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Magic and Christianity: An Exegesis on Magical Passages in the Acts of the Apostles

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Abstract

Magic is a significant theme in The Acts of the Apostle but is undermined by scholars. The significance of this theme is obvious in the so-called five episodes or passage of magic. Thus, how does Christian understand of magic particularly in the Acts of the Apostles is also prominent. This article aimed to re-examine all five episodes of magic in The Acts of the Apostles that Christian may have a more comprehensive understanding of magic and able to conquer the reality of magic which is still very relevant in our contemporary ministry in Indonesia. The method of this article was literature study. By the study it was concluded that the magic in Acts is best understood to further its apologetical purpose, because the passages clearly demonstrate evil as the reality behind magic, thus the confrontation between God's power and magic is inevitable for it is between God and evil.

Keywords: magic; apologetic; Christianity; Greco-Roman; the Acts of the Apostles

INTRODUCTION

The root term “magic” occurs eight times in the New Testament and four are found in Acts.¹ These four occurrences in Acts indicate the significance of magic, and the significance of magic is contra with Klauck’s² argument that magic is not significant and thus can be undermined. Christianity flourished in the Greco-Roman context of life that was vastly dominated by magic, then, it is plausible to claim that the readers of Acts are likely familiar with the practice of magic and the reputation of a magician. Therefore, it is unnecessary for Luke to provide the description of magic in detail to emphasize the significant of magic in his second book.

The examination of the purpose of Acts is complex as many scholars have proposed answers for the purpose of Acts³

which vary from edifying or entertaining the reader,⁴ providing a historical account of Christianity,⁵ apologetic in the sense of defending Christianity as superior to other religions and a religion which is not against the Roman authorities,⁶ and demonstrating the unimpeded spread of the word of God.⁷

Without undermining other purposes of Acts, this article considers the apologetic purpose of Acts fits to the understanding of magic in Acts. The apologetic purpose supposed that Acts is written with two intentions: First, Christianity is the true religion and superior to others, thus the flourish of Christianity cannot be retained by either Jews, nor pagan beliefs, nor even magic. The episode of Paul and Barnabas who resisted to be associate with the pagan gods⁸ and also the narration of the inability of the Jews to stop Christianity⁹ demonstrates that

¹ All the occurrences in Acts are: First, “μαγευω”, the participle of the verb “μαγεω” to practice magic, is found in Acts 8:9. Second, “μαγεις” or magic appears in Acts 8:11. The third occurrence is recorded in Acts 13:6 that is “μαγος” or a magician. The fourth or last appearance is “μαγον” the accusative of “μαγος” as reported in Acts 13:8.

² Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 119.

³ See for instance Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context* (London: T & T Clark, 2000); Richard Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). Basically there are two positions in understanding the genre of Acts: First, Acts is a novel which implies an unhistorical account of Acts such as adopted by

Richard Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, and Sandra Schwartz "The Trial Scene in Greek Novels and in Acts," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, edited by Todd Penner and Caroline V. Stichele (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 105-37. Second, Acts is a historical book such as understood by Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 39.

⁴ See for instance Pervo, *Profit with Delight*; Schwartz, *The Trial Scene in Greek Novels and in Acts*.

⁵ As perceived by Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 39.

⁶ See James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), xii-xiii.

⁷ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, xii.

⁸ See Acts 14:12-15.

⁹ Acts 5:17-25 and 8:1-4 are very obvious evidence that even the persecution done by the Jews could not stop the spread of Christianity.

Christianity is true religion and yet superior to other beliefs. Moreover, the superiority and the trueness of Christianity are presented by Luke in the outgrowth of the Gospel. Second, Luke demonstrates that Christianity does not oppose to Roman authority. The evidence is found in several episode such as an authoritative Roman representatives who accepted Paul to witness to his faith in Christ.¹⁰ Another episode shows that Paul as a Christian and at the same time is a Roman citizen has all its rights and advantages.¹¹ Paul is not a rebel who opposes the empire. Nearly the end of Acts, Paul during his house-prison, still can witness freely to the word of God.¹²

Magic in Acts and also in Greco-Roman literature, is depicted negatively as an evil power in two ways. First, magic is an attempt to manipulate the power of supernatural beings for personal benefit.¹³ Second, its power led people to believe in many gods and the true God of Christianity is only one of them.¹⁴ Thus, magic is understood as power that impedes people to believe only one and true God and must be overcome.¹⁵ Here, the apologetic purpose of

Acts fits the context since this purpose also demonstrates a negative perception of magic that thwarts the spread of the word of God.

The Acts of the Apostles presents vastly the miracles performed by the apostles and the victory over the power of magic and also the Jew's authority who try to thwart the proliferation of Christianity. However, with five lengthy episodes of confrontation between magic and Christianity, it is plausible to state that magic is a real problem for Christianity. Thus, magic is best understood within the apologetic purpose of Acts. The victory over magic is a clear feature of Christian propaganda to witness to the trueness and superiority of Christianity.

The main issue with these magical episodes is likely about the how to understand these magical issues in Acts and apply them in the context of Christian ministry in Indonesia where magic is manifested in many aspects of life whether culture, social life, or religion. The evident that magic with all its facets is flourish until now in Indonesia is found in several articles currently.¹⁶ It is

¹⁰ See for instance Acts 13:7; 24:10-22.

¹¹ Acts 16:38-9; 22:23-9.

¹² Acts 28:30-31

¹³ See the case of Simon, the magician in Acts 8:4-25.

¹⁴ See Acts 13:8 and 16:16.

¹⁵ The clearest expression is found in Acts 13:9-10.

