Elymas the sorcerer** (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy [Spirit], set his eyes on him, and said,

‘O full of all subtlety and all mischief, **you child of the devil**, you **enemy of all righteousness**, will you not cease to **pervert** the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.’

And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”

• *Acts 13:6–12*

Paul lists idolatry and witchcraft as great evils that can, when practiced with knowledge and repetition, cause God to delay a person’s salvation (see my December 2019 article “[Losing Your Salvation](#)”).

“But if you be led of the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are;

Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, **idolatry**, **witchcraft** [enchantment],

hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like:

of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

• *Galatians 5:18–21*

Paul and his associates traveled to the city of Philippi in Macedonia, northeast of Greece (Acts 16:12). In Acts 16:16, Paul encountered a young woman who spoke. She was what the Greeks call an oracle:

"And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination ["divination" in Greek is *python*] met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, 'These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.'

And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out the same hour."

• *Acts 16:16–18*

The owner of the young woman lost his livelihood and complained to the Roman magistrate. The oracle likely brought in money to the city also. For this act Paul and Silas were thrown in prison and beaten. A miracle released them, but for the sake of the jailer, they did not leave the prison. The jailer was converted, it became known Paul and Silas (and perhaps the physician Luke) were Roman citizens, and Paul and Silas were released (Acts 16:19–40) because of the encounter and exorcism of the python spirit.

The python spirit operated in a manner similar to the oracle at Delphi. The Pythian Games took place at Delphi every four years, two years after the Olympic Games. There was a connection of the python spirit with a dragon named Python. In Greek mythology, Python was killed by the god Apollo. Apollo is also the patron god of Delphi. While there is no further biblical information about this incident in Acts or its implications, contemporary Christian audiences of Acts were likely aware of the social, cultural, and religious background.¹⁵

If the Python oracle was similar or connected with the Delphi Oracle (both operated in a similar manner), did the action by Paul to exorcize the Python spirit or demon from the young woman have had an effect on other oracles? In the 1st century AD an interesting book was written, [On the Cessation of Oracles](#) (or *On the Failure of Oracles*) by the prolific Greek author Plutarch (d. 120 AD) who wrote, among many other works including *Plutarch's Lives*. The pagan Plutarch became a priest at the oracle at Delphi around 95 AD.¹⁶

Magic Is a Perversion of the Words of Jesus

In Capernaum Jesus taught the people about His coming death, and how He would give His flesh and blood **"for the life of the world."** Jesus said to the assembled people:

"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever [for the eon]: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Then Jesus said unto them,

¹⁵ "Python," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, K. van der Toorn, etc., eds. (Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans, 1999).

¹⁶ As an interesting side note, toward the end of Plutarch's *On the Cessation of Oracles*, there is a curious discussion on whether demons could die. Of course, spirit beings can die, read Psalm 82, especially verses 6–7:

"I have said, 'You are gods [elohim]; and all of you are children of the most High.' But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."

These spirit beings were the Sons of God, not demons, but they certainly can die. Remember, Christ was originally spirit, became a human being (*anthropous*) and He died.

‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal [eonian, age-lasting] life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eats me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eats of this bread shall live for ever [for the age].’

These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can hear it?’”

• *John 6:48–60*

The disciples had difficulty with the words of Jesus, first because God prohibited the ingesting blood in the time of Noah (Genesis 9:4) and later under God’s covenant with Moses (Leviticus 3:17, 7:26–27 and other passages). The second reason was because this must have seemed like magic to some of His disciples. In reality, it would have been magic if His words were spoken by anyone other than Jesus. In reality, magic and its horrific use of blood to gain power is an intentional and total perversion of the truth of God, applicable to Christ alone.

The True Importance of the Blood of Christ

Blood does have real power. The blood of Jesus Christ is a source of power, not for humans, but it is used by God and Christ to cleanse and save every child of Adam to become a child of God.

“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal [eonian, age-lasting] redemption for us.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the [sprinkled] blood of Christ, who through the eternal [eonian] Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament [covenant], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament [covenant], they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”

• *Hebrews 9:11–15*

And remember, no spirit in the realm of magic can mediate with anyone on behalf of any person. No human being, whether a priest in the Old Covenant or a priest in some church today, no one can be a mediator for us any longer:

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

• *1 Timothy 2:5–6*

The giving of Himself as **“a ransom for all,”** included His blood in death. The gift and the knowledge of our salvation do not extend to every human being — not yet, but it will. Only those Israelites who were elect believed in Christ as Peter wrote to believers “scattered abroad.” ...

“... to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

• *1 Peter 1:1–2*

Jesus Accused of Being a Magician by the Jews

“It is this latter requirement concerning rebellious elders that is important to us in our present context. Since Jesus was recognized as an Elder in Israel, he was consistently called ‘Rabbi’ by the people (John 1:49; 6:25), the final judgment to condemn him to death had to be made at Bethphage to satisfy the legal demands that were enforced in the time of Jesus.

Indeed, the Talmudic scholars specifically state that **Jesus was accused and convicted by the Sanhedrin of practicing magic and leading Israel astray**. For this he was excommunicated from Israel (Sotah 47a). Plainly stated, it meant that Jesus was ‘put out of the Camp of Israel.’ This meant, that from the point of view of the Jewish authorities at Jerusalem, **Jesus died on the tree of crucifixion as a Gentile, not as an Israelite!**”

• Ernest Martin, [Secrets of Golgotha](#), 130

Jesus was

1. accused and found guilty of magic or sorcery by the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem,
2. excommunicated from Israel for practicing magic (or sorcery), and
3. hanged on a tree.

The Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1st edition, compiled several statements from Talmudic sources about the death of Jesus.

“They hanged Jesus on the eve of Passover. Forty days earlier a proclamation was issued that **he was to be stoned for practicing sorcery** and for enticing and leading Israel astray.”

“Let anyone who can speak in his favor come forward.”

“Nothing in his favor was discovered and they hanged him on the eve of Passover.”

• Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1st edition, vol. X, p. 5

Sorceries and Unclean Spirits in the Book of Revelation

Consider passages in the Book of Revelation that deal with sorceries and sorcerers. Remember, Revelation is a series of visions experienced (not just seen) by the apostle John.

The verse below takes place before Christ returns:

“Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their **sorceries** [enchantments], nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

• Revelation 9:21

The next verse describes preparations to oppose Christ’s return:

“And I saw three **unclean spirits** [pneumata] **like frogs** come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are **the spirits** [pneumata] **of devils** [daimonion, demons], **working miracles**, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

• Revelation 16:13–14

In this vision, John foresees the fall of Babylon before Christ returns:

“And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, ‘**Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils** [daimonion], and the hold of **every foul spirit** [pneumata], and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.’ ...

And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in you; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in you: for your merchants were the great men of the earth; for by your [Babylon’s] **sorceries** [enchantments] were all nations deceived.”

• Revelation 18:2, 23

This next verse occurs after the New Earth is created and after New Jerusalem has descended.

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers [enchanters], and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

• *Revelation 21:8*

The next verse shows events during the great White Throne Judgment, when God’s education and conversion of all mankind will occur. When completed 1 Corinthians 15:28 will be the result.

“For without are dogs, and sorcerers [enchanters], and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loves and makes a lie.”

• *Revelation 22:15*

Angels ... and Simon Magus

(1) **Angels.** Human contact with angels is a subject beyond the scope of this article. Some magic users try to make contact with angels. Who knows if they succeed? I do not really care.¹⁷ However, regarding angels and their role in God’s creation, Dr. Martin has produced several articles on the subject. Read them in any order that interests you:

[“Angels - the Facts and the Fictions”](#)

[“Why Did God Create Angels?”](#)

[“How God Uses Angels to Govern the Universe”](#)

[“The Positive Good that Angels Perform”](#)

[“Do You Have a Guardian Angel?”](#)

[“Why Does God Need an Army?”](#)

(2) **Simon Magus.** If you wish to learn about the intrusion of paganism into the Christian *ekklesia*, along with information about Simon Magus, read Dr. Martin’s excellent book (free online) [The People That History Forgot](#). Simon Magus is discussed in chapters 4–8, 10–12, 17–19, with chapters 4, 17, and 18 having the most information about this historical figure.

The Burning of Books

While Paul and his colleagues were teaching in the city of Ephesus, an interesting incident took place:

“And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them, which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’ And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books [scrolls] together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

• *Acts 19:11–19*

Biblical Greek lexicons consistently consider the “**curious arts**” to be “magical arts.”

¹⁷ According to Nelson White (aka Frater Zarasthustra), *A Brief History of Western Magic ...* (Pasadena, CA: The Technology Group, 1986), there is a portion of magic that makes contact with angels.

Morality Has Degraded, Not Improved

I have a saying, “Never bet against human depravity.” Just as humanity is degrading genetically, so too human morality is degrading. After all, Scripture has a vast stream of accounts of people, and Paul tells his young colleague Timothy (and us) in 2 Timothy 3:1, “**This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.**” He is not writing about the tribulation. He is talking about the conditions for everyone in the last days (which we are still approaching). Then Paul presents a list of evils people will do. Many of those people will be believers or former believers in Christ’s resurrection:

“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.”

• **2 Timothy 3:2–9**

Paul tells Timothy later in chapter 3, still writing about the time of the end:

“But evil men and seducers [swindlers] shall wax WORSE and WORSE, deceiving, and being deceived. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

• **2 Timothy 3:12–13**

While few Christians in America suffer persecution by physical attack, many Christians around the world are suffering persecution. Be warned, for believers to “**live godly in Christ**” without persecution is not normal. Persecution may even come through your own family. In addition, Paul also tells us:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [among the celestials or the heavenlies].”

• **Ephesians 6:12**

In the lifetime of Christ and the apostles it was a time of peace and prosperity, called the Pax Romana. It began in 27 BC with the reign of Emperor Augustine and lasted for 200 years. During the 1st century AD this peace allowed Christianity to grow. One upset to peace was the Jewish rebellion that ended in 70 AD. Paul wrote Ephesians knowing that Christ would not return for a long time. Paul, Peter, and John gathered and organized the documents that became our New Testament.¹⁸

Things will indeed “**wax worse and worse**” in the future, and evils such as magic will increase. Satan, his minions, evil spirits, and principalities and powers, all sense the end of their limited sovereignty as Christ’s return gets closer with the passing of every day. Their hatred of all Christians will increase. We must depend more and more on the grace and mercy of God and Christ for all our brethren.

David Sielaff, February 2020

¹⁸ Dr. Martin’s book, [*Restoring the Original Bible: The Design and Development of the Holy Scriptures*](#) describes the two processes of the canonization of books of the Bible from within the Scriptures: one process for the Old Testament (confirmed by Jesus), and a later process for the New Testament. It is a remarkable story of God’s preservation of His written word to teach the world about Christ, the Living Word of God, and our salvation through Him.