

A Biblical Perspective of Magic

By Rebecca S. May

- *What is magic?*
- *What is the scope of magic?*
- *What does the Bible say about magic?*
- *Is it a sin to practice magic?*

“The greatest appeal of magic is not in its application but in its esoteric meanderings” -- Anton LaVey, author of the Satanic Bible.

Throughout history, magic has adopted a variety of meanings to the point where many do not know exactly what it is, or how to define it. Magic is and means something different to everyone.

“Magic,” according to Webster’s, is “the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces” (“Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary,” 1991). It is defined in the “Handbook of Today’s Religions” as “a secretive art which attempts to master supernormal forces in order to produce visible effects” (McDowell and Stewart: Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1991, p. 203). And finally, in the “Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult,” “magic is the ability to control or manipulate nature and the environment in order to serve a particular end or purpose” (Mather and Nichols: Zondervan, 1993, p.179).

Whether in secular or Christian literature, magic is always defined as something supernatural or supernormal, emphasizing the ability to control or manipulate nature and the environment. An accurate definition of magic, therefore, does not include “sleight-of-hand” or “trickery,” which has a natural explanation. Magicians can, and usually do, perform such acts. Although many have accepted and promoted the idea that magic is innocent harmless fun, it will be described and analyzed here by the accurate definition--the historical and modern practice of occultic art.

The Scope of Magic

Harry Blackstone, son of America’s first premier magician, describes what he believes to be the beginnings of the practice of magic. “There was always magic. Itinerant street magicians, gypsy fortune tellers, and even the soothsayers of ancient Egypt and Babylonia were relative latecomers to the world of power and mystery. In man’s earliest beginnings, magic was everywhere, in the winds, in fire, and water, in the changing seasons. Every element of his daily existence was ruled by powers far beyond his comprehension. The wiser among his kind reasoned that if they too were powerful, whether to appease the irrational gods or to have power over their fellow men, they must take on the semblance of gods themselves and thus magic and deception found their start on the altars of the early religions. Was a man not godlike if he could calm a wild animal, cause a bird to fall asleep and awake at his will, make three stones appear where there had been only one? Should he not be superior to all other if he could change a staff into a serpent or raise the dead to life again?” (“The Blackstone Book of Magic and Illusion,” New York: Newmarket Press, 1985, p. 11).

If you draw a line illustrating the scope of activities which have been categorized as magic, starting at the right end of the spectrum you have the Walt Disney Magic Kingdom where children go to make wishes and where they are told if they wish hard enough, their wishes will come true.

Then moving left down the line, there are what I call entertainment or professional magicians who perform sleight-of-hand tricks which may appear supernatural but are simply clever tricks which fool the eye. Many, however, also use spiritual forces to perform acts, which simply cannot be achieved in our natural three-dimensional world.

Further left, but not far from these is the practice of witchcraft, which isolates the spiritual aspect of magic, using their supernatural powers to manipulate people and things by casting spells and curses.

Then at the left end of the spectrum is the worship of Satan, which uses magic rituals for self-gratification and to summon the presence of the most powerful and evil demon.

The Practice of Magic

Disney

The magic which is promoted at places such as Disney World teaches it is simply innocent fun for children to make wishes and dream they will come true. Satanist Anton LaVey responds to the naivete of their claim in his *Satanic Bible*. “A little child learns that if he wishes for something hard enough, it will come true. This is meaningful. Wishing indicated desire, whereas prayer is accompanied by apprehension. Scripture has twisted desire into lust, covetousness, and greed. Be as a child, and do not stifle desire, lest you lose touch with the first ingredient in the performance of magic” (page 122).

Entertainers

The magic which is done at the entertainment level can be dangerous to those performing the art. Even if the magician does not believe in the power of supernatural interaction, that does not mean his rituals are not going to be attractive to demonic forces. *One of the greatest of all fallacies about the practice of ritual magic is the notion that one must believe in the powers of magic before one can be harmed or destroyed by them* (The *Satanic Bible*, p. 115).

