



# Considering magical objects and rites in the biblical milieu

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## Abstract

A wide range of objects were used in rituals and their purpose was to mediate divine power in the Graeco-Roman world. These included amulets, which were objects commonly inscribed with mysterious formulae and used by mainly pagans as a protection against numerous illnesses, as well as witchcraft, occultism, curse tablets, magical gems and also magical bowls. There were also magical handbooks and binding spells. Each of these reside under the category of magical texts or objects. These objects were believed to be effective based on their messages and also the sense of power that they were believed to possess which was magical. Their messages often went together with a ritual curse. Magic was basically based on the belief that the divine elements could be exposed to manipulation by different means including inter alia sacrifices, charms, and even gifts. This obvious misinterpretation of God's character assumed that one could acquire God's favour through 'buying' it. This article briefly considers such objects in a biblical literature perspective, and how they were often used as means to mediate divine power.

**Keywords:** Magic, amulets, mediating divine power.

## Introduction

It is abundantly clear that the diverse languages, cultures, ethnicities, settings, and political systems were some of the variances which divided the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world. Nonetheless, most of them believed in the existence of magic. The word 'magic' comes from the Greek *magiko*, that is, relating to the magi, who were originally a priestly grouping serving the Medes and the Persians (Seveniste, 1938). Thus the term has an ancient origin. The earliest written records of magic have been identified in cuneiform incantation inscriptions which Assyrian scribes in 800 BCE. Imitated using Babylonian prototypes. The earliest religious tablets refer to divination and in the latest Chaldean period, astrology absorbed the vigour of the Babylonian hierarchy, and medicinal magic and nature magic were largely practiced (Arendzen, 1911).

In Egyptian magic a mere agglomeration of vowels or of meaningless syllables was supposed to work good or evil. Their barbarous sounds were the object of ridicule to the man of common sense. In many cases they were of Jewish, or Babylonian, or Aramaic origin and because unintelligible to Egyptians, the words were generally corrupted beyond recognition. Thus on a demotic papyrus is found the prescription: "in time of storm and danger of shipwreck cry Anuk Adonai and the disaster will be averted"; on a Greek papyrus the name of the Assyrian Ereskihal is found as Eresgichal. So potent is a name that if an inscribed amulet be washed and the water drunk or the charm written on papyrus be soaked in water and this taken, or if the word be written on hard-boiled eggs without shell and these eaten, preternatural



powers come into play. Another prevalent idea in magic is that of substitution: the person or thing to be affected by the spell is replaced by his image, or, like the "ushabtiu" figures in Egyptian tombs, images replace the protective powers invoked, or lastly some part (hair, nailparings, garments, etc.) take the place of the whole person (Arendzen, 1911).

In the Hellenistic era the word *magi* came to designate astrologers, such as those who went to adore Jesus at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-12). The Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Galatians contains sorcery in a list of "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5: 19-21). The Didache also known as The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations (Διδαχὴ Κυρίου διὰ τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), is a short and anonymous early Christian discourse written in the first century attacks sorcery and related aspects of spirituality. For Christians, the Holy Bible and the Early Church Fathers, spoke out zealously in contradiction of magic and its malpractices and practice. Catholic theology defines "magic as the art of performing actions beyond the power of man with the aid of powers other than the Divine, and condemns it and any attempt at it as a grievous sin against the virtue of religion, because all magical performances, if undertaken seriously, are based on the expectation of interference by demons" (Arendzen, 1911).