¹⁶ See for instance several articles that deal with magic in Indonesia, Jusman Tago'a, I Ketut Enoh,

"Tinjauan Teologis Terhadap Budaya Pemanggilan Arwah Orang Mati Pada Suku Pamona", *Jurnal Jaffray*, Vol.8 No.2 (Oktober 2010); Pramadi Tjahjono, "Peranan Kejawan dan Islam dalam Praktik Ziarah serta Upacara Labuhan di Parangkusuma, Yogyakarta", *Dunamis: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* Vol.3 No.1 (Oktober 2018); Ahmad Afandi, "Kepercayaan Animisme-Dinamisme serta Adaptasi Hindu-Budha dengan Kebudayaan Asli di

also strange to find out that many articles have been written about these magical episodes but without providing any application.¹⁷ The lack of application will turn to merely knowledge of magical episodes in Acts which is inappropriate for Christian. The Acts of the Apostle which is the word of the living God must provide more than merely the knowledge, for it goes further to convince Christian to apply the teachings or principles into their life and ministry. This is more like also the intention of Luke when he wrote his second book for the most excellence Theophilus. Therefore, the necessity to revisit these magical episodes and draw its application in the context of Indonesia is urgent. The relevant research question is how should Christian understand magic as the cultural intersubjectivity of the Roman Greco in the light of the philosophical world view, and then apply them in their ministry? The purpose of this article is to re-examine the so-called five episodes of magic by first, translating the text, provide the structure, exegete, and expose all the

passages of magic, and provide the application in the context of Christian ministry in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

The literature study is employed in this research. There are four steps in this literature method. The first is step is the translation of the Greek text. The second step is the brief provision of the historical background or setting of the text. The third is the structure of the passage. The fourth is then the exegesis and exposition of each passage within the proper and relevant historical background. The relevant and proper historical background is selected from the primary source, the collection of Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) translated in English. The exegesis and exposition will refer also to the relevant commentary of each passage of magic and the context of Christian ministry in Indonesia that encounters with magic in its many facets abundantly.

Pulau Lombok-NTB", *Historis* Vol.1 No.1 (Desember 2016); Ali Nurdin, "Komunikasi Magis Dukun (Studi Fenomenologi Tentang Kompetensi Komunikasi Dukun)", *Jurnal Komunikasi* Vol.1 No.5 (Juli 2012); Bernard Lubis, "Korelasi Pemahaman Tentang Okultisme dengan Perilaku Hidup Sehari-hari Jemaat di GPIB Eben Haezer Lubuk Pakam", *Jurnal Pionir LPPM Universitas Asahan* Vol. 6 No. 2 (Mei 2020); James J. Watopa, "Pengaruh Kepercayaan dan Praktek Agama Suku terhadap Komunitas Kristen Suku Dani, Papua, Indonesia",

Jurnal Fakultas Filsafat (JFF) Universitas Klabat Vol. 2 No. 1 (Juni 2013).

¹⁷ See for instance Dick van der Merwe, "The Power of the Gospel Victorious Over the Power of Evil in Acts of the Apostles", *Scriptura* 103 (2010); also, Benedict H. M. Kent, "Curses in Acts: Hearing the Apostles' Words of Judgment Alongside 'Magical' Spell Texts", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* Vol. 39 No. 4 (2017); also, Chandra Han, "Magic in Greco-Roman Era: A Historical Context for Magic in the Acts of the Apostles", *Jurnal Jaffray* Vol. 18 No. 1 (April 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Acts 8:4-25

This is the first as well as the lengthiest account in Acts that deals with magic and the magician. The author of Acts intends to show that however impressive and great is the magic and the magician, the victory still belongs to the word of God. Several facets of magic as represented in the magician can be found either implicitly or explicitly. The setting of this passage resides in the larger context found in the three verses¹⁸ that precede the text.

The Setting

The setting of this magical passage is introduced by the death of Stephen which ignited a massive persecution of the believers, with an exception of the apostles. The persecution sparked two significant consequences to Christianity: 1) the spread of the believers throughout Judea and Samaria and 2) the unanticipated opportunity to proclaim the gospel beyond Aramaic speaking Jews. Therefore, the experiences at Samaria provide an introduction to the mission work that Jesus had commanded to the disciples to perform.

The encounter with Simon, the magician takes place in a missionary context. The concern of magic is evident in the

lengthy record on the confrontation between the magical power represented in Simon the magician and the power of Jesus' name and the Holy Spirit represented by Philip and later by Peter. The confrontation between magic and Christianity can be found in the structure of this passage.

The Structure

The structure of this particular passage Acts 8:4-25 can be outlined as follows:

The spread of the believers to Judea and Samaria (1-4)
Philip and his deeds (5-8)
The proclamation of Christ (5)
The signs Philip performed (6)
The positive explication of the signs of Philip (7)
The rejoicing result in that city (8)
Simon, the magician and his deeds (9-11)
Self-oriented proclamation (9-10)
The practicing of magic (9)
Getting attention from the people (11)
The victory of the word of God over magic (12-13)
Peter and the receiving of the Holy Spirit (14-17)
Simon, the magician and his wickedness (18-23)
The rebuke over magic (24)
The successful outspread of the word of God throughout the cities of Samaria (25)

The structure shows several significant issues concerning the confrontation between magic and the word of God. Several reasons that underlie such a structure are: First, it is likely that Luke intentionally

¹⁸ Acts 8:1-3.

contrasted Philip and Simon the magician. Second, the contrast between Philip and Simon is evident in the parallel portrait of Philip and his deeds followed immediately with the portrait of Simon and his magical performance. The identity of Philip is not mentioned as it has been introduced in the previous passage (Acts 6:5). Third, the deeds of Philip are presented in two ways: to proclaim Christ and to perform signs (v. 6) so that Luke pays attention to Philip's saying and performing (v. 6). The signs are positive since they result in casting out of unclean spirits and the healing of the paralyzed and the lame (v. 7). The conclusive statement about the rejoicing¹⁹ of the city of Samaria (v. 8) confirms the positive portrayal of Philip. Contrasting this positive portrayal of Philip, the episode of Simon is obviously negative. Such a negative view is presented in two ways: First, the identification of Simon as the one practicing magic (v. 9) which is represented in verse 11. Second, the self-proclamation of Simon (v. 9) is escalated in the claim of the people that Simon is divine (v. 10). Although the attention given by the people is recorded in both episodes of Philip and Simon, the rejoicing of the city of Samaria clearly distinguishes these two figures. Therefore the contrast between Philip which is posi-

tive and Simon as the opposition is obvious. The person represented by Philip is clearly Jesus Christ since this is his message, while evil is represented in Simon. By contrasting these two powers Luke shows the confrontation between them as well as the submission of Simon to the word of God proclaimed by Philip. Though the report of Simon is that he believed to Philip's message, the next episode proves that his main intention is the manipulation of the power of magic, even if he has to pay for it. This false belief corresponds with his constant amazement at the signs and the great miracles which Philip did rather than to the person of Jesus who is the core message of Philip.

