In times past, entire civilizations saw the earth as a magical place filled with spirits and miracles of the gods. Gradually, the world changed. Science and rationalism began to give natural explanations for processes that used to be regarded as supernatural.

Our modern world is again thinking about the supernatural. TV programs based on unsolved mysteries probe whether claims for angels, ESP, and conversations with “the other side” are true. Yet, as RBC research editor Dennis Fisher shows in the following pages, there are more serious issues about magic and the supernatural than just “Is it true?” These issues need to be addressed—for our well-being, and for the sake of those we love.

Martin R. De Haan II
In 1965, “Do You Believe in Magic?” was a song by The Lovin’ Spoonful. In that era, many would have associated the word *magic* with little more than the romance of a love song or with magicians who delighted audiences with card tricks, vanishing coins, or any other illusion they had up their sleeves.

But today, the subject of magic has far broader associations. The *Harry Potter* series has captivated millions (young and old alike) with the unfolding story of an unwanted stepchild who discovers that he has untapped powers of wizardry. A film version trilogy of *The Lord Of The Rings* has exploded at the box office and renewed interest in the magical world of Middle-Earth.

In our modern world, public reaction to the word *magic* is as diverse as its many expressions. Some still think of magic as the world of the illusionist or as an imaginary world of make-believe. A growing number, however, are inclined to pay money for a few moments with someone who claims to be able to tell the future or speak with the dead. A visit to the local library or bookstore shows the growth of interest in occult practices, witchcraft, and sorcery. Some are dead serious about acquiring supernatural power.

The ground swell of interest is understandable. The world of magic taps into our fascination with supernatural knowledge and power. It runs parallel to a religious desire for something more than the visible world we experience every day. Many are desperately trying to find a way to control their world.
The growth of interest in magic, however, also raises questions for those of us who don’t want to be either gullible or uninformed about something that has become such a part of our culture. If we are followers of Christ, how can we be discerning enough to know whether an interest in the supernatural is innocent or dangerous?

To address such concerns, we will answer four important questions: (1) What are the popular views of magic? (2) What does the Bible say about magic? (3) Why is it dangerous to experiment with magic? (4) What’s the difference between real and make-believe magic?

Public reaction to the word magic is as diverse as its many expressions.

WHAT ARE THE POPULAR VIEWS OF MAGIC?

Everyone has a worldview. Whether we realize it or not, all of us look at life’s experiences through the window of certain assumptions about what is real. Our worldview defines what we believe about magic. So let’s begin by looking at three popular views of magic.

THE OCCULT VIEW: EXPERIMENTING WITH MAGIC

Believing That Unseen Spiritual Powers Can Be Controlled. A growing number of people who believe in magic see the material world as more than matter and energy. They believe it is also composed of supernatural powers that are personal and nonpersonal. By learning how to use secret
formulas, charms, or spells that have been passed from generation to generation, they believe they can make contact with these unseen forces. Such persons are convinced that the supernatural can become an ally by providing them with extraordinary knowledge and by enabling them to exert paranormal power over events and objects for their personal benefit.

This dimension of magic opens the door not only to a world of the supernatural but also to efforts to communicate with spirits.

**Communicating With And Controlling The Paranormal.**

A medium claims to be a channel of communication between the earthly world and the world of spirits.

On a popular TV show, a self-professed psychic claims to carry on a dialogue between guests and their deceased relatives. Sometimes the medium uses leading and emotionally manipulative comments like, “Your relative is laughing at what you just said,” or “He is telling me he is happy and not to worry.” At other times, however, participants are astonished as the medium appears to share specific details that only they and the departed could know.

There are many questions about how the medium gets the information and to what extent the bereaved are contributing to the experience out of their own emotional needs. But it does appear, at times, that the medium is getting information from the other side.

A longing to contact departed loved ones is not the only reason some are drawn to experiment with occult practices. According to author and researcher Ron Enroth, the occult view of reality often includes “the promise of godhood.” People who delve into occult
literature are likely to be introduced to pantheism, the idea that everything is God. Thus, according to such a worldview, “everyone and everything in the material world is part of the Divine.”

Those who are trying to expand their awareness through witchcraft and sorcery come to believe that humankind is basically good. They see evil only as an imperfection or illusion, so they conclude that the root of the human dilemma is ignorance, not sin. In the occult worldview, enlightened individuals will rise above moral distinctions, so there’s no need for redemption or forgiveness (“The Occult,” *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*, p.787).

To sum up, the occult view is held by practitioners who experiment with magic and think of themselves on the same level as gods, who can learn how to safely access and manipulate supernatural powers to their own advantage.