Various items were believed to have supernatural power and were viewed as texts and objects that could affect human affairs and they could be coaxed, or even forced to act on someone's behalf. In the worldview of those who believed in them it was believed that there was indeed an order of powers and their agents which were connected to everything and which could control the cosmos. Consequently, magic was present everywhere and from as early as the fifth century BCE the word *magos* came to have the derogatory idea of a 'sorcerer' or 'impostor,' (Nock, 1940). This is how it was applied to the actions of Simon (see Acts 8:9, 11). The texts which speak to ritual objects were in the hands of those in the upper echelon in society who could afford writing material. Nonetheless, what has been found in magical tests speak to the often basic desires, hopes and fears of all people and also those in the lower stratum of society and are effectively their voice (Meyer and Smith, 1999). Jewish magic thrived, particularly just before the birth of Christ. This is evident various sources including from the Book of Enoch, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Testament of Solomon. The incidence of Jewish magic is also validated by Talmudic wisdom texts. Books such as *The Book of Secrets* which was written in Hebrew was almost a textbook for magical practices (Craffert, 1999). This book includes a variety of spells, curses and incantations relating to healing of illnesses, getting into peoples' minds and even their dreams, getting rid of enemies and love charms and they also dealt with the evil eye and how to protect oneself against its malevolent existence (Schäfer, 2009).

Some Coptic and Greek magical texts used by Christians had invocations to protect one against the evil eye, sorcery and magic. Magical papyri from the Hellenistic period demonstrate that a range of religious traditions were incorporated and modified. The name of Jesus was popular in some of the texts and even the name of YHWH was considered to be effective in magic. The magical papyri described prayers and magical rights and even offered prescriptions as used by magicians and were somewhat of a training manual for magic for all types of events or happenings. The Hebrew word *kashaph*, as used in Exodus 22:18 in the Tanakh is derived from a root meaning "to whisper". James Strong (1890) an academic, biblical scholar, lexicographer, Methodist theologian and professor, the author of Strong's Concordance, determined that the word means "to whisper a spell, i.e. to incant or practice magic".



There were Curse tablets which were generally made of lead or alloys but there were also curses placed on broken potsherds, gemstones, limestone, papyrus and wax. A curse for example could be written on the bottom of a ceramic bowl. It could also be an inscription on a piece of lead. Once cursed tablets were written they could be rolled or even folded or pierced with nails which indicates it was binding or tying down a curse. Such items were supposed to influence events through supernatural happenings. In the case of binding spells, the victim had to be nailed down or bound and powerless to perform (Craffert, 1999). Curse tablets were put in specific places such as a coffin, the home of the intended victim, in streams, rivers, sea or land. It was believed that when the tablet was buried in a grave or water the victim would not be able to find it and get rid of the spell. Curse tablets and binding spells took different forms. There was a direct binding formula, where one would say they were binding somebody. They could also be prayers to gods or demons to act against the victim. It was also common for one to wish somebody to fail. In addition there were persuasive analogies in which a victim should assume some characteristic or other such as a mute personage.

The belief that divine names have unlimited power has been a characteristic of Jewish magical practice from its start. The magician's knowledge of the names and their uses in writing in magical texts, was critical to thought in guaranteeing the success of a magical procedure (Bohak, 2008: 305). Mystical words or formulae generally consisted of rows of letters or sentences which were not recognisable in any language, however it was believed the spirits understood what the letters were saying. Sometimes the same letters were used when invoking a god or demon to support one's objectives. People used palindromes which were magical words but unrecognisable as such. Dolls and small figures were used in the binding process and they were made of various materials, such as lead, mud or wax. Their hands were tied behind their backs and sometimes they were mutilated or the name of the intended victim was inscribed on them. They could harm bind or attract the victim. An epithet used in magic was considered to be a formula for 'sending out fire' and it invoked "...the name of God as 'As the Lord of Hosts Lives'" (Naveh & Shaked, 1993: 179). This was derived from 1 Kings 18:15 in which Elijah made an oath and amazingly caused fire from God to devour a sacrifice on Mount Carmel.

The majority of curses were based on jealousy of people who were vying for their share of material things in society (Versnel, 1991:62). People wanted honour and status. Even athletes hoped that their opponents would not do well due to curses placed on them. In the business world craftsmen, shopkeepers, inn-keepers, and tradesmen all used curses to prevent their competitors from doing better than them. Some tablets were used for spells in the area of love affairs to overcome competitors or as an aphrodisiac so as to entice a loved one, or prevent a spouse from cheating or being jealous. Both men and women used such tablets. In court-cases cursed tablets were written to prevent a bad outcome and the curses had specific body parts in mind. So, a defendant would want the tongue and mind of an opponent to be 'tied up' or 'bound'. Such actions were common in all social classes. Sometimes spells were cast by people seeking justice and revenge, and given that there was no good policing, victims complained to the gods (Gager, 1992:190).

### **Occultism and immortality**

A belief in the immortality of the soul is vital for occultism. In fact aspects such as necromancy are founded on the belief that the living can make contact with the spirits of deceased people. Communication with *sheol* is considered to be possible. Humans devoid of an immortal soul, have spirits which are of satanic origin Deuteronomy 32:17 "They sacrificed to devils, and not to God; to gods whom they knew not: new and fresh came in, whom their fathers knew not" and in Psalms 96:5 "For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heaven", and 2 Corinthians



11:14 “ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” Kiuchi (2007) states that turning to mediums and necromancers comprises contacting satanic beings. Nephesh was designed to be understood together with the complete form of man, and “...especially his breath; moreover man does not have nephesh, he is nephesh, he lives as nephesh” (1974:10). However, Irenaeus in his work *Against Heresies* launched a vehement attack on the use of magic.

The Apostle Paul attests that only God is immortal: “Who [God] alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16). Humans are not fundamentally immortal, Christ gives us immortality (Romans 2:7; 6:22-23; Galatians 6:8). People thus do not possess conscious existence other than their body and death is then a mere sleep “Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Psalm 13:3). Tertullian was one of the foremost Christians who claimed that humans possess an immortal soul. In similar vein, Athenagoras of Athens (2015), and also Clement of Alexandria (2008) asserted that people have an immortal soul and they also opposed the use of magic. The Seventh Ecumenical Council as well as its predecessors were vehemently opposed to the use of magic in any form (Nicolaidis, 2014). Cullmann (1958) supports the notion of immortality is of Greek origin. This was also promoted by Tertullian who stated that every soul is immortal. Death is considered then to be a reversal of God’s creation which is restored through Christ’s sacrifice on Golgotha.

### **Amulets, magic bowls and people names**

Amulets were intended to protect the wearer or carrier from all harm and danger and they were believed to keep one safe from disasters and also thus helped one to stay prosperous and successful. Magical amulets almost give the impression that the wearer expected some healing without a need to request it from God. Merely quoting scriptures was considered to be sufficient for desired healing of soul and body. They were used to gain love, power and even wealth (Yamauchi, 1983:195). Amulets could be string, stones or rings that were engraved, embroidered colourful bands, metal or papyrus that had special formulae written on them. The rolled up and folded and one carried them around in a pouch, tube-like containers or on a string and they were sold by specialists who made them and used ritual acts to give them power. Some amulets were believed to protect the bearer against illness, injury or any other disaster that could have been caused by an evil spirit or power. Based on God’s words in Deuteronomy 32:39, ‘I wound and I heal’, an amulet was used for the healing of a certain Bunayna, and inscribed on it were the words ‘the God who wounds and heals’ (Schiffman & Swartz, 1992: 115). Thus magicians’ could create original divine names on the basis of biblical descriptions of God. Magical gems were cut from stone by a gem cutter and they were inscribed, and they had the same meaningless formulae or rows of vowels that were found on some papyri. On most gems the active part could be a symbol or even a specific picture and not words.

Magic also entered the Roman Empire. Pliny the Elder in his work *Natural History* (CE 77) gives an important discussion on magic as deception. Yet he still states “Wear as an amulet the carcass of a frog minus the claws and wrapped in a piece of russet-coloured cloth and it will cure fever” (Bk. XXXII, xxxviii; Beagon, 1992). This shows us some belief in medicinal magic existed. Generally however, the Romans condemned it and magic was forbidden under Emperors such as Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and also Caracalla. Informally, some emperors such as Nero dabbled in magic to eventually abandon its use.



Magic bowls were basically food bowls that had magical texts written on them or images inside or at the bottom of the bowl. They were believed to protect individuals and their families from various evils and they cursed evil forces. There were three main evil agents that magic bowls were intended to function against these were the evil eye, Lilith and Bagdana. Incantations were needed to give one protection against these entities. It was believed that words had power over the world which is why amulets and cursed tablets were similar to what was said in verbal curses.

Often people's names were used in magic, for example in the exorcism demons, thus disciples for example, would invoke the name of Jesus in New Testament times so as to cast out a demon from an afflicted person. Because many people who had magic bowls were illiterate, their bowls had magical texts that were nonsensical with lines of letters not making any sense at all. At times cryptograms were used and words were written in secret codes. There was such an intermingling of worldviews that it sometimes became difficult to ascertain which magical texts were pagan in origin and which were Jewish (Gager, 1992).

### **Instances of magic in biblical literature**

While there are many instances of magic and mention of it in the Bible, I will mention only a few here.

Exodus 22:18 states, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" and Leviticus 19:31 "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God". The texts, "Do not allow a sorceress to live" (Exodus 22:18 ) and "Do not practice divination or seek omens" (Leviticus 19:26) and especially "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:31) all demonstrate that magic was not acceptable to YHWH (Enroth, 1984). Deuteronomy 18 forbade the Israelites from engaging in human sacrifice and in eight other very specific practices which could be considered to occultic. The same is evident in Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26-26; 19:31; 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Isaiah 8:19 and Malachi 3:5. The Prophet Micah speaks about God's ruling on those who apply magic: "I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells" (Micah 5:12). Leviticus 20:6 informs us of the punishment for divination, "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people."

Deuteronomy 18: 10-11 reads, "...that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." Finally, Jeremiah 27: 9 reads, "Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." Each of these five Old Testament snippets has a basic thread in common – they speak out against magic and its kind. Nicolaidis (2017) mentions that in the Jonah saga, redemption was only possible through the abolition of evil practices.

In Genesis 44:5, Joseph's domestic supervisor mentions a silver drinking cup "...in which my lord drinketh and whereby indeed he divineth". This passage demonstrates Joseph engaged in scrying also known as "seeing" or "peeping", which was the practice of looking into a suitable medium in the hope of perceiving a significant messages or visions. It was an occultic technique of divination in which one usually used a cup or other vessel filled with water, and by gazing into it, hoped to obtain a message from a superior being.



There are numerous examples in the Old Testament where esteemed biblical leaders were involved in magic, divination and other occultic activities as a usual part of their day-to-day activities (Moskala, 2015) and some were not condemned by YHWH. For example in 1 Samuel 28, king Saul went to visit the witch of Endor because God was not interacting with him anymore (Bakon, 1976). 1 Chronicles 10:13 somewhat contributes Saul's death to his having called upon a witch and magic for help, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it." It is clear in this story that Saul did not encounter the spirit of the deceased Samuel, but rather experienced an evil spirit who played the role of the prophet Samuel so as to discourage him (Kent, 2011). Queen Jezebel was tangled up in witchcraft as 2 Kings 9:22 states: "When Joram saw Jehu he asked, 'Have you come in peace, Jehu?' 'How can there be peace,' Jehu replied, 'as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?'" (NIV). In Genesis 35:4 it is likely that the earrings which Jacob buried at the oak tree in Shechem were probably amulets. In Zacharia 3:2 it is clear that people had deep faith in certain texts and their power and also names when it came to mediating divine power (Craffert, 1999).

Isaiah asserts that God's people had fallen into magical practices: "They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and embrace pagan customs" (Isaiah 2:6). "This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, the Maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens, who spreads out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense" (Isaiah 44:24, 25). In Judges 8:21, we read that Gideon took amulets off the necks of camels and both men and women wore them.

We also read of the Urim and Thummim mentioned in Numbers 27:21 and 1 Samuel 28:6. These were objects most likely flat stones that the high priest would consult to conclude the will of God. They probably worked much like a pair of dice do. They were deposited in the breast-piece of the high priest (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8). The Urim and Thummim were used at perilous moments in the history of God's people when special divine supervision was required. The leader of the people was anticipated to make use of this means for all important matters for which he required some direction (Elwell, 1997). Lots, which were pieces of wood or stone and had markings on them, were also used to decide the supposed will of God (Numbers 26:55; Proverbs 18:18).

Numbers 5:12-31 describes a customary ritual of magic that a priest would perform on a woman if her husband suspected that she was guilty of adultery. He would take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water and she and her husband would go, with an offering of barley meal, to the tabernacle. The priest would usually make a magical drink consisting of holy water and sweepings from the tabernacle floor. The woman would then drink the water the priest recited a curse on her, stating that her abdomen would swell and her thighs would atrophy if she had committed adultery. If she was pregnant the curse recited would surely induce an abortion. In Daniel (5:11), we read that he working for many years in Babylon as the chief occultist of the king. He was in fact the overseer "of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers".

King Manasseh of Judah practiced idolatry and offered his sons to foreign gods as living sacrifices and he used magic, divination and Spiritism (2 Kings 21:6). Manasseh sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, and "He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger" (2 Chronicles 33:6).



In the New Testament we read that Paul was involved in evil witchcraft as described in Acts 13:6-12. Paul met Bar-Jesus, who was an assistant of the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus. He had a clash with Bar-Jesus, and stated: "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun". Bar-Jesus apparently heard the curse and was blinded.

Peter was also engaged in sorcery, as described in Acts 5:9. After he determined that Sapphira had lied to him, he cursed her, by saying "How is it that you have agreed together to try the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them that have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out". After this, Sapphira collapsed and died. In Acts 19:11-12 we read that there were small facecloths and strips of bandage which touched Paul's skin and were able to heal the sick and exorcise demons. In Acts 19:13-14 some Jewish exorcists used the name of Jesus (Craffert, 1991).

In Acts 3:6 and other versus the disciples exorcised demons and healed people in the name of Jesus. There were also some Jewish exorcists who conducted exorcists in the name of Jesus (see also Luke 9:49 and Mark 9:38). Magic was thus very much a part of life and the worldview of people either privately, in household religion or on political religion.

### **How magic was used as a means to mediate divine power**

It is evident from the Holy Scriptures, from extra-biblical texts, and from a range of archaeological discoveries that the Word of God came to people who existed in a space with unique and yet often overlapping cultural worldviews which were preoccupied with magical beliefs and ritualistic practices. The social institutions support each other in that the Biblical world was difficult to live in and so the worldview of people created hostile agents thus obliging people to try to cope in difficult circumstances by mediating divine power. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament were forged in environments infused with magical beliefs and practices (Yamauchi, 1983) and this environment was used to mediate divine power.

Magic which was used was for the most part grounded on the acceptance of the idea that the divine can be subjected to manipulation through diverse ways amongst others, such as cultic sacrifices, magic acts, sorcery enchantments, and even gifts. God or the god(s) were believed to need human food and drinks, sacrifices, incantations of texts (Yamauchi, 1967) and other offerings that when used correctly, could bring rewards to people who were desperately trying to improve their lot in life, in rapidly changing political and socio-economic circumstances. One thus believed he or she could influence God or the gods and gain courtesy and consideration by their good actions. The Didache (v, 1) and also the letter of Barnabas (xx, 1) warned early Christians about the practice of magic. Magic had no place in Christianity but was bought into by some due to ignorance of the laws of nature (Nicolaidis, 2009). In addition, the belief in the frequency of diabolical interference with the forces of nature led effortlessly to credence being given to real magic.

Mediating divine power was important in fighting the evil powers of hunger, poverty, crop failure, sickness and other misfortunes (Craffert, 1991). Mediating divine power would also help one get supporters and customers or have a funeral or participate in community meals once a week and so people got involved in religious activities to seek divine power.



Belief in the immortality of the soul was also an essential assumption needed for magic. In fact spiritism and necromancy were founded on a belief that the living could interact with the souls or spirits of the deceased (Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Isaiah 8:19; 2 Corinthians 11:14). Notwithstanding the opposition of some people like prophets, magic was progressively used by the people as part of a worldview and this is evident from the Hebrew manuscript, the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, 'Book of the Secrets', published by Margalioth in 1966.

Even though various prophets condemned magic and divination this did not stop some people from making illicit use of them, and in fact things like spells could be used with negligible variations by people from different political and religious backgrounds (Fishbane, 1971) such as Judeans, Greeks and Romans.

## Conclusion

Religion was very much a social institution and practiced on three levels, either privately where one was a religious entrepreneur, as part of one's household which consisted of community cults, or politically as part of a centralised cult. Rowley (1956) asserted the line between magic and religion is not continuously easy to outline, but we can mostly say that wherever there was a "... belief that by a technique man can control God, or control events, or discover the future, we have magic". Magic deals in objective supernatural forces, often in the confidence that such forces are characteristic properties of particular objects or words and more especially written or spoken formulae and incantations. The Bible and the Church Fathers speak out antagonistically against magic and its uses. Benedict distinguished between religion and magic and suggested that the former includes "personal relations with the supernatural," while religion deals with "mechanistic manipulation of the impersonal" (1938:637).

Religion was considered to be a civic duty and when viewed from within a locative world-view perspective people needed to find the right ways through which they could get the gods on their side in all their daily activities. So in this situation magic was very important as a means of being successful and living a harmonious life in turbulent times. The authentic biblical prophets never made use of magic or incantations or indeed any form of divination or manipulation to articulate God's communication to his laos (Van Gemeren 1990:16–40). As God's chosen they enjoyed a special status. The creation of the Ekklesia by the incarnate logos of God created a new and unique relationship with God's people that permits humanity to enter into the Covenant and to become part of the 'people of God' (*Laos tou Theou*). (Nicolaidis, 2010 ). The word of God was exposed to them without any specific actions required. They relied only on revelation (Hebrews 1:1, 2; 2 Peter 1:19–21).

Middleton (1967: ix) says that "Magical beliefs and practices are particularly significant in being mental, with little expressive content". Scholars generally understand magic 'functionally', and proclaim that in some cases it was useful to relieve social stresses, but in other circumstances it was considered to be the disruptive action of abnormal sorcerers (Adeney, 1974). The relationship between magic and religion was close because in both the locative and utopian world views people had a similar basic idea about the world and what influenced their lives and needed ways to protect themselves and become powerful (Craffert, 1991).

Thus, in houses, magic and religion went hand-in-hand, and religious activities comprised the worship of the patron god of a house and even merchants met in private homes with other merchants and they would have the same patron god. People not only worshiped their gods in their homes but could now also mediate divine power wherever they happened to be.





People no longer felt the strong need to go to temples because other people could be demon possessed and individuals used objects to protect them, or people such as magicians which became more personal (Craffert, 1991). In private life people used amulets and similar objects to mediate divine power, while in household religion as such they worshipped from home or the synagogue. In the political sphere they used temples and other sanctuaries for worship. People tended to use holy men or magicians for rituals such as initiation into a secret group or being identified with holy men or magicians and their ritual objects. Sacred spaces therefore were replaced by people and objects which were believed to have mediating power. Magic was considered to be an earlier stage that was superseded by religion as far as some people were concerned, but to others it was viewed as a mere corrupting of religion. It is evident from Christian teachings that we need to keep a sound relationship with the Lord if we wish to avert the immense deception of magic objects and rites involved in the practice of divination and occultic activity. As the *Laos tou Theou* we need to build deep trust and grow our faith in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people that mediated divine power were accused of being demon possessed for example in Mark 3:20-26, Jesus was accused of being possessed by Beelzebub. Magic and spells were used to achieve specific objectives in an unnatural way and all the curses, spells etc. were all believed to be effective. Whether it was political, household or private religion each had its own social structure and gave effect to different aspects in the material culture when it came to mediating divine power. According to Stark (1991) we need to also understand that magic diverges from religion because it does not speculate the presence "...of Gods, does not offer clarifications either of its own domain or address questions of ultimate meaning, does not offer "otherworldly" rewards, and is unable to sanctify the moral order, while religion does all of these things". The debate could undoubtedly benefit from a more thorough and comprehensive research of extant literature including an examination of all magic and its practice in other cultures of the ancient world, Old and New Testament, and Early Church Fathers writings.

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