The negative image of magic can be identified by contrasting Simon with his magic and Philip with his miracles. For Luke, Philip, as one of "seven" is a servant of the word.²⁰ The miracles performed by Philip are a means to convince and lead people of Samaria to believe the word of God. Simon Magus-the magician in contrast to Philip and the apostles, is depicted as arrogant since the magic he performed is to amaze people in order to exalt himself and lead people to trust in him.

The victory of the word of God over magic and the confession of Simon that the

¹⁹ This significant feature namely "joy" that distinct to magic is likely lack in the analysis of Merwe, *The Power of the Gospel Victorious Over the Power of Evil in Acts of the Apostles*, 83.

²⁰ See Luke 1:3, where those who are the eyewitness of Jesus' life are merely the servants of the word. Thus, it is legitimate to associate Philip as a servant of the word.

power of the Gospel is stronger than his magic evidences a strong apologetic against magic. Magic can never rival the word of God, it has to be vanquished. The victory over magic is a strong proclamation before the readers of Acts that Christianity is a true and superior religion. One may miss the seriousness of magic if Simon with his magic in this particular passage is understood merely as performing tricks²¹ and having a false view of God.²² To argue that magic in this particular passage is as positive as its first reference in Matthew 2:1-15 to the Persian Priests or teachers²³ is highly questionable, even illegitimate.

Such a negative image of magic is exhibited more implicitly in the following verses 18-24. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers is contrasted with the wicked philosophy of the magician. The assumption of magic that any power can be manipulated and dispensed at will is revealed in the following verses 18-24 which describes the offer of Simon to buy the power of the

Holy Spirit. The action of Peter in dispensing the Holy Spirit is impressive before Simon since as a magician, Simon thought that any power could be obtained through buying and learning. The offering of money by Simon to dispense the power of the Holy Spirit is strong evidence pointing to the assumption that magic can obtain all cosmic power.²⁴ The rebuke of Peter disclosed the wickedness of Simon, the magician. The immediate response of Simon who asked Peter to pray for him that the saying of Peter might not happen implies the conquering of magic by God's power. The argument is this: Simon was a magician who claimed himself as great and used to benefit others with his magical power. But now he asked Peter to pray for him. This is of course an upside-down situation for Simon, from the great one to become the one who asked for prayer from Peter who possessed God's power. When Philip contested with Simon, the text did not mention Simon's petition to Philip. Simon only asked for baptism. In the

²¹ See Merwe, *The Power of the Gospel Victorious Over the Power of Evil in Acts of the Apostles*, 83, who mentioned the magic of Simon as magic tricks.

²² See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109. Although Dunn mentioned further that "there is no need to assume that magic is consistently negative," in Acts, all accounts of magic are negative and even wicked. The positive image of "μαγοι" in Matthew is because the reference of "μαγοι" is distinct between Matthew and Acts.

²³ See Stephen Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 193, who cited Cicero that the μαγοι were "that clan of wise men and teachers dwelling in Persia."

²⁴ Such principles are found abundantly in the context of Christianity in Indonesia, see for instance Trevor Loranto Watulingas, "Pelayanan Gereja Terhadap Praktek Okultisme di Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa Jemaat Karunia SEA 1", *e-Jurnal: Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen* Vol. 1 No. 2 (2020), 13-4; Elfrida Saragih, Ebenhaizer I Nuban Timo, "Kajian Teologis mengenai Praktik Okultisme dan Pelayanan Pelepasan bagi Mahasiswa", *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injil dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* Vol.4, No.1 (Januari 2020), 47-50; also Emanuel Satyo Yuwono, "Kejawaaan dan Kekristenan: Negosiasi Identitas Orang Kristen Jawa dalam Persoalan di Sekitar Tradisi Ziarah Kubur", *Humanika* Vol. 16, No.1 (September 2016), 93-5.

case of Peter, Simon's request show that he as magician was no longer great and must ask for prayer from Peter. This is to say that the power magic has been conquered by the power of God.

The negative picture of magic as represented in Simon, the magician is contrasted with God's power represented by Philip and Peter who disclose the wickedness of magic. Without the confrontation of Philip and Peter with Simon, the story would only reveal the astonishing acceptance of the gospel by the Samaritans. Luke intended as well to offer a negative understanding of magic. As the purpose of Luke in presenting this account is to exhibit the trueness and superiority of Christianity which could not be restrained, thus, it is true to conclude that magic, particularly its wickedness, should be understood in the context of spreading the gospel to the end of the world. The record of Luke in Acts 8:25 about preaching the gospel in many villages of Samaria is very strong evident that Christianity cannot be restrained. Even when the gospel faced the power of magic, it cannot be impeded. It is the power of magic that is vanquished.

Acts 13:1-12

The other two verbal terms of magic are found in this particular passage. Even though this passage is not as long as the account of Simon Magus, the evils of magic

are more explicitly revealed. Again, the confrontation between magical power and God's power is represented in human figures. The representation of magic is Elymas and God's power is Paul. The account is also situated in the midst of the spread of the word of God in Cyprus, particularly Paphos.

