

Magic and the Bible

The following is an article by André Kole concerning what the Bible says about "magic".

André Kole is a world renowned magician, illusionist, and the inventor of magical effects used by the leading magicians in the world today. He also is a dedicated Christian who has used his magical talent to share his faith with millions of people in 76 countries.

When I was about 25 years old I was challenged as a magician and as a skeptic to examine the miracles of Christ from a magician's point of view. In making this investigation I not only discovered that Jesus Christ had to be Who He claimed to be--the Son of God and the Savior of the world; but I also discovered that He is the "magic" ingredient Who really makes life worth living. Since that time, in my performances throughout the world I have used my talent not just to entertain people but to share my deep personal faith in Christ.

During these past years some well-meaning and sincere Christians have asked me such questions as, ***"How can a magician be a Christian? Isn't the use of magic unscriptural? What does magic have to do with Christianity?"*** etc. The following comments are made for the purpose of helping people to understand the difference between what the Bible condemns as magic and the type of entertainment I do, which in our time is referred to as magic.

The dictionary gives two meanings to the word magic. The first definition is as follows: "The pretended art of producing effects or controlling events by charms, spells, and rituals supposed to govern certain natural or supernatural forces; sorcery; witchcraft."

The practices contained in this definition are all condemned by God in the Bible. Whether these practices are claimed to be used for good or not makes no difference, they are still condemned as an abomination to God.

The second definition in the dictionary is for theatrical magic: "The art of producing baffling effects or illusions by sleight of hand, concealed apparatus" etc. This definition describes what I do. I have made a very careful study of every Hebrew and Greek word in the Old and New Testaments that has been translated magician, diviner, soothsayer, wizard, conjurer, astrologer, sorcerer, etc. Not one of the definitions of the Greek and Hebrew words describes or implies this second definition of the word magic which is used for entertainment purposes and which has no relationship with occult practices. There is harmony between the teachings of both testaments.

OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING

In order to clarify my previous statements, it will serve us well to study the various words used in the Scripture which are descriptive of these practices which are an abomination to God. Since Deuteronomy 18:9-14 is more inclusive than the other passages in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, and Daniel, let's consider that passage and the titles listed in various translations of the Scripture.

The following is a summary of these practices as explained in The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke and published by Moody Press.

DIVINATION: The exact meaning of this practice is unknown. The word seems to convey the idea of obtaining an oracle (divine announcement) by means of drawing lots. Ezekiel 21:21-22 is a Biblical clue as to how divination may have been done.

OBSERVER OF TIMES: The meaning of this word is uncertain, as the list of words used in various translations indicates (practice soothsaying, practice spiritism, fortune-teller, enchanter, etc.). Because this word is closely related to the Hebrew word translated cloud, it may refer to the reading and interpretation of cloud patterns. Another thought is that this is an onomatopoeic word, a word that is derived from the sound of the individual performing the practice.

ENCHANTER: Because of the similarity of this Hebrew word to the word for snake, some scholars are of the opinion that there is a connection to snake charming. Others believe that since there is a similarity of hissing sounds between enchanters as they chant and snakes, this accounts for the similarity of the words.

WITCH: The RSV uses SORCERER. Exodus 7:11 tells us that Pharaoh had this group among his court advisors. Nebuchadnezzar also summoned his sorcerers to recount his dream as reported in Daniel 2. These men were using natural means to promote the belief that they truly had supernatural powers and to lead the people into a superstitious, pagan way of life which turned them away from the true and living God.

CHARMER: The Hebrew word reflects the sense of binding or casting a spell. The usual translation is enchantment which refers to the means that the charmer uses in attempting to influence people.

CONSULTER OF FAMILIAR SPIRITS: A variety of terms including medium, necromancer, ghost, and spirit of the dead, are used to describe this Hebrew term. I Samuel 28 describes a medium; a person who supposedly can make contact with the dead.

WIZARD: The root of this word comes from the Hebrew word to know, and implies knowledge available only to the specially initiated and not available to the ordinary person. The wizard was one who was thought to be acquainted with the secrets of the nonmaterial or unseen world.