Witchcraft

No one religion or practice is known more for its use of magic than witchcraft. “Witchcraft has most referred to the human harnessing of supernatural powers for the purpose of practicing Black Magic. For this reason, witchcraft, sorcery and magic are nearly synonymous. ... Black Magic is magic used in the occult to bring evil, cursings, or negative effects on the persons to whom it is directed. The witch, sorcerer, or magician conjures up evil spirits and invokes them to carry out the intended harm” (Mather and Nichols, p. 312, p. 40). Witches get their power to affect spells and curses by becoming one in mind and spirit with the universe, in worship of nature whose name is Mother Goddess.

Satanism

The occultic art of magic is practiced throughout the worship ceremony to Satan. “The massing together of persons [in a magical ceremony] who are dedicated to a common philosophy is bound to insure a renewal of confidence in the power of magic” (LaVey, p. 119). As with all who practice magic, the satanist’s desire is to harness a power which will enable him to fulfill his desires and accomplish his will. As the *Satanic Bible* boasts, “the amount of energy needed to levitate a teacup (genuinely) would be of sufficient force to place an idea in a group of people’s heads half-way across the earth, in turn, motivating them in accordance with your will” (LaVey p. 121). Satanist magic encourages the use of imagination and claims that magic is purely an emotional art. “Imagery can be manipulated, set up, modified, and created, all according to the will of the magician, and the very blueprint that is created by imagery becomes the formula which leads to reality” (LaVey, p. 125).

The satanist conducts a magic ceremony to achieve one of three specific outcomes: lust, compassion, or destruction. For any of these three purposes, the magician casts curses on others and/or summons power for himself. “Should the fearful ask, ‘Is there no defense against such witchery?’ It must be answered thus: ‘Yes, there is protection. You must never sleep, never daydream, never be without a vital thought, and never have an open mind. Then you shall be protected from the forces of magic’” (LaVey, p. 124).

The Bible and Magic

Evidence of the practice of magic exists throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. **Magic** is used synonymously in Scripture with **witchcraft**, meaning to “whisper a spell, to enchant or practice magic”; as well as **sorcery** which means “to cover or cloud over, to act covertly i.e. practice magic.” Whichever word is used, magic always means something negative. It is never used in a neutral or not sinful context. In fact, when God gave the Law, He demanded the death penalty for those practicing sorcery or magic (Exodus 22:18). He later described the sorcerers as those who “do not fear Me,” says the Lord of hosts (Malachi 3:5).

Many people in the Bible practiced magic and were condemned for it. For example,

- Manasseh, King of Judah, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. According to 2 Chronicles 33:6 he did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger.
- Jezebel was involved in harlotries and witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22).

- Simon, a popular magician in his day, was told by Peter that his art was wickedness and that he was in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity (Acts 8:22-23) because of his desire for magical power to do miracles.
- Bar-Jesus, a magician and a man of intelligence, was confronted by Paul on his first missionary journey where Paul asked him, *You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord* (Acts 13:10)?

Even though the Bible says, both by command and example, that magic is sin, it will continue even throughout the tribulation. *So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer ...because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth* (Revelation 18:21-24).

The future, therefore, for those who practice magic is clear. *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (Galatians 5:19-21).

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is magic?*

A: Magic is the use of supernatural forces to control and/or manipulate nature.

Q: *What is the scope of magic?*

A: The belief in and practice of magic exists from the simplest level, involving making wishes and performing tricks, to the most sinister level involving the worship of nature and worship of Satan.

Q: *What does the Bible say about magic?*

A: The Bible condemns the practice of magic as deception and against God. Those who practice magic *are children of rebellion, offspring of deceit* (Isaiah 57:4).

Q: *Is it a sin to practice magic?*

A: Yes. Any and all practice of magic is sin. Performing “tricks” or “sleight-of-hand” is not addressed specifically in the Bible and therefore cannot be labeled sinful, but it may be a stepping stone to something evil, and should be monitored continually.