A Literal Translation

The text of Acts 13:6-12 will be translated as literal as possible with the consequence that the English translation might seem strange or a bit redundant. The reason to translate literally is to exhibit the emphasis which is not apparent in English.

6) And when passing all the islands as far as Paphos, they found a man, a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name Barjesus 7) who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man, summoning Barnabas and Paul, sought after to hear the word of God. 8) but kept opposing them, Elymas the magician, for thus his name is interpreted, keep on seeking to pervert the proconsul from the faith. 9) But Saul, who also Paul, being filled of the Holy Spirit, looking intently into him 10) he said "O, full of all deceit and all fraud, son of devil, enemy of all righteousness, will you not stop perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" 11) but now behold the hand of Lord upon you, also you will be blind, not seeing the sun until a time. And immediately there fell on him a mistiness and darkness and going about he kept seeking the one who lead him by the hand. 12) then,

seeing thing had happened, the proconsul believed because of being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

The Setting

The setting of this passage is located within the first missionary journey of Paul which begins with the description on how Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch to other regions to proclaim the gospel. If in Acts 8:1-3, the mission is carried out unplanned as a consequence of the persecution, here in Acts 13:1-12 the mission is the plan of the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate figure behind the mission.²⁵ It is told in this setting that the Holy Spirit is the real dispatcher into mission through worship, prayer, fasting, and finally the laying on of hands by the congregation in Antioch.

Once they arrive in Salamis, they at first preach the gospel in the synagogue without any opposition. The hindrance of the magician appears in the next step of the preaching throughout the city. Unlike the previous account of Simon²⁶, here the negative image of the magician is explicitly confirmed by the rebuke of Paul. The sentence given to the magician, without even an opportunity for repentance, marks impli-

citly the total victory of God's power over magical power.

The Structure

As the context of this passage is a missionary narrative, so the structure of this passage can be developed as follows:

The beginning of the mission led by the Holy Spirit (1-5)

The setting of the episode (6-8)

The identity of the magician, Barjesus (6)

The intelligent proconsul, the magician, and the word of God (7)

The disclosure of the magician's evilness (8)

The confrontation (9-11)²⁷

The looking at the magician (9)

The warning to the magician (10)

The rebuke of the magician (11)

The result of the victorious power of the Holy Spirit (12)

Several conclusions concerning the understanding of magic derive from this passage: First, the magician is a Jewish false prophet, Bar-Jesus by name. The association of the magician as "false prophet" is not followed by a further description of what is a "false prophet." It is likely that the main concern is on the works of the magician, namely opposing Paul and Barnabas who are the representatives of the God's power in the mission to proclaim the gospel and to lead

²⁵ The plan of the Holy Spirit is obvious in the selection of Paul and Barnabas from several names of two offices mentioned in Acts 13:1-2.

²⁶ In the Account of Simon in Acts 8:4-25, there is no casting out of evil behind his magical performance at least in the confrontation with Philip, while here Acts 13:6-12 the rebuking of the exorcist is explicit.

²⁷ Although not precisely similar to the entire exorcism structure as in Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 52, the confrontation structure is very similar. The reason is perhaps the mission context in Acts is to proclaim the gospel.

people to believe in Jesus, on the contrary, the work of the magician was seeking to turn the proconsul from believing the gospel. The name of the magician, Bar-Jesus is rooted in Aramaic and derived from two words “Bar” and “Jesus”. “Bar” means “son of”²⁸ and “Jesus” is preferable to the other meaning of Joshua. Although the meaning of this name has drawn comments from several commentators, unfortunately, its relation with the whole episode has not yet been properly examined.²⁹ As Paul was in the mission to proclaim the true gospel of Jesus Christ, he encountered a magician whose name was similar to heart of the gospel.³⁰ Also, since this episode presents the confrontation between the magician and Paul, it is plausible to assume that such a name as “son of Jesus” reveals a contrast between the true Jesus and the “son of Jesus” who is in opposition to the true gospel of Jesus.³¹ There are several considerations on the contestation between this “son of Jesus” and Paul who preached the gospel which is centered in the true Jesus. The first is from

Luke. Luke’s intention in both his two books is mentioned obviously at the very outset of each book. Particularly in Acts which is Luke’s second book, he mentioned that his first book (the Gospel of Luke) was about who Jesus was and his ministry, and his second book is about the continuation of Jesus ministry. It is likely that for Luke Acts is the following works of Jesus Christ through his apostles. This first argument fits very well to the contestation between Bar-Jesus or “son of Jesus” and the true Jesus proclaimed by Paul. The second argument is found in the rebuke of Paul. The title Paul put on Bar-Jesus was “son of evil” rather than magician (*magoj*). This is like a clear confirmation that the one who had been recognized as “son of Jesus” was actually “son of evil.” This second argument is also a strong evident that Luke intention in presenting the confrontation between Paul and Elymas was about the confrontation between the true Jesus and the evil, between magic and gospel. This contention implied that the true gospel is in danger, so the false

²⁸ See Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 133. This reference will be stated as BAGD.

²⁹ See for instance J. A. Alexander, *Acts Geneva Series of Commentaries vol. 2* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1963, reprinted 2003), 7-8; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of The Apostles The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 380.

³⁰ This analysis is missing in Merwe, *The Power of the Gospel Victorious Over the Power of Evil in Acts of the Apostles*, 84.

³¹ See Benedict H. M. Kent, *Curses in Acts*, 416, who depicts Bar-Jesus as “someone more akin to an antagonist Gentile”. This Gentile identity is not convincing since the name Bar-Jesus is likely a Jewish name rather than a Gentile identity, as Luke seems to contrast the true Jesus and the false Jesus although he carried the name of Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus.

“Jesus” must be overcome. Thus, the confrontation is a necessity. The following episode of Paul filled with the Holy Spirit also stands as a confirmation and evidence that these two similar names have to be distinguished. The Holy Spirit is the only person able to distinguish these two similar names which is God’s power and which is magical power.