NECROMANCER: This is a general term given for the practice of spiritualism. The Hebrew word means seeking unto the dead and is a comprehensive term which includes all forms of attempting to make contact with departed spirits.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

The New Testament speaks of four magicians. Simon (Acts 8:19-24) practiced magic in Samaria and amazed all who saw him. Along with wrongly using his natural abilities to try to convince the populace that he had great supernatural powers, he was also rebuked by Peter for supposing that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit could be purchased with money.

Bar-Jesus or Elymas (Acts 13:4-12) was a false prophet and magician who resisted Paul and Barnabus. Paul's condemnation of Elymas was not because of his natural ability to perform, but rather because of his wrong use of the ability and his opposition to the faith.

Jannes and Jambres (II Timothy 3:8) are two of the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses. If they were in fact advisors to Pharaoh, we may consider them in the light of the earlier study of Hebrew words (See WITCH).

The New Testament also uses various words to describe the practice of magic. Among these is the word translated curious arts in Acts 19:19. The Greek word carries the root idea of being concerned with other peoples' business and is translated busybodies in I Timothy 5:13. It conveys the sense of interfering with other peoples' lives through the practice of these curious arts.

MAGICIAN: Various forms of the Greek word magos are used to identify Simon, Elymas, and the Magi who came to visit Jesus after his birth. Although it is not easy to identify what the term magi precisely means, they "were clearly not crude practitioners of the occult arts" (see "Magic," The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown, published by Zondervan).

SORCERER: As used in the book of Revelation, sorcerer is translated from the Greek word pharmakos, and carries with it the idea of medicine, magic potion, drugs, and poison. Sorcery (witchcraft in KJV) is one of the works of the flesh as listed in Galatians 5:20.

SEDUCERS: Some scholars feel that the seducers or impostors of II Timothy 3:13 may be translated sorcerer, wizard, or magician in light of the mention of Jannes and Jambres in vs. 8. Still, the context of the verse shows that this deceit will be in the area of doctrine and not in the area of legitimate entertainment.

CONCLUSIONS

Once a person has done any amount of study of these and other related Scriptures and has any knowledge of the theatrical art of illusion, he would immediately realize that the practices defined by the above English and original Greek and Hebrew words are completely foreign to anything anyone in my profession does today who uses the title "magician."

We do not tell the future, we do not try to communicate with the dead, and we do not accomplish or claim to accomplish our effects by the aid of demons or supernatural powers. In fact, when someone arises on the scene that claims to possess some type of supernatural power, it is usually the professional magicians who are the first to investigate these claims in order to expose those who would benefit at the expense of others by laying claim to these powers.

Everything we do is for the purpose of entertainment and instruction and is accomplished by natural means that usually involve a tremendous amount of work and long hours of practice. As I have said many times, any eight year old child can do the things I do--with fifteen years of practice.

Anytime I mention astrology, communication with the dead, or any other form of the occult in my programs, it is either for the purpose of dealing with these subjects from a Christian point of view to alert people to the dangers of these subjects and their true nature; or secondly, it is a matter of applying I Corinthians 9:21-23 by using a subject that audiences are interested in today as a springboard to presenting the Gospel. When I do this I never compromise my beliefs or deal with these subjects in an unscriptural way.

In everything I do my primary goal is to present the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in such an attractive and meaningful manner that people will be drawn to Him. Over the years thousands have prayed to receive Christ through this outreach, and I have never heard of one person who has turned to the occult or other practices condemned by Scripture as a result of witnessing my performances; however, on the contrary I do know of hundreds who have turned away from manmade or satanically influenced practices to Christ.

Magicians are legitimate deceptionists. They use their artistic skill for the purpose of entertainment. "I love magicians because they are honest men," said author Elbert Hubbard. "They tell you they are going to fool you and then they proceed to do it. But no matter what happens at the show, when you get home you will still have your watch, your pocketbook, and your appendix. And that is more than I can say for some of my non-magician acquaintances."

In my particular case I do use my art to entertain people for their momentary pleasure. But when my audience goes home, they not only have their watches and pocketbooks, but they also leave with the truth that the God of the Bible is still alive, the same today as yesterday, and He offers them abundant life and love for now and eternity through Jesus Christ.