

Question: Does the Bible say anything about people in the world who have magical powers?

When most of us today think of magic, we think of magicians who entertain groups of people with trickery that appears to be something it is not. These magicians do not claim to have some kind of special power; but by sleight of hand and eye tricks, they do things that appear to be impossible in our world. However, as used in the Bible, the terms “magic” and “magician” describe those who tried to influence and control people or events by appealing to supernatural power through things like spells, special charms, incantations and other magical rituals. The Bible associates this magic with occult practices like divination, sorcery and spiritualism. Thus, we are told: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, **those who practice magic arts**, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

The Bible does leave open the possibility that ancient magicians may have been accessing some supernatural power to perform their magic, but the powers of these magicians were very limited in comparison with God’s power. For example, the magicians in Egypt did appear to imitate the miracles of Moses and Aaron when they turned their rods into snakes, turned water into blood and produced frogs in the land (Exodus 7:9-22; 8:6-7). But the snakes produced by the Egyptian magicians were swallowed by Aaron’s rod (Exodus 7:12). After the plague of frogs, the Lord brought eight more plagues upon the Egyptians that their magicians were not able to imitate (Exodus 8-12).

At two other times, the Pharaoh of Egypt and the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar called upon their magicians to interpret their dreams (Genesis 41:8 & Daniel 2:2). But Joseph and Daniel, both men of God, demonstrated that God could do what the magicians could not do. God gave them a reliable interpretation to the dreams of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel declared: “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries” (Daniel 2:27-28; Genesis 41:25).

We learn from the New Testament about a man named Simon who used magic to astonish the people of Samaria into believing he was someone great (Acts 8:9). But when he saw the signs and miracles God did through Philip, he was amazed (Acts 8:13). Thus, after hearing the good news about Jesus, he became a believer. Later in the book of Acts, we are told that when the apostle Paul visited the city of Ephesus “many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of all” (Acts 19:19 NAS).

Where did the ancient magicians get their power to do even the limited things they did? The evidence points to demonic influences in our world. Christians have been warned about “the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; cf. Matthew 24:24). While there may be people in our world who can access this power through magic, we need Jesus Christ and his power in our lives and no other. He was not a magician sent to trick us but the Son of God sent to save us. One may find magic tricks entertaining, but we must leave no place in our lives for the ancient magic arts. Christians should know that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

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