The second conclusion about magic is that its influence infiltrates not only those of low status in the social hierarchy but also a ruling figure of the Roman establishment. The record that the magician “was with”³² the proconsul Sergius Paulus strongly indicates the close relationship between the magician and the proconsul. The preposition “σὺν” (with) implies that the magician was with the proconsul for perhaps a long time already and not just occasionally.

Luke’s concern is to emphasize Elymas’ continuous attempt to oppose God’s power by perverting the proconsul from his faith. The continuous attempt of Elymas is found in the present participle active of “σητῶν”. The rebuke of Paul to Elymas, the magician with a rhetorical question introduced by the phrase “will you

not stop perverting” affirms the consistent attempt of the magician to pervert the proconsul to believe God. Such a phrase also strongly suggests the contrast between magic and God’s power that Luke intended to highlight.

The brief explication on Sergius Paulus the Proconsul is crucial to understanding the influence of magic. Although the identification of the proconsul as intelligent is positive, it could also imply how intelligent people still can be infiltrated by magic. The infiltration of magic into an intelligent person happens because magic is more than just an uttered spell or rites but is ultimately about power that attempts to lead people away from God.³³ For Luke, it is the power that has to be vanquished.

A third conclusion about the evil power of magic found in verse 8 is the magician’s attempt to keep opposing Paul and his team by seeking to turn the faith of the proconsul away from God as affirmed in the rebuke of Paul. The phrase prior to the rebuke of Paul is significant since it helps us to understand how Paul arrives at the true conclusion. It is said that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and stared at the magi-

³² See for instance New International Version Bible that translated verse 7 as “He was an attendant of the proconsul”; the combination of both “ἦν” (was) and “σὺν” (with) suggests the emphasis on the togetherness or accompaniment as in BAGD, 781, 1c.

³³ See for instance Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press,

2003), 26, who suggested that “The larger context of Lukan journey also discloses forces arrayed in opposition to God”. Moreover, Gaventa pointed out rightly that “Most important, Satan and Satan’s agent oppose God, openly attempting to subvert the gospel or to claim its power for themselves, as in p. 26-7.

cian before the rebuke. It is almost certain that Luke intended to notify his audience that it is the Holy Spirit who provided the legitimacy and power to figure out rightly who is really behind the magician. Therefore, the real confrontation is between God's power and the power of the devil behind the magician. The victory of God's power is evident in two results, 1) the sentence of the magician in verse 11 and 2) the proconsul who in turn believes and is amazed about the teaching about the Lord as recorded in verse 12.

The rebuke of Paul reveals the evil nature of magic as represented by the magician. The wickedness of magic is found in the deeds of the magician who opposes God by attempting to pervert people from believing God. The victory over Elymas, the magician is a strong apologetic that magic cannot rival God's power. Without such a confrontation the evil of magic would not be emphasized.

Acts 16:16-18

Just as the two previous passages decipher magic in Christian mission, this section is also located within the missionary context of Christianity, the mission of Paul in Philippi. Though there is no use of the

word *magos* found in this passage, there are several allusions referring to magic. Thus, this passage is included in the examination of magic. The narration that presented the confrontation of magic and God's power is brief, but the consequences that involve other aspects of life are narrated in more detail.

A Literal Translation

16) And it happened, when we went into prayer, a certain female slave, who keeps on having a spirit of the Python³⁴ met us, who kept on bringing many profit to her lords by telling fortune. 17) this girl following after Paul and us, kept on crying out, saying "These men are slaves of the most high God, who keep on proclaiming to you a way of salvation." 18) and this she continued doing for many days. But Paul was greatly disturbed and turning to the spirit, he said "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out from her." And it came out in the very hour.

The Setting

The confrontation between God's power and magic in this passage took place in Philippi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. Such a con-

³⁴ The term "a spirit of Python" is chosen instead of "a spirit of divination" because the later term is originated in the earlier one, particularly the word "πυθωνία" which is the accusative of "πυθων" (Python). "Πυθων" is understood as "The serpent or

dragon that guarded the Delphic oracle; it lived at the foot of Mount Parnassus, and was slain by Apollo. Later the word came to designate a spirit of divination" as in BAGD, 728-9. It is not clear how the change came about.

frontation is preceded by the record of Paul's facile mission in Philippi. This expeditious mission was evident in the response of Lydia, a woman from the city of Thyatira, whose profession was a seller of purple fabrics. It is narrated that this Lydia opened her heart, and after her household baptism she prevailed to insist that Paul and his team stay longer. After a smooth mission in Philippi, there appears once again the refrain of magic. This time, the magic is manifested by a female-slave who possessed a spirit of divination or Python.³⁵

The Structure

The structure of this section can be seen in an examination of the larger context outlined as follows:

- The mission to Philippi (12-15)
- The female slave and her divination power (16)
- The manipulative message of the "magician" (17)
- The confrontation (18):
 - The meeting with the evil (18a)
 - The warding-off formula (18b)
 - The rebuke of the "magician" (18b)
- The expulsion (18):
 - The command to exit (18b)
 - The immediate exit of the evil (18c)
 - The implicit victory of God's power through Jesus' name (18c-19a)
- The negative response of the people (19-24)
- The victory of the power of God's

³⁵ Unfortunately, this confrontation is lack in the examination of Harming, Gilbert Yasuo Imanuel, Yogi Darmanto, "Pelayanan Lintas Budaya: Sebuah Kajian tentang Pelayanan Rasul Paulus dalam Kisah Para Rasul 16:13-40", *Vox Dei: Jurnal Teologi &*

word remains (25-34)

The main reason to outline the structure as such is because the main concern of this passage is to highlight the victory of Jesus' power over magical power as represented by the female slave. Though the larger unit begins in verse 12, this magical passage actually starts in verse 16. The phrase "Ἐγένετο δέ" is obviously a literary device Luke uses to introduce a new section in the progress of his narration.³⁶ The closing of this larger unit in verse 34 is the report of the jailer who believed and the baptism of his household. Such a positive response to the gospel is indeed introduced by the victory of God's power over the spirit of Python.

