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PARENTS! PLEASE READ THIS ARTICLE! Be advised that the current “Harry Potter” craze is not “child’s play.”

THE TROUBLE WITH Harry

by Michael Martin

There’s a new fad in town, and it’s going to be here for a while. Children everywhere have become absorbed in the world of sorcery and magic, wizardry and witchcraft, all thanks to a young boy named Harry Potter. You’ve no doubt heard of him, and now, children across the country want to be like him. What began as a popular children’s book series has now grown into a full-blown franchise, spurred on by the release of what promises to be only the first in a series of wildly successful motion pictures. Harry Potter is perhaps the biggest attraction for children in years, and the trend presents some interesting problems for children and parents alike.

That Harry Potter appeals to children is not surprising on the surface. With notions of performing magical feats and defeating “bad guys” with supernatural powers, Harry Potter offers children a whimsical escape from the ordinary, and with such a wide variety of Harry Potter merchandise available, a child can easily become immersed in this “magical” world.

So, what’s wrong with all of this? It’s only make-believe, after all. What’s the harm in a story that includes a little sorcery and magic? First, let’s make some important distinctions. While there have been many children’s stories which feature magic and even witches (including the Chronicles of Narnia), in most cases, the character who uses magic and sorcery is a villain—not a hero. Secondly, magic and sorcery are generally not the focal points of most children’s stories, and perhaps most importantly, witchcraft is not portrayed in a positive light. Not so with Harry Potter. According to my research, Harry Potter, the “hero” of the stories, uses sorcery and witchcraft to resolve conflicts. The story spends a great deal of time teaching Harry Potter, his friends, and consequently, any child who sees the movie or reads the book, sorcery, wizardry, and witchcraft. The basic message? Witchcraft is good. Witches are good.

Remember, witchcraft and sorcery are real things, and real people practice them in the real world. There are only two sources from which supernatural powers can come. Either God Himself can impart such abilities at His discretion, such as He did by enabling the Apostle Peter to heal sick people (Acts chapter 3), or evil magical powers can come from Satan. Any supernatural power or ability that is not given by God comes from the evil

one, and witchcraft, sorcery, and wizardry—all of the magical forms portrayed in Harry Potter, are evil. Period. We should have nothing to do with such things. Nothing. Not convinced? Keep reading.

What Does God’s Word Say?

The Bible has much to say about this subject. After all, witchcraft is nothing new, and so God’s Word includes numerous directives regarding these kinds of “black magic.” Witchcraft and sorcery are considered to be very serious offenses, and the Scriptures are very clear about how God feels about such things. Take a look at these passages, and if you have children, we suggest looking at them together.

Deuteronomy 18:10-13

“Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist, or who

consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God.”

Leviticus 19:31

“Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.”

Leviticus 20:27

“A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”

Exodus 22:18

“Do not allow a sorceress to live.”

Micah 5:12

“I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells.”

Isaiah 8:19

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?”

Acts 19:18-20 *“Many of those who believed [in Christ] now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”*

God’s Word is very clear. Witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and spiritism are evil and detestable to God. In fact, these activities are so evil and so repulsive to God that they carried a penalty of death in the Old Testament days. These are

Harry Potter Article, continued from the reverse side

serious offenses, and though our society does not call for capital punishment for these activities [so don't get any ideas], it is important to remember the seriousness of these evil deeds.

Still, some valid questions have been asked about the harm of seeing a movie or reading a book about Harry Potter, and many parents and children may be faced with such questions. Here then, for your consideration, are some possible answers to common Harry Potter questions:

Q. What's the harm in seeing "Harry Potter?" It's just make-believe!

A. Harry Potter promotes evil magic, no matter how you look at it. Kids who see the movie or read the books will come away with an interest, on some level, in witchcraft and sorcery. Additionally, the money you spend to see the movie, read the books, or buy the merchandise will only go toward supporting more books, movies and toys to promote these evil activities further. This is the last thing that we as believers in Christ should do.

Q. What's the difference between the magic in Harry Potter and some other children's stories such as "The Chronicles of Narnia?"

A. Harry Potter portrays witchcraft in a positive light, while most other children's stories which involve magic portray it in a negative light. The Chronicles of Narnia is an allegory—a representation of the gospel. In "The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe," a character known as the White Witch represents Satan, and her magic represents Satan's power. Both are defeated by Aslan, the lion who represents Christ.

Other stories, such as the classic fairy tales, often incorporate some sort of magic, but it is typically the villain who uses it (there are notable exceptions to this which we will address below). Few, if any, other children's stories are focused centrally on the magic and sorcery itself—they are typically minor plot points to help advance a larger story. Harry Potter, on the other hand, is completely held together by the sorcery and witchcraft it promotes, portraying it in a positive and appealing light.

Q. What about other stories which portray magic as a positive thing?

A. It is true that some well-known children's stories have portrayed magic as a positive thing. Among these are the Wizard of Oz, which features two "wicked witches" and one so-called "good witch," who tells Dorothy how to get home. The problem is that there is no such thing as a "good witch." One cannot be a witch and be "good." In Cinderella, the fairy godmother uses her magic to make sure that Cinderella makes it to the ball in style, but again, one has to consider where such magic would come from. The three fairies of Sleeping Beauty, also "good," use magic.

What should we do with stories like these? This is for you to decide, just as it is your choice whether to avoid Harry Potter. In order to be consistent, one should consider avoiding ALL such stories, but there are some distinctions which can be made between these classic tales and Harry Potter. Little girls who watch Cinderella want to BE Cinderella. They want to BE Sleeping Beauty. They want to BE Dorothy—NOT the witch. The role models in these stories are NOT the magical characters. The fairy godmother, "good witches," and fairies are only peripheral characters—not the hero or heroine. Harry Potter is different. Children who watch Harry Potter will dream of BEING Harry Potter, because he is the hero. He is the role model, with all of his sorcery, wizardry and witchcraft, and this is an important distinction between Harry Potter and most other children's stories.

Q. Isn't the point of Harry Potter that good triumphs over evil?

A. While the Harry Potter stories may portray a triumph of good over evil, it is still centered on evil witchcraft and sorcery. Remember, there is no such thing as "good" witchcraft or sorcery. God made no provision whatsoever in His Word for these things, and they should have no place at all in the lives of

the believer. The notion that there are "good witches" is a faulty one.

Q. Could Harry Potter be dangerous?

A. In a word, yes. I was asked by a child recently if he would die as a result of seeing the Harry Potter movie. I told him that he would not die as a result of seeing the film, but he would grieve the Holy Spirit. I do not believe that a Christian can participate in the Harry Potter trend and remain obedient to God. The teachings of Harry Potter can confuse our understanding of spiritual things, entice kids to become involved with witchcraft, and damage our witness, causing other believers to stumble.

I was asked about the threat of demon possession by this same child, and I will answer the question here in the same way. For the believer, who has the Spirit of God living within him, there is no threat of demon possession. He is already "possessed" by the Holy Spirit. However, many people believe that believers can still be oppressed by demons. My personal belief is that the greatest threat to our spiritual lives is our own sinful nature, and I believe that the Scriptures show that we should steer clear of the entire Harry Potter fad. For the unbeliever, on the other hand, demon possession, though probably rare, is a possibility. Numbers of people in the Bible were demon-possessed, many of whom were delivered from their ordeals by Christ Himself. Any time someone opens the door to the evil one, they place themselves at great risk. Therefore, Harry Potter is also a bad idea for the unbeliever.

Q. How can I convince a child that they don't need to become involved with Harry Potter?

A. If you are a parent, you obviously have the authority to simply impose your decision to avoid Harry Potter on your children, but you may find it helpful to explain your reasoning to your children. "Because I said so," while being a valid explanation of a parent's decision in some cases, may not satisfy children who want to see the movie. Children will find it helpful if you explain your reasons for keeping them away from Harry Potter, and you may use the Scripture references provided in this article to help you with this.

Aside from simply keeping your children away from this trend, you may also want to provide fun alternatives to children. Remember that in many cases, your child may be the only one at school who hasn't seen the movie and will therefore feel left out of conversations and activities which stem from the Harry Potter fad. A good strategy is to help children to arrive at a point where they don't WANT to have anything to do with Harry Potter. Children want heroes to imitate, so instead of allowing Harry to be their hero, YOU can be their hero. Better yet, Christ can be their hero. This means spending a significant amount of time with children, playing with them, being silly with them, and so on. Engage in activities that they enjoy and which are pleasing to Christ. Make their lives so much fun that they will find the idea of Harry Potter to be boring and unappealing. This will take a great deal of energy, but it will also pay off.

Harry Potter is everywhere, and he's going to be here for a while. The movie has launched Harry Potter into super stardom, and the subsequent video release, future books and movies, and toys will keep the Harry Potter trend alive for a few years yet to come. If you don't believe that this is a big trend, take a walk down the toy aisles the next time you visit Target or Wal-Mart. The simple fact that a trend is geared for children, or that it's cute or even fun does not mean that it is harmless. In the case of Harry Potter, an apparent agenda is at work, teaching children that witchcraft is good. So, may I suggest that you keep yourself and your children away from this trend? The Bible is very clear. Harry is no hero.