It’s important to keep in mind, however, that belief in the supernatural is not limited to an occult worldview. There is another view held by people who try to apply the controls of science to claims of the supernatural. They are called parapsychologists.

**THE PARA-PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW: INVESTIGATING MAGIC**

Seeking To Verify The Untapped Powers Of The Mind. Because parapsychologists have committed themselves to objectively explore the paranormal, they find themselves in an awkward position. On the one hand, they want to follow the scientific method in exploring phenomena. But on the other hand, they do not believe that matter and energy are the only realities. The very fact
that they are experimenting shows that they are committed to documenting “something beyond.”

Parapsychology, which might simply be defined as the study of psychical phenomena, . . . deals with cognition such as telepathy or foreseeing the future that is not based on the five senses. It also studies those experiences where physical movements of objects are not caused by any normal power . . . popularly referred to as mind over matter (Parapsychology—A Century Of Inquiry, p.13).

The line between parapsychology and the occult, however, is not always clear. Those who want academic respectability from the scientific community try to be selective in what they study and meticulous in how they record their findings. Yet not all in the field are that focused. Indeed, some open the door wide to occultic studies of all kinds.

As Dr. Rogo writes in Parapsychology—A Century Of Inquiry:

One problem we must face with the current vogue in “pop” parapsychology is the confusion between parapsychology and the occult. . . . Parapsychology has little to do with these systems [of the occult] since it is, above all, an experimental science. That is, its facts and theories are based on empirical studies, experiments, or observations. However, it has not been ruled out that some peripheral element of ESP might not be an occasional factor in the . . . pseudosciences [occult] (pp.14-15).

Keeping in mind that parapsychology ranges from carefully controlled experiments to overt study of the occult, we now turn our attention to how
Embark on a journey through the intriguing field of parapsychology, where methods were developed to investigate the unseen powers of the paranormal. During the Enlightenment, a number of scientists turned their attention to the mysterious realm of the unseen. A Viennese physician named Franz Aton Mesmer (1734–1815) utilized his own form of hypnosis to propose a scientific explanation for extrasensory perception. E. Dawson Rogers and eight members of the British Royal Society established the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882. SPR's research often focused on anecdotes and case studies to explore various psychic experiences. “Gifted individuals” were tested in their ability to predict the next card or roll of the dice.

In the 1920s, parapsychology transitioned to methods of experimentation that persist to this day. J. B. Rhine introduced a systematic approach to studying “psi phenomenon” latent in everyone, not just “gifted” people. Rhine founded the *Journal Of Parapsychology* and The Parapsychological Association, and helped to coin the term *extrasensory perception* (ESP). Parapsychology began as a careful study of “gifted” people who could predict the future and know specific information without the aid of the five senses. As the discipline evolved, some researchers delved into the realms of magic and occult practices. What they explored reads like a table of contents for a book on the occult: telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, survival of death, apparitions, hauntings, poltergeists, mediumship, out-of-body experiences, and reincarnation (William Braud, *Resources For Parapsychological Inquiry*).
As a result of the eccentric and fringe elements that have entered into their field, parapsychologists have had problems being accepted by the academic community. 

*Ghostbusters*, a popular movie from the 1980s, illustrates this point. Actor Bill Murray plays the part of a parapsychology professor who fakes expertise in examining the paranormal. In the opening scene, Murray is conducting an ESP experiment in which he seems more interested in a pretty blonde student than he is in real research. A colleague bursts through the door excitedly shouting, “At 1:40 p.m. at the main branch of the New York Library on 5th Avenue, 10 people witnessed a free-floating full torso vapor apparition. It blew books off the shelves from 20 feet away and scared the socks off some poor librarian!” Murray and his colleagues’ confrontation with the “library ghost” is a total fiasco. When they return to their office at the university, the dean informs them that their grant for psychic research has been canceled. “Your theories are the worst kind of popular tripe, your methods are sloppy, and your conclusions are highly questionable. You are a poor scientist!”

Despite the humor of this scene, there is a kernel of truth that illustrates the tension between “hard sciences” like physics, chemistry, and biology and “soft sciences” like parapsychology. Parapsychologists investigate paranormal events, but mainstream scientists deny them.

**THE SCIENTIFIC VIEW: DENYING MAGIC**  
*The Laws Of Physics Are Reality.* Carl Sagan
has had a profound and widespread influence as the apologist for “pure” science—a commitment to the laws of physics and the scientific method with no attempt to blend in religious or spiritual elements in the quest for truth.

Sagan had no disagreement with spiritual beliefs reflecting the human quest for the transcendent and the eternal. But he drew a clear line in the sand when it came to believing that any religious theory had any merit of truth in the objective world.