Several negative characteristics of this female slave who had spirit of divination must be recognized. First, the narration reveals that it was the female slave who met Paul and his team. Thus, Luke most likely intends to notify the reader that the initiative to oppose God came from the female slave or the magician. The arguments the active initiation to confront gospel are: First, in the previous episodes of magic, the preaching the gospel preceded the confrontation and when the gospel was hindered by magic, then the magic was conquered. Now the text

Pastoral Vol. 1 No. 1 (Juni 2020), 78-88, who focused on the trans-cultural ministry.

³⁶ This phrase is Lukan. The function of this literal device is to mark the progress of a narration, see BAGD, 159.

shows clearly that the magician now actively following Paul. Second, the syntax of the sentence strongly indicates that the female slave is the subject who initiates the action to meet Paul. Third, the tense of the verb “ἐκράζειν” in v.17 in Greek is imperfect which emphasized on the continuation action in the past. This is obvious a repetitive action of the magician to follow Paul. This means that magic is no longer a passive power encountered in the spread of the gospel as in the previous passages.

Second, the identity and the role of this female slave exhibit the evil characteristics of magic. Once again, the syntax of the sentence suggests that the emphasis is on the identity and the action of this female slave. The identity of the female slave translated as “keep on having a spirit of Python” carries two important implications. The first implication is the consistent action of having the spirit as evidenced in the present participle in Greek. So, the female slave has consistently had such a spirit. Another issue is the phrase “spirit of divination” which originated in the story of Python. Though

the story of Python is not explicated, it indeed points to the pagan belief of this female slave in a serpent or dragon instead of God.³⁷ The practice of divination for the benefit of the practitioners is prevalent in magic along with the Romans’ readiness to accept foreign deities³⁸ in their polytheistic beliefs.³⁹ Ferguson mentioned that the practices of magic “continued to flourish in Hellenistic and imperial times”⁴⁰ and “came to rule supreme in the late antiquity.”⁴¹ He discovers a regular pattern in the display of magic:

The treatment in the magical texts is quite regular: invoke a higher power to compel him to assist the invoker in procuring what he wishes— healing, fame, wealth, or power, or to obtain the affection of a loved object (which frequently included dissolution of an existing amatory bond).⁴²

Therefore, it is obvious that obtaining the power for the wealth of the practitioners is one of the purposes of divination. With such a background of magic in the Greco-Roman culture, the power behind the female slave in Act 16:16-18 becomes obvious, the evil power. Since Christianity

³⁷ See the note in the literal translation that provided the information of what Python really is.

³⁸ James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999), 98; see PGM IV.2373-2440; PGM VII.348-58; PGM VII.1009-16; Dean Deppe, *All Road Lead to the Text Eight Methods of Inquiry into the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2011), 169; also Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 14.

³⁹ See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 92-93; Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 134.

⁴⁰ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 178.

⁴¹ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 178; also Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, xli-xlii, who mentions the use of magical books by philosophers of the Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic school, as well as the Gnostic and Hermetic groups.

⁴² Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 180.

held a monotheism belief, therefore, “The exclusive demands made by Jews and Christians for their God were part of the scandal of these faiths to pagan.”⁴³ Then, the real confrontation between these two powers, God’s against the Python’s, becomes a necessity with the victory of God’s power being the expected conclusion.

Third, the role of this female slave as a fortune teller, confirms her wickedness. The power of fortune telling derives from the power of Python which is in opposition to God. Although there is no explanation of what is fortune telling, it is closely related to providing a way of salvation which opposes God’s plan for salvation in Jesus. The salvation related to the fortune telling is likely in material and physical ways as evidenced from the Greek Magical Papyri. Such a salvation is contradictive to the salvation in Jesus that is the forgiveness of sin and the certainty of being saved from the death and this evil world. In Acts, God is understood as the only one who determines the future or salvation of every human being. This is done through Jesus. There will be no real future or salvation or security apart from Jesus. The word of God proclaimed by all Jesus disciples is the word about the greatest thing God has done to Jesus, that is to raise him from the death.

The implication of this understanding of God is that it is God’s power that determines the fortune or salvation and not the spirit of Python. Therefore the practice of fortune telling using the spirit of Python as demonstrated by the female slave is wicked; that spirit has to be vanquished.

Fourth, with such false principles and power behind the practice of the female slave, it is no surprise that her further action is understood as evil. Her recognition of God’s power and a seemingly positive attempt to affirm the identity and the role of Paul should not be seen as an endorsement but can only lead to being greatly disturbed. The crying out of the female slave turns to be negative because it leads the people to believe in the pagan gods instead of the true God. Deppe points this out when he says that:

Since the ethnic background of Philippi was not Jewish (for instance, there are no OT quotes in the Letter to the Philippians) hearers would not think of Yahweh but Apollo as the “Most High God”. The gospel of Christ was being undermined and Apollo, the god behind the Python spirit was receiving the credit.⁴⁴

The response is then clear that Apollo, the god behind the false spirit of Python, not the female slave, has to be confronted, rebuked, and cast out immediately by the power of

⁴³ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 132.

⁴⁴ Deppe, *All Road Lead to the Text*, 168.

God.

Fifth, the significant report on the material benefit to her lords who manipulate the spirit she used to have, has served as a window to the broader influences of magical practices. The casting out of the spirit has indirect social and political consequences since magic is used for gaining financial benefit. The social and political consequences are actually rooted in the financial loss and not directly in magical performance. The indirect influence of magic socially is evident by such a report. But Luke's main concern is that the evil spirit who is behind all this turmoil is wrong and has to be cast out whatever consequences will appear afterwards. The argument that supports this Luke's main concern is the record that Paul was put in jail afterwards. This casting out of demon is politically harmful to Christianity and Luke can easily omit the record of Paul being jailed. This record implies that for Luke the right thing to do is to cast out demon rather than Paul's safety in preaching the gospel.

It is the spirit behind the female slave that Paul turned and rebuked. The casting out of the spirit with the power of Jesus' name verifies that the real confrontation is between Jesus' power and the power of the evil spirit. The immediate coming out of the

spirit affirms explicitly that the power of the spirit could not rival the power of Jesus. Luke's main concern is apologetic that the word of God is unimpeded, even when the proclaimer has been put in jail in order to restrain its spread.

Acts 19:13-20

Just as in the previous passage of Acts 16:16-18, here there is also no specific word for magic, but several remarks disclose this theme. The contrast between the miracles attempted by non-Christians with those exhibited by Paul demonstrates the power of God over magic.

A Literal Translation

13) then attempted also some of the Jewish exorcist who used to go⁴⁵ from place to place to name upon those who had the evil spirits the name of Jesus saying "I implore you Jesus whom Paul keeps on proclaiming." 14) and seven sons of a certain Sceva, the Jewish chief priest were doing this 15) But the evil spirit answered and said to them "Jesus I know, also Paul I know, but you, who are you? 16) and leaping upon them the man in whom was the evil spirit, subduing all, prevailed against them so naked and having been wounded to run away from that house 17) and this became known to all Jews and also Greek who dwell

⁴⁵ The present participle "τῶν περιερχομένων" is translated as "who used to go" to highlight the continuous aspect of the present. This implies that the

magic performed by the seven sons of Sceva has been done consistently for some time and is not a spontaneous event that occurs only once.

Ephesus and a fear fell upon them all and was exalted the name of the Lord Jesus 18) and many of those who believe continued to come confessing and announcing their deeds 19) and large (numbers) who practiced magic, bringing together the books were burning up before everyone 20) Thus according to the power the word of the Lord was growing and prevailing.

The Setting

This magical section is located in the larger events that happened in Ephesus, the most significant city in Asia Minor. The significance of Ephesus for Christianity is evident in the two and half year stay of Paul as narrated in Acts 19. This chief city of Asia Minor in the first century served as a base for Paul's mission to other provinces as well. The vast domination of magic is also an important feature of this city.⁴⁶ There are several evidences both within the Bible and external evidence that attest the significant of magic in Ephesus. The evidence of magic in Ephesus within the bible are found in Act 19:19 that recorded the

burning of magical books with a price of fifty thousand pieces of silver, and in the occurrence of the term "powers of the air" and "principalities/rulers" in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.⁴⁷ The value of one piece of silver is equivalent to one drachma (a day's wage of average labor) which could buy a sheep and an ox under favorable circumstances.⁴⁸ Such a huge price demonstrates that magic is significant and vastly dominated in Ephesus. Therefore, it is sensible that Luke emphasizes magic in this episode occurring at Ephesus.

The "Ἐφεσια γραμματα" is the external evidence that witnessed the significance of magic in Ephesus. This "Ἐφεσια γραμματα" is "Ephesian letters" that denoted written magical spells. These letters refer to the six magical terms named by Clement of Alexandria and Hesychius as ἄσκιον, κατασκιον, λιξ, τετραξ, δαμναμενευς, and αἴσια.⁴⁹ These letters are laden with apotropaic powers, that is, in warding off the demons.⁵⁰ Therefore, evidence from the cultural background confirms that Luke pre-

⁴⁶ A particular study of magic in Ephesus is provided by Arnold in *Power and Magic*; also, David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, eds., *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting vol. 2: The Book of Acts in Its Greco-Roman Setting* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 314-5. The vast domination of magic in Ephesus is indicated by the occurrence of the term "powers" and "principalities" which is found the most in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians.

⁴⁷ These two terms are closely associated to the powers beyond the visible phenomenon, see for instance Eph.2:2; 6:12.

⁴⁸ See BAGD 206.

⁴⁹ See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.15; 5.8; Hesychius, s.v.; also Karin Preisendanz, "Ephesia Grammata", *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 5 (1965), 515-20; Bruce M. Metzger, "St. Paul and the Magicians" *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (1944), 27-30; C. C. McCown, "The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 54 (1923), 128-40.

⁵⁰ See Arnold, *Magic and Power*, 15; several uses of these letters are also provided by Arnold.

sented the episode of Paul's mission in a magical context.

Acts 19:11-12 is critical to both the preceding text that presents the miracles done by Paul and the following passage that deals with the confrontation between God's power and magic. The summary in verse 12 of the miraculous work performed by Paul is closely parallel to the miracles done by Jesus⁵¹ and Peter.⁵² But for Luke, it is God who performed these miracles "not the common power."⁵³ These two verses (11 and 12) not only stand as the summary of the great miracles that Paul performed, but also as a preparation to contrast God's power and Satan's as demonstrated in the following verses.⁵⁴

The extraordinary miracles of Paul in verse 11 are explicated in verse 12 explaining that even the apron used by Paul can heal the sick. Another miracle is the casting out of the evil spirit. It is likely that Paul in his ministry had performed the casting out of the evil spirit who impeded the spread of the gospel in Ephesus. The last phrase of verse 12 "the going out of the evil spirit" indicates that magic, which is significant in Ephesus, is associated with the evil spirit, as confirmed in verses 13-20 that

show the implicit confrontation between the evil spirit and God. Thus, the conclusion of what happened in Ephesus stated in verse 11 and 12 have served as a clear introduction that the confrontation between Paul and the sons of Sceva in the following verses 13-20 is in fact between God and the evil spirit.

The Structure

The structure of this particular passage can be carried out as follows:

The Introduction of the confrontation between God and the evil spirit (11-12)

The manipulation of the Lord's name by the sons of Sceva (13-14)

The wrong formula of exorcism by the exorcists (13b)

The failed command to the evil spirit to come out (13b)

The recognition God's power by the evil spirit (15)

The paradox: the overpowering of the evil spirit as the victory of God's power (16)

The power of God is recognized by all the Ephesians (17)

The confession and repentance of many other magicians (18-19a)

The expression of repentance by the burning the magical books (19b)

The victorious conclusion regarding the word and power of God (20)

Since verses eleven and twelve belong to both the preceding and the following con-

⁵¹ See Luke 8:44 where even the fringe of Jesus' cloak could heal the bleeding of a woman.

⁵² As presented in Acts 5:15, though in the case of Peter, the power is in the shadow of Peter instead of the face cloth or apron as in Acts 19:12.

⁵³ This "not the common powers" is the literal translation of "extraordinary miracles" as in English

translation such as New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Version (NIV), also TNIV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), and also English Standard Version (ESV, 2007 updated version).

⁵⁴ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 266-7.

text, they are then included in this examination and prepare for a discussion about magic. First, the presence of the particle “δε” in verse 13 which is translated as “then” is crucial, since it will show the continuation with the previous verse, and implies that the seven sons of Sceva had observed Paul in performing exorcisms by the name of Jesus. For the seven sons of Sceva, the miracle of casting out the evil spirit is just another more powerful magic, as they then attempt to imitate Paul’s casting out of the evil spirit by using Jesus’ name. The attempt to imitate the casting out of Satan confirms the assumption behind magic that any power can be manipulated and dispensed at will with a certain rite or spell.⁵⁵ The

seven sons of Sceva think that through imitation they can manipulate the power of God,⁵⁶ thus demonstrating the wickedness of magic.

Second, the identity of the seven sons as “those who practiced magic from place to place” is similar to Plato’s negative accusation of the magicians as “the beggar priests”⁵⁷ attempting to persuade rich people from place to place. This similar designation again discloses the negative nature of magic. Also, the two references of the word “magic” in the previous discussions⁵⁸ confirm that merely the phrase “those who practiced magic” carries a negative perception.

⁵⁵ Such principles and practices are found in many regions in Indonesia and the world. See for instance Demsy Jura, Wellem Sairwona, “Deskripsi Praktik Okultisme di Kalangan Remaja Suku Dayak Maanyan di Gereja Sidang-Sidang Jemaat Allah (GSJA) Wilayah Kabupaten Barito Timur Kalimantan Tengah”, *Shanan Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Oktober 2018), 1-4, who described the practice of worshipping and calling the ancient spirits in Kalimantan. Gusti Ayu Agung Reisa Mahendradhani, “Animisme dan Magis E.B. Taylor dan J.B. Frazer (Sebuah Analisis Wacana Agama)”, *Vidya Samhita Jurnal Penelitian Agama* III 2 (2017), who presenting the practices of animism in the east and west. Ceria, Fredy Simanjuntak, Evans Dusep Dongoran, “Kajian Teologis Ritual Nynagahatn Dalam Perspektif Penyembahan Menurut Alkitab”, *Real Didache: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* Vol. 5 No. 1 (Maret 2020), 99-100. See also Gratiadeo Tumbelaka, Izak Y.M. Lattu, David Samiyono, “Negosiasi Identitas Kekristenan dalam Ritual Kampetan di Watu Penawetengan Minahasa”, *Anthropos: Jurnal Antropologi Sosial dan Budaya* Vol. 6 No. 1 (Juni 2020), 1-4, and also Firman Oktavianus Hutagaol, Iky Sumarthina P. Prayitno, “Perkembangan Ritual Adat Mangongkal Holi Batak Toba dalam Kekristenan di Tanah Batak”, *Anthropos: Jurnal Antropologi Sosial dan Budaya* Vol. 6 No. 1 (Juni 2020), 85-6. While Robi

Panggarra, “Konflik Kebudayaan Menurut Teori LewisAlfred Coser dan Relevansinya dalam Upacara Pemakaman (*Rambu Solo*) di Tana Toraja”, *Jurnal Jaffray* Vol. 12. No. 2 (Oktober 2014), 294-6, presenting the funeral ritual *Rambu Solo* which is very similar to many magical rituals.

⁵⁶ Gaventa in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 267 even claimed that “the seven have false relationship to the high priesthood, just as they fraudulently call on the name of Jesus” because there is “no such high priest appears in other records”. Such a claim needs to be examined further since there is no any further report on the manipulation of the relationship to the high priest, though such a possibility could be true (also Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 259). If this manipulation of relationship is true, then the wickedness or perhaps also the ridiculous act of the magician is even worse. See the understanding of magic by Graham H. Twelftree, “Jesus, Magician or Miracle Worker?”, *The Biblical Annals* Vol. 10 NO. 3 (2020), 406-9; also, Stanley J. Tambiah, “Form and Meaning of Magical Acts”, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* Vol. 7 No. 3 (2017), 451-2.

⁵⁷ Plato in *The Republic* as cited by F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. by Franklin Philip, (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

⁵⁸ Those are Acts 8:4-25 and 13:6-12.

Third, the attempt to make use of Jesus' name implies that it is the power of Jesus that is manipulated. The phrase "I implore you by Jesus which Paul keeps on proclaiming" is perhaps modified already with the magical formula these seven sons used to employ. There is no other text similar to such a saying,⁵⁹ and the only other account that shares the similar word "implore" is in 1 Thessalonian 5:27 which is not used in an exorcism but for encouragement. It is plausible to assume that the seven sons of Sceva have altered the wording to their own magical formula. This phrase also explicates obviously that the seven sons of Sceva don't know Jesus since they are not Jesus' disciples. They just make use of Jesus' name with the assumption that the power will immediately follow, and they are totally wrong.

Fourth, the following account of the exaltation of Jesus' name is intentionally narrated by Luke to highlight the veracity and superiority of power in Christianity. It is obvious for the readers that the previous exorcism by Paul contrasts with the display of magