

Halloween Special: The Harry Situation: A Review of J. K. Rowling's "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone"

On Sunday we completed our exegesis of Ephesians 5:18. Here is the corrected translation:

Ephesians 5:18 - [CTL] Stop being intoxicated by wine which is dissipation but keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit (or) keep on being controlled by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Our study of this verse included an examination of substance abuse and addiction with emphasis on overindulgence in alcohol. Within that context we observed as late as last Sunday the following principles with regard to the use of alcohol and drugs by children:

Free will is the issue when one is tempted to use alcohol or drugs from tobacco to heroin. This is why children, adolescents, and young adults (under 21) should be prohibited from their use. Parents, society, and the legal system should protect children from these substances. Their norms and standards are not fully developed and they do not yet have the doctrine to control their sinful nature's lust patterns. Those in positions of responsibility over children who do not protect them against these evils invite divine punishment. The alternative suggested by our Lord gives a idea of the grief in store of those who abuse children in any way:

Matthew 18:6 - Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

There are many ways by which children may be abused. This evening on the occasion of All Saints' Eve, better known as Halloween, we will examine a very subtle form of child abuse but potentially the most dangerous and devastating of all: involvement in the occult. I have entitled our Halloween Special:

The Harry Situation

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

J. K. Rowling

Scholastic Press / 309 pages /

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The publishing world was unprepared for *Harry Potter* when it became a sudden best seller in England. The first volume in what has become a popular series of books, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was written by Joanne (J. K.) Rowling /RO-ling/, a single mother from Edinburgh, Scotland, and educated in the classics at Exeter. The books are written for eight- to twelve-year olds and the fact that her first four titles have hit the *New York Times* Bestsellers List gives reason to take a critical look at this phenomenon.

Challenged by an old friend from Alabama, I bought the first book in the series, whose American title is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. It documents Harry's first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This caused initial consternation on my part since numerous biblical passages prohibit any involvement in the supernatural and the occult and implore us to protect children from exposure to them.

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' commencement address to the second generation of Jews that had graduated from his military academy, theological seminary, and school of government. It is a review of the Law and is replete with reminders of the responsibilities that must be kept by a free people.

Among Moses' comments are numerous warnings regarding the inhabitants of Canaan, a group of Hamitic first cousins whose iniquity is considered by the Lord to be full (Genesis 15:16). Among the many charges brought against them is that of demonism. The major passage that contains Moses' warnings about such practices by the Canaanites is:

Deuteronomy 18:10 - "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,

v. 11 - or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

v. 12 - "For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord ...[NASV]

With this in mind I attempted to read through the book with an objective attitude yet I found I was constantly on the lookout for indicators of how an eight- to twelve-year old might be lured into the world of demonology.

Many Christian parents have legitimate concern about this series. They struggle daily against the mental mind games of the Invisible War that surreptitiously seek opportunity to manipulate the malleable minds of their children. That they are vigilant in this endeavor should be recognized and appreciated. After all, don't the movies, the music, and the video games provide enough to manage without adding a fabulously popular series of books?

Right away Ms Rowling's vocabulary sends up red flags. The first is the American title's inclusion of the word "Sorcerer's." This word is used in English bibles to translate the Greek noun *φαρμακεία* / *pharmakeia* /from which the word "pharmacy" is derived. Its definitions include, "the use and administering of drugs" and its verb form means "to mix drugs." It is connected with the "magical arts" and is "often found in connection with idolatry and is fostered by it." (*The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, 649.*) A more detailed analysis is provided by:

Vine, W. E. *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 1064-65:

PHARMAKEIA (φαρμακεία) primarily signified the use of medicine, drugs, spells; then poisoning; then sorcery. In sorcery, the use of drugs, whether simple or potent, was generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers, with the provision of various charms, amulets, etc., professedly designed to keep the applicant or patient from the attention and power of demons, but actually to impress the applicant with the mysterious resources and powers of the sorcerer.

With such an introduction one becomes immediately alert for examples of sorcery in J. K. Rowling's storyline. The first opportunity came when we were introduced to Hogwarts' course in Potions, taught by Professor Snape. His opening-day lecture contained this chillingly accurate remark:

I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses (p. 137).

Following this eye-opening preface we get a brief introduction into potion making with herbs and items that not only can be found in *Webster's* and *Britannica* but also whose definitions assign some to the fields of mythology and the occult.

The herb **asphodel** /AS-fa-del/ is a lily that grows in Great Britain and in Greek legend is the most famous of the plants connected with the dead and the underworld.

Mixed with asphodel is **wormwood**, a bitter plant that grows in desolate places and thus become emblematic in Scripture for calamity that follows involvement in idolatry. (Deuteronomy 29:17.)

According to Professor Snape the combination produces a “sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of the Living Death.”

Bezoar /BE-zoar/ is a concentration found chiefly in the alimentary organs of cud-chewing animals and formerly believed to possess magical properties.

Monkshood /MANGKS-hood/, also called **wolfsbane**, is an herb of the buttercup family but contains the powerful poison **aconite** /AK-ah-nite/.

These items are mentioned in *Sorcerer's Stone* (137-138) on the first day of school. I became immediately concerned that this was a harbinger of even more detailed and intensified presentations as the story progressed.

I point this out because of the principle we have unscientifically established over the years but that is supported by the practical experience of every parent: children go legally insane at age 13. That's why the school system invented middle schools. These are designed to separate the mentally deranged from the rest of the student population until some sanity begins to return around age 16. Full recovery usually does not occur until the mid twenties, if then, but that's another story. Nevertheless, Ms Rowling includes actual herbs in a discussion of potion recipes. As is noted, some of them have histories associated with occult practices. Yet her pre-teen audience is soon to be offered drugs by classmates and others and the practice of making homemade concoctions from sometimes readily available plants and chemicals is increasing. Why introduce this subject in such authentic detail?

Placed on early alert I am able to report that the kind of detail discussed in the initial Potions class did not continue. The story became an adventure on the order of a young Indiana Jones. I was personally reminded of the *Hardy Boys* series by Franklin W. Dixon that was so popular in my youth.

The activities that one might imagine at an academy of witchcraft are a continuing theme throughout the book but were used more as a vehicle to drive the story than as an instructive on the occult. The investment of magical powers into her characters also provided Rowling with a very convenient *deus ex machina* on a number of occasions.

Like it or not, the *Harry Potter* adventures are here to stay. Our parents thought Rock an' Roll was a passing fad. It wasn't. Neither is this. J. K. Rowling is a fantastic writer. She uses fantasy, magic, and make-believe to tell her story. And her story ultimately concludes with the triumph of good over evil.

Were it not for the fact Harry apparently inherited a heavy slug of magical powers from his parents he would be classified as a geek. All geeks, not to mention jocks, want to be heroes but rarely are. Imagination affords opportunity to identify with fictitious characters that have attributes of invincibility.

The most famous geek turned hero is the mild-mannered Clark Kent who only needs to strip to his long johns in order to acquire instant omnipotence. As long as Kryptonite is avoided the Man of Steel rules.

Harry takes the pre-teen into the world of make-believe with powers supplied by a genetically inherited ability for hocus-pocus. His flying requires a broom whereas Superman only needs a cape. However Harry one-ups Superman since his cape makes him invisible. We could discuss the Invisible Man here, but we won't.

The adventure presents a number of challenges for Harry and His friends, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Neville Longbottom, to use their knowledge, their skills, and their sense of duty to untangle a mystery and to do so under pressure. Failure would mean disaster for their friends, both fellow students and teachers.

The dénouement required Harry to concentrate on the objective, exhibit courage under pressure, and have confidence in his abilities. He had the poise to use reason and logic instead of emotion and zeal to resolve intractable problems. His loyalty to his friends motivated him to put his own life on the line when he could just as easily have done nothing.

Harry's personal virtue became the key to his victory over the dark side's Lord Voldemort, who is Rowling's Darth Vader. But where Darth Vader is truly science fiction, Lord Voldemort introduces very real aspects of the angelic conflict into the final struggle between good and evil. The Christian parent can use Voldemort to illustrate demon possession. Voldemort needed a body to indwell in order to carry out his nefarious scheme and he used Professor Quirrell's for that purpose. Quirrell perfectly portrays the duplicity and deceit of the satanic modus operandi and this is typical of demon possession. As Quirrell he took on the personality of a meek, stuttering, self-effacing schoolteacher. Down in the dungeons' last chamber he is arrogant, articulate, and confident.

The final battle with Quirrell brings Harry face-to-face with the same demonic powers once encountered by Saul in 1 Samuel 28, our Lord Jesus Christ in Mark 5:1-13, and Paul in Acts 16:16-18. Let's note all three passages:

1 Samuel 28:1 - Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel.

v. 3 - Now Samuel was dead and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah /RAY-mah/ his own city. And Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists.

v. 4 - So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem /SHOO-num/; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa /gil-BO-ah/.

v. 5 - When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines; he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly.

v. 6 - When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets.

1 Samuel 28:7 - Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor /EN-door/."

v. 8 - Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, and he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, "Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you."

v. 9 - But the woman said to him, "Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?"

v. 10 - And Saul vowed to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment come upon you for this thing."

v. 11 - Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me."

v. 16 - And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary?"

v. 17 - "And the Lord has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David."

Mark 5:1 - And they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes /GER-ah-senz/.

v. 2 - And when Jesus had come out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him.

v. 6 - And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him;

v. 7 - and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!"

Mark 5:8 - For Jesus had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit [**demon possession**]!"

v. 9 - And Jesus was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Jesus, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

v. 10 - And he began to entreat Jesus earnestly not to send them out of the country.

v. 11 - Now there was a big drift of swine feeding there on the mountain.

v. 12 - And the demons entreated Jesus, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them."

v. 13 - And Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the drift rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.

Acts 16:16 - And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination [**demon possessed**] met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.

v. 17 - Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

v. 18 - And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the demon, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

Like Christ and Paul, Harry is victorious. But Christ has authority over the entire angelic creation under His titles, Angel of the Lord and Lord of the Armies. Paul had authority over the demon-possessed woman because he held the rank of Apostle. But only believers in the Church Age are divinely protected from demonic possession and demon influence by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the ability to discern the cosmic lie from an inventory of biblical principles. All of these concepts can be taught in the context of chapter 17, "The Man with Two Faces."

Before reading that final chapter I was convinced I would not be able to recommend the *Potter* series with much enthusiasm. But its final pages changed my mind. Harry's conversation with Professor Albus Dumbledore is filled with opportunities to teach biblical principles to children. Let me illustrate.

The object being sought by Voldermort was the Sorcerer's Stone, a ruby-red gem that provided for its possessor the ability to change any metal into gold and to make the "Elixir of Life," a potion that extends longevity indefinitely. Harry winds up with the Stone but ultimately Professor Dumbledore gets it when he helps Harry defeat Voldermort in the dungeon. Dumbledore tells Harry he destroyed the Stone and explains why:

"To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure. You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all-the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them."

Christian parents can take a paragraph such as this and expound on several biblical subjects: the soul never dies; once a believer dies physically his soul enters into heaven in the presence of the Lord; at the end of the Death-Shadowed Valley a believer ends the adventure of time and begins the adventure of eternity; the principle of rewards and blessings that come from spiritual growth as opposed to human energy or luck; the principle that material things fade but the Word of God remains forever.

With regard to the Elixir of Life, the parent can initiate a discussion about the true Elixir of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ:

John 4:13 - Jesus answered (the Samaritan woman), "Everyone who drinks of this water (in the well) shall thirst again;

v. 14 - but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

There is also an opportunity to discuss heritage impact. In the struggle against the Voldermort-possessed Professor Quirrell, Harry was able to obtain victory because of the legacy of his mother's love for him.

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldermort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever."

This allows parents to discuss the principle of the personal impact mature believers have on others. Although in the context of the book Mrs. Potter was obviously not a believer the concepts of unconditional love and heritage impact are introduced. These doctrines can be discussed with children by emphasizing that even after the death of a spiritually mature parent a child is divinely blessed and protected in that parent's absence. Sacrificial love is introduced and the undiminished love of God for the human race from eternity past can be emphasized. This love was demonstrated on the cross through the substitutionary spiritual death of Christ. (Romans 5:8; John 3:16)

I will not go further with the examples but there are several others in chapter 17 alone that enable parents to talk about doctrinal subjects with their child.

In conclusion let me stress that this series by J. K. Rowling is not the ideal source for teaching biblical principles to children. However, these books are extremely popular among young people. But Christians do not need to be afraid of *Harry Potter*. Fear is not a part of the Christian way of life. *Harry Potter* has been successfully introduced to the younger generation and heartily accepted by an ever-growing number. As are so many of the distractions that are prevalent in our culture today this one not going to go away. Consequently, believers must go on the offensive. They must seize the moment, not whine and mewl while promoting censorship. Have the courage to confront the lie and embrace the truth! Inevitably, the wrong shall fail, the right prevail. Thus parents and teachers should take advantage of *Harry's* popularity and use it to teach children principles of establishment and biblical truth while exposing the lie.

I suggest parents buy the books but read them first. As they do they should determine how they would address the troublesome aspects of each story. Give thought to what principles of biblical truth might be discussed. Identify false concepts and determine how these will be refuted. After having made a complete analysis of a particular book and worked out a strategy then let the child read it.

As the child advances through each volume, enter into a conversation about the various subjects you have already previewed. Use *Harry Potter* to teach the Word of God and use the Word of God to critique *Harry Potter*. This will help your child think analytically from biblical principles as he progresses through each title.

If this course is followed then the child will be armed and prepared to enter into constructive discussions with his friends and possibly evangelize some of them while introducing biblical principles to a few.

A final thought to teachers. Since the public schools function under judicial tyranny the opportunity to communicate biblical truth is rare. Yet *Harry Potter* provides the opportunity to introduce theological concepts into classroom discussions. *Harry Potter* is popular, it is in the schools, and the literati love it. Wonderful! It is their anointed Ms Rowling who brings up the subjects just mentioned all of which are biblical. The Supreme Court has approved the teaching of the *Bible* as “literature.” Therefore *teach* it as literature! Use the *Bible* as a resource to offer insight into the subjects addressed by Ms Rowling.

Don't fight *Harry Potter*! Embrace *Harry Potter*! Don't censor *Harry Potter*! Interpret *Harry Potter*! Don't be afraid of *Harry Potter*! Utilize *Harry Potter*! In so doing you will fulfill the imperative of the royal family honor code stated by Paul in:

Romans 12:21 - Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Due diligence requires that the challenges issued above be accompanied by the warning Paul provides in:

2 Corinthians 2:11 - In order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Satan and his demonic forces can most definitely use *Harry Potter* as a scheme to introduce children to the insidious world of witchcraft, sorcery, and the occult. This is a danger unrecognized by those without doctrine, which is of great advantage to the ruler of this world. If he can capture the thinking of children he can later hinder their objectivity toward the gospel and the Word of God. Involvement in the occult always and inevitably leads to involvement in idolatrous religious practices, the phallic cult, and drug abuse. To allow children unsupervised access to *Harry Potter* offers our Adversary, the devil, opportunity he rarely misses. For parents and teachers to permit *Harry Potter* to go uncriticized is to invite the disastrous result reported on by Jeremiah in:

Jeremiah 17:1 - [Corrected translation] Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a diamond-tipped stylus on their conscience [mental idolatry] and on the horns of their altars [overt idolatry].

v. 2 - Their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills.

A sobering comment on this passage is found in a book by:

Feinberg, Charles Lee. *Jeremiah: A Commentary.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 127:

The children of Judah will be so steeped in idolatry by their parents that the desire for it will emerge at the slightest provocation.

Left on their own alone with Ms Rowling a child's soul is placed at jeopardy before the literal but invisible Lord Voldemorts who prowls about seeking someone to devour. (2 Peter 5:8) Such a danger must not be ignored. To do so invites the disaster that is the subject of these lines from Rudyard Kipling's poem:

EN-DOR

Oh, the road to En-dor is the oldest road

And the craziest road of all!

Straight it runs to the Witch's abode,

As it did in the days of Saul.

And nothing has changed of the sorrow in store

For such as go down on the road to En-dor!

The suggestions contained in this critique cannot be executed unless Christian parents know enough about the angelic conflict to properly evaluate the *Potter* series. Any parent who does not have a solid understanding of these doctrines should consider reading the following books:

Suggested Reading

Barnhouse, Donald Grey. *The Invisible War*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965).

Dickason, C. Fred. *Angels: Elect & Evil*. Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995).

Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Your Adversary, The Devil*. (Grand Rapids: Lamplighter Books, 1969).

Thieme, R. B., Jr. *Satan and Demonism*. 3d ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1996).

Unger, Merrill F. *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*. (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1994).