Tragically, Carl Sagan contracted a bone-marrow disease called myelodysplasia. And despite varied kinds of chemotherapy and other treatments, his condition became terminal. During this time of declining health, he was interviewed on television. With the likelihood of Sagan having to face death in the near future, the interviewer asked him if this prospect had caused the great scientist to change his mind about his denial of a possible afterlife.

Carl Sagan’s response was in keeping with his unwavering atheism. But then he surprisingly revealed a paranormal experience he had just had. “I heard my deceased mother calling to me,” Sagan commented, “but it was just an auditory hallucination.”

This shows the power of one’s worldview. The voice he heard may very well have been only a product of a brain in ill health creating some connection with his mother from years before. But notice that even though Sagan received data from one of his five senses, he rejected it out of hand because his naturalistic presuppositions had no category for it other than mental illness. To him, science was all there was and nothing more.

Like Sagan, some hold to
the scientific worldview with the same dogmatism. But what exactly are these scientific convictions, and why are they held with such passion?

There are several reasons why scientists hold their “physics only” worldview and deny anything supernatural. Science is seen as the great catalyst that has taken a primitive, unenlightened society filled with superstition and brought it to the light of sound reason. The hostility that has persisted for centuries between religious faiths has left a bad taste in the mouths of many scientists. They believe that if a theory can be proven with the scientific method, there is consensus in the scientific community. This is not possible between religious faiths, since many of their doctrines fall beyond the reach of science to verify or disprove. And clearly the growing achievements of science include healthcare, food production, and many other enterprises beneficial to the human race. A likely question they would ask is, “Why argue religion, since it's impossible to prove?” (see The Universe Next Door by James Sire, pp.61-75; and Broca's Brain by Carl Sagan, pp.3-76).

Denying Paranormal Phenomena. What happens when magic and the supernatural cross the path of a scientist?

A parapsychologist at UCLA had been contacted by a woman who claimed to be harassed by a malevolent “spirit entity.” She said it would push her around and make her life miserable. When the team for psychic research arrived, they were equipped with various instruments for recording the phenomenon. According to their report, after the team spent some time in the woman's home, the “spirit
entity” entered the room where they were standing. The parapsychologists said they witnessed the formation of a full-bodied apparition. They saw the head and then the shoulders. Eventually, a greenish white light took the shape of a human form. Cameras took photographs of paranormal images that appeared before the astonished scientists.

The film that captured the form was successfully developed. Excitedly, the parapsychologist showed the “proof” to one of his colleagues in one of the “hard science” departments. “There must be something wrong with your camera or film. These can’t be photographs of what you tell me they are,” the scientist replied.

The parapsychologist was disappointed. “All my life I had been looking for proof of the paranormal. Then when I finally got it, my friends in mainstream science wouldn’t accept it.” The scientist didn’t have a category for the evidence, so he dismissed it.

One thing is clear, a person’s assumptions about what is real will determine how he responds to the whole subject of magic. The answer to the question “Do You Believe In Magic?” depends on a person’s worldview. Occultists experiment with magic, parapsychologists investigate magic, and scientists deny magic.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MAGIC?

With the revival of neopaganism and the magic arts, the relentless pursuit of the paranormal by parapsychologists, and the denial by scientists of any evidence for the
supernatural, it's important that we understand what the Bible says about magic.

**INTERSECTING WORLDS MAKE MAGIC POSSIBLE**

At first glance, one would assume the Bible talks only about God, angels, and human beings. But both the Old and New Testaments also talk about a world of the supernatural where good and evil spirits carry on spiritual warfare. In fact, the Bible teaches that this struggle is as real as our own visible world. The apostle Paul wrote:

*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Eph. 6:12).

Paul's statement expresses the biblical worldview—that the enemies of God are not limited to human beings (flesh and blood). The broader picture includes a vast host of evil spirit beings who are aligned in a hierarchy under the control of Satan. They rule over our visible world under a veil of darkness. These spirit beings, who were once angels, chose to rebel against God and align themselves with the evil one, becoming demons or “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible depicts a worldview with spiritual dimensions that interact with our observable world of space and time. There are good angels who do God's bidding and demons who follow direction from the devil.

If there are a host of spiritual beings interacting with our world, why don't we see them? The answer is that God has graciously

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veiled their activity from our view. The God of the Bible asks us to live within the physical boundaries He has set for us while trusting Him to oversee everything in the visible and invisible worlds. This curtain prevents us from being disoriented by the spiritual activity in this parallel world.

Yet there are times in biblical history when the veil is lifted. One example of this is when Elisha and his servant were surrounded by the fearsome Syrian army. Any hope of escape seemed impossible. What could two men do against all those chariots, spears, and armor?

When the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Ki. 6:15-17).

God pulled back the curtain to reveal to Elisha and his servant the angelic army that was poised and ready to do battle with the Syrians.

**OCCULT ACTIVITIES CAN ACCESS THE SPIRIT WORLD**

According to the Bible, there is a real danger in occult experimentation. While God has set up a protective shield to discourage direct contact with demons in the spirit world, occult practices attempt to penetrate that shield and open a door to interact with spirit beings. Let’s see how this works.
Magic Accesses The Spirit World Through Spells. Magic uses charms and spells that are believed to have supernatural power over natural forces. But according to the Bible, the power isn’t in the saying of certain words or following prescribed rituals. The power comes from demons who, when invited, can provide supernatural assistance (1 Sam. 28:5-20; 2 Ki. 23:24).

A few years ago I met an undergraduate student who was involved in the occult before he put his faith in Christ. He told me that he once experimented with magic spells by putting a curse on someone he hated. He was shocked when his enemy had a horribly maiming accident. The timing was such that he believed something terribly sinister had operated through his “experiment.” Later, he claimed to have been harassed by a spirit entity. This incident turned him away from occult practices to Christ.

Can a magical curse really cause harm? Coincidence? You won’t convince this student that his experiment with magic was accidental.

From early times, magic has encompassed a blend of trickery and the demonic. When Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh and demanded that he let their people go, their request resulted in a supernatural competition.

As evidence that they were speaking on behalf of the one true God, Aaron cast down his walking stick before Pharaoh and the rod turned into a serpent. What happened next gives us a window into the ancient use of magic. According to Moses:

Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.
For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. So the Lord said to Moses: “Pharaoh’s heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go” (Ex. 7:11-14).

This text makes it clear that the Egyptian magicians had access to the supernatural. But their power was not from God (Ex. 7:22; 8:7,18-19; 9:11).

The magicians of Pharaoh’s court used an ancient art. Charms and spells are a religion of antiquity. They have been used from prehistoric times and even now are used in our present age. For the most part, such magical claims probably reflect superstition—beliefs and practices from ignorance or fear of the unknown. But in other cases, as the biblical record shows, they can achieve interaction between our world and the spirit world.

Because such magic is used as a substitute for belief in the one true God, the Bible condemns such activities. According to Moses:

*There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord* (Dt. 18:10-12).

**Sorcery Accesses The Spirit World Through Drugs.** Magic is not the only term used in the Bible to refer to the occult arts. Sorcery is a word that carries its own connotation. The New Testament Greek word that is translated
“sorcery” is the word *pharmakeia*, from which we get the word *pharmacy*. Sorcery’s connection with drug usage is obvious. In the ancient world, mystery religions were sometimes accompanied by the use of certain drugs to create an altered state of mind, which resulted in ecstatic religious experiences.

There is a parallel between sorcery and the experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs in the 1960s that gave rise to the widespread interest in Eastern religions and the occult. A scientist doing research at Stanford University during that time tells how he participated in a scientific experiment with LSD. Before long he was hearing voices that told him to look at the sun directly during midday, damaging his eyes. Later he came to the conviction that drugs had been the gateway to the demonic world. He never participated in this kind of “scientific” experimentation again.

The Bible portrays God as the embodiment of truth who desires all human beings to seek and find Him. So it’s not surprising that both the Old and New Testaments condemn the use of drugs to open the door to an alternative spirituality (Dt. 18:10-14; Acts 17:27; 19:19; Gal. 5:19-20).

In the first century, there were those who made their living as professional sorcerers. One such person was Simon the Sorcerer.

*There was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great (Acts 8:9).* Simon the Sorcerer apparently used sleight of hand and perhaps certain potions that were able to alter perceptions and draw...
people to him. His goal would have been to gain followers by fooling and possibly drugging those who came to him for spiritual help and power.

The day came, however, when Simon the Sorcerer met Simon the Fisherman, whom Jesus had renamed Peter. When the sorcerer learned that Peter was in touch with the power of the Spirit of Christ, he was intrigued. According to the New Testament record:

When Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:18-22).

The apostle Peter saw that Simon the Sorcerer did not want to yield his heart to Christ to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Instead, Simon viewed the Holy Spirit as a kind of magical power that he wanted for his personal use. Here is the distinction between Christian spirituality and that of the occult. The former yields to God to do His bidding; the latter seeks power to control others. Peter’s condemnation is a warning to all who would confuse occult power with the power of God.

The apostle Paul condemned sorcery in a list of the works of our sinful human nature:

Now the works of the flesh
are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies (Gal. 5:19-20).

Our sinful nature is drawn to the fallen spirit world and therefore must be renounced.

Mediumship Accesses The Spirit World Through Familiar Spirits. Charms and spells and drugs are not the only way occultists seek to penetrate the wall that separates us from the spirit world. Mediumship is an ancient technique for communicating with spirits. Often a special relationship is established between the medium and a “familiar spirit” that has worked with him or her in the past.

The Wise Remove Mediumship. The history of ancient Israel is a cycle of revival, apostasy, and judgment, followed by revival. Although national leaders often contributed to the spiritual decline of Israel, there were exceptions. Josiah is one of those wonderful examples of a monarch who, when he was exposed to the Word of God, took decisive action to comply with it. Having read the Word to his people, Josiah set out to implement important reforms. One such campaign was the removal of the spiritistic activity of mediums.

Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord (2 Ki. 23:24).

It has been wisely said that “when the only virtue
held by society is tolerance, then all the other virtues have to go.” That is why the Bible is not tolerant of occult practices in the lives of those who claim to be people of the one true God. In ancient Israel, the removal of occult influence was as essential to the health of the nation as the removal of a cancerous growth is to the health of the human body.

**The Unwise Seek Out Mediumship.** Unfortunately, not all kings in the history of Israel were as discerning as Josiah. A case in point is Saul, the first man anointed King of Israel. Saul tended to follow and rationalize his own desires—even when they conflicted with the principles of God (1 Sam. 15:20-22). As a result, the Lord of Israel removed Saul from the throne.

Once Saul was no longer being given divine guidance through God’s prophet, he looked for alternative spiritual insight from a medium known as the Witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:5-20). During this session, the unexpected happened. The medium seemed to call back from the dead the recently deceased prophet Samuel. Occultists sometimes point to this biblical event as evidence that mediums can actually contact the dead. Yet all was not as it appeared, even for the Witch of Endor. The medium expressed alarm at the sight of Samuel and indicated that the “séance” was not going according to plan. It's likely that God allowed either a simulation or actual appearance of Samuel as another warning of judgment on an impetuous and wayward king.

Once again, the biblical record describes a physical world of space and time intersecting with a real spirit world. God has wisely placed a protective shield over our
eyes so we cannot see it. But the spirit world can occasionally be penetrated through spells, drug use, or seeking out a medium. The motivation for doing so is to acquire secret knowledge and power over our circumstances. Since the source behind these activities is demonic, the result can be an enslavement to spiritual darkness and alienation from the one true God.

**WHY IS IT DANGEROUS TO EXPERIMENT WITH MAGIC?**

Although the Bible clearly condemns the use of magic, some people are tempted to fall into Saul’s kind of rationalizations. Some are likely to say, “Okay, so we’ve got some statements that condemn occultism in the Bible. But what would be wrong with wanting only to do good with magic? What if we limit ourselves to ‘white’ magic and stay away from the more harmful ‘black’ magic?”

**IT CAN LEAD TO DEMONIC INVOLVEMENT**

**Seeking Out “Spirit Guides.”** Today, in many local bookstores, the occult enjoys a prominent position. Many books promise to show you how to use mental imaging to get what you want. Others promote the use of “spirit guides” to function as allies in overcoming the challenges of everyday life. Some go so far as to promote out-of-body experiences to penetrate the “other world.”

The holistic-health movement has more than its share of occult practitioners. While there may be many helpful dimensions to certain holistic-health ideas, some authors and advocates
go beyond alternative medicine. “Spiritual health” practitioners sometimes advocate techniques of visualization that begin with a positive mental attitude and enter into a form of alternative spirituality.

I once knew a chiropractor who became a Christian because of a bad experience he had while contacting a spirit guide as a part of his holistic-health remedy. During the visualization that was part of his technique, he heard the woman who was channeling say, “I see a beautiful young woman in shimmering robes.” But the chiropractor saw something radically different. He said, “I saw one of the most hideous and sinister creatures I had ever seen.” Because of this traumatic experience, he decided to trust Christ as his Savior and Lord. He never went back to a channeling session again.

Those who do channeling with only “good spirits” need to realize that, by nature, the spiritual enemies of God are deceivers. The apostle Paul wrote, “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). So what looks like spiritual light might in reality be spiritual darkness.

In our visible world we have a number of ways of doing “character checks.” Before hiring a new employee, businesses will sometimes do background checks, credit checks, require references, and in some cases even ask for lie-detector tests. But we can’t do this with spirits. They exist in a world that is beyond such checks.

**Attending Séances.**

Many years ago, author Victor Ernst was at a spiritual crossroads. He had grown up in a spiritualist family and had regularly attended séances. In one such encounter, he heard his
mother tell the medium that what they were hearing contradicted the Bible. This made Victor curious enough to get a copy of the Bible. He was surprised when he read, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1).

Victor had not yet decided to become a follower of Christ, but he had some questions at the next séance. During the conversation with the spirit, he asked questions about Christ. The spirit spoke in positive tones about Jesus until Victor asked one final question: “Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood for the remission of sin?” There was such a dramatic and confused response from the medium that he needed to be revived from his trance. Victor Ernst concluded, “I never went to another séance. I had ‘tested the spirits’ and found they were not of God” (I Talked With Spirits by Victor Ernst, pp.15-34).

I’m not recommending that we seek out evil spirits to cross-examine. But we do need to be constantly testing spiritual opinions and claims. The context of 1 John 4 shows that real spirits advocate misleading ideas that need to be cross-checked with Scripture. Whether it is a religious visitor at our door or a friend inviting us to participate in some kind of occult activity, we need to listen carefully to what they say about the person and work of Christ. If their ideas are not in line with the New Testament description of Christ, then we can be sure that their ideas are not from God.

Playing With Occult Games. A growing number of games are borrowing from the world of the occult. Whether it’s “Dungeons And
these amusements introduce children, young people, and adults to occult theory and terminology.

The Ouija board deserves special caution. The name ouija comes from the French word oui—both meaning our English word yes. Various letters and numbers with "yes" and "no" locations are marked on a flat board. Then two people place their fingertips on a pine marker and ask the board questions. To the players' amusement, the board seems to have a mind of its own. Predictions sometimes come true. Unexplainably accurate information is occasionally provided.

What is going on? On one level, such experiences could be explainable. Some players might consciously push the marker where they want it to go. On another level, the players feel compelled to contact the deceased through a spiritist and have started with the intent to have fun. They may unintentionally open a dangerous door to the spirit world (The Ouija Board by Edmund Gruss, pp.3-30).

Dr. Fred Dickason, a theologian who has written about demons and the occult, notes that the Ouija board is an instrument of divination. It is possible that this "innocent" game could be a means of penetrating the shield that protects us from the spirit world and invites interaction with demons and the occult. There is considerable evidence that some who have started with the intent to have fun have found themselves in contact with demons.

Trying To Contact Dead Relatives. Someone who is grieving over the death of a loved one may feel compelled to contact the deceased through a spiritist. There is considerable evidence that some who have started with the intent to have fun have found themselves in contact with demons.

Dragons” or “Tarot Cards,” these amusements introduce children, young people, and adults to occult theory and terminology.
who claims to be able to have conversations with those who have passed to “the other side.” Some of these spiritualists are charlatans who use tricks and verbal manipulation to fake the supernatural. Others, however, give more evidence of being in contact with the world beyond.

Years ago at a California university, I met a young woman who had just joined a Christian campus ministry. She told me that her journey to faith in Christ started as a result of her involvement in spiritism. She said, “My dad had died and I really missed him. So I sought out spiritists who could help me to make contact. When I saw my first materialization, I thought it was great! But then I couldn’t turn it off. The spirits would come to me in the night—and it scared me to death. Not long after that I came in contact with some Christians, heard the gospel, and received Christ as my Savior. Over a period of time, the Lord began to slowly close the door to the spirit world that I had opened. Now I don’t have any more unwanted visits from that forbidden world.”

IT CAN LEAD TO BONDAGE

The beaches of Normandy have a unique place in history. On June 6, 1944, thousands of troops of the Allied Expeditionary Force landed there as a first step in the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe.

Today the beaches look like a place where any of us would want to sit on the sand or swim in the salty ocean on a summer’s day. But there are parts of the Normandy beach that are off limits. Why? Because there are still live Nazi landmines that have not been cleared. Below the beautiful sands washed by blue waters are
lethal weapons that can maim and kill.

Our contemporary culture is like the Normandy beaches in some ways. Many books, movies, videos, DVDs, and games are harmless. But there are some that can lower inhibitions and serve as a conduit to real occult activity—unintentionally or intentionally.

For more than 30 years, Kurt Koch traveled the world gathering case studies of people who had become entangled in the web of occult activity.

Included in the table of contents of a book of these case studies are clairvoyance, fortunetelling, ghosts, magic, Ouija board, parapsychology, poltergeists, and spiritism. With vast documentation, Koch points to tragic results from becoming involved with the occult.

As previously mentioned, white magic is not good (as its users claim). Kurt Koch writes: “In the worldwide literature of magic, it is maintained that black magic is done by the help of the devil and white magic with the help of God.” According to Koch, that definition is false. “White magic is just as dependent on the powers from below as is black magic. . . . The effects of white magic are the same as those of black magic” (The Occult ABCs by Kurt Koch, p.135).

What is the negative effect of white magic? What often happens is that the person dabbling in the occult develops a resistance to the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. One example of this is “spiritistic healing.” One consequence of being “healed” by an occult power is that the person comes under spiritual bondage. The healing is never bestowed free of charge.

But there is hope for those who turn from occult practices to faith in Christ.
Kurt Koch outlines several steps in the deliverance process:

- Place your trust in Christ to save you from your sin (Jn. 1:12; Eph. 2:8-9).
- Renounce the occult and solicit the prayers of other Christians (1 Cor. 10:14-22; Eph. 6:18).
- Destroy all occult objects (Acts 19:11-19).
- Break off all contact with friends who are involved with the occult (2 Cor. 6:14).
- Accept God’s forgiveness and declare yourself free from sorcery (Rom. 8:1; Col. 1:13).
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18; 1 Jn. 1:9).
- Use your spiritual armor (Eph. 6:10-18).

(Adapted from Occult Bondage And Deliverance, pp.88-131.)

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL AND MAKE-BELIEVE MAGIC?

With all the sober warnings about experimenting with real magic, what are we to think of make-believe magic? Isn’t there a place for children’s fantasy that loves to pretend?

THE VALUE OF MAKE-BELIEVE

Telling stories has had an enduring appeal to young and old. When storytellers write down their tales, it’s called fantasy. Fantasy may be defined as “a literary work based on the imagination and not necessarily on fact.” Fictional stories can take the form of drama classics like Hamlet or even children’s stories like Aesop’s Fables. These tales are not based on
real events, but they teach us lessons about human nature and values. Yet when the theme of magic is introduced into a fantasy world, legitimate questions should be raised.

**CAN MAKE-BELIEVE MAGIC BE DANGEROUS?**

When an illusionist is able to pull a rabbit out of a hat or coins from someone’s ear, we all know it’s make-believe. It’s the special skill of fooling us that we find entertaining. From the dawn of time, people have been fascinated by sleight of hand. Even though we know it is make-believe, this kind of “magic” captivates us. “How did the illusionist do that?” we ask.

Similarly, when the thrill of make-believe magic finds its way into literature, it carries with it a similar delight of enchantment. King Arthur is mentored by Merlin the Magician. Dorothy travels down the yellow brick road with the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion to meet the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Peter Pan is able to fly and outmaneuver Captain Hook with the help of enchanted pixie dust.

From these stories we learn chivalry from King Arthur, positive character qualities from Dorothy and her friends, and bravery from Peter Pan. The magic is fictionally created to move a moral lesson forward.

But while *King Arthur*, *The Wizard Of Oz*, and *Peter Pan* are viewed as legitimate children’s fantasies, not all literature with magical themes is viewed as harmless.

In our present day, nothing has created more questions about magicians and sorcerers than J. K. Rowling’s fictional character Harry Potter. Many have declared the
series a wonderful read and have given their enthusiastic applause to an author who has reintroduced a love for reading to many of our schoolchildren. Others have advised parents to forbid their children to read the *Harry Potter* books or see any of the films because they believe the series is inspired by the occult. In certain parts of the US, legal action has been taken to overturn efforts to keep these books out of the classroom and the school libraries.

What is behind such controversy? Interviews with Rowling have indicated that the author did consult books on the occult as a reference for her books about Harry Potter. But the author persistently claims she had no intention of trying to involve young readers in the world of magic. Despite her assurances, many find her dark themes very disturbing and are afraid that her books may lead young readers to become interested in occult experimentation.

Even among committed Christians, there is a split decision for and against the *Harry Potter* series. Is there any way for a discerning parent to arrive at an informed conviction about this series? I believe part of the answer comes when we try to evaluate the motives and worldview of the author.

Perhaps it would be helpful to compare Rowling’s books with two other prominent children’s fantasies and their use of magical themes. *The Chronicles Of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis and *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien provide an excellent litmus test of author integrity and intent in the genre of magical fantasy.

**The Chronicles Of Narnia.** The distinctive of C. S. Lewis’ children’s books are their use of Christian
symbolism in fairy tale. In the first book, *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, Narnia is under a terrible spell from the wicked witch (the devil). Aslan (the Lord Jesus Christ), the rightful ruler of Narnia, breaks the spell by giving his life for a spoiled little boy, Edmund (a rebellious traitor). Lewis’ intent was to create a mythic world that would build a framework into which true faith in Christ could later be poured.

These stories, rich in Christian symbols, clearly are in a fantasy world with no connection to our own world. Lessons of Christian virtue and Christ-honoring themes are characteristic of the plots. Evil’s characteristics are spelled out and condemned. Some children might be frightened by the witch and/or the battle scenes. But few Christian parents have raised objections to these particular children’s books.

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**The Lord Of The Rings.** J.R.R. Tolkein’s famous trilogy teaches Christian values in a war between good and evil within a mythical world. Gollum, a hobbit who has been corrupted by “the ring of power,” provides penetrating insights into the psychology of evil.

Tolkein was an Oxford scholar in the fields of languages and literature, and was an expert in the classic tale *Beowulf*. He chose a mythical world to teach lessons about the titanic struggle between good and evil. The magic that is used is limited to the wizards and the race of elves and does not encourage experimentation with real magic in our world. Rich lessons of Christian virtue and the deceitfulness of sin are a source of moral instruction. Both in the books and in the films, some children might be alarmed by fearful creatures.

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But the story’s theme is redemptive. Although it’s more intellectually complex than *The Chronicles Of Narnia*, Tolkein’s trilogy has become widely accepted as a legitimate fantasy with Christian-friendly values for readers young and old.

**The Harry Potter Series.** J. K. Rowling has studied occult theory and practice to develop a fantasy that parallels real-world magic. At the same time, she has written believable characters in compelling plot lines that are accompanied by positive moral lessons for children. But in contrast to Lewis’ and Tolkein’s Christian perspectives, Rowling operates out of a magical worldview. She consulted real-world magic on most of the magic fictionalized in her *Harry Potter* books. In the books she has written so far, she has not used any real spells in the text but relies on a creative use of fantasy. She claims her sole motive is to interest children in reading. And she’s succeeded beyond her wildest imagination.

It’s clear that Rowling’s stories teach children positive values such as protecting the underdog, inclusiveness, valor in standing up to evil, and children’s intelligence in problem-solving. But because Rowling based her fiction on occult research, there must be a “buyer beware” warning. The parallel to real-world magic is close enough to possibly lower the resistance of the reader to occult experimentation. The danger, therefore, does not lie in the books themselves but in the possibility that young people could be lulled into viewing any magic as only harmless entertainment. (Book reviews were adapted from *Harry Potter And The Bible* by Richard Abanes, pp.229-246.)

Despite the celebration of freedom of speech and creative license in literature,
we need to think carefully about books and movies that introduce readers to the actual spells and formulas of real-world magic. When the incantations that are used by occult practitioners are written into the plot, script, and character development, the literature has moved beyond mere imagination. Having access to the wording and knowledge of rituals used by occultists provides a dangerous level of information and can invite readers to become directly involved with occult power.

But how can we be sure that *Harry Potter* does not contain real spells? In his well-researched book *Harry Potter And The Bible—The Menace Behind The Magic*, Christian scholar Richard Abanes writes:

Although the [Harry Potter] novels may not contain true incantations, they do illustrate the importance of spells to occultists and the significance that words play in casting those spells. . . . Obviously, the nonsensical words used in the Potter books (e.g. Alomohora! Expelliarmus! . . .) . . . are not truly magic. Each spell is nothing but silly babble, humorously latinized by Rowling to impart a sense of mysticality (pp.57-58).

So if there are no real spells in the *Harry Potter* series, why the continuing uproar? According to some, Rowling's popularity is breaking down healthy resistance to the occult and making sorcery look like fun. It's on this point that concerned parents have the right and responsibility to make a judgment call about the suitability of *Harry Potter* for their child. In certain cases, it may be best for a child who is weak in discernment not to read the books or see the films. What
may be safe for one can be dangerous for another. Wisdom and discernment need to govern the life of a follower of Christ.

For those parents who believe there is merit in allowing their child to read the Harry Potter series, a word of caution is in order. Try to make sure they don’t read the series without evaluating what they are reading. Look for occasions to talk with them about the positive values illustrated in the books, and reinforce that the magic described in the story must never lead to experimentation with occult practices in the real world. In this way a child can learn to read with a filter of discernment and not be tempted to dabble in the occult.

WHO HAS THE POWER?

It’s important for us to keep the world of magic in perspective. The desire for knowledge and power over our circumstances is understandable. But if we enlist the help of Satan or his demons through occult experimentation, we are setting ourselves up for self-deception and danger.

The New Testament assures us that the power of Christ is far greater than any kind of power obtained through sorcery and magic (Acts 19:15-19). Furthermore, the occult leads to spiritual darkness, keeping us from knowing and trusting the One who died for us to bring us to God. He alone can relieve the torment of our guilt and replace our fear with a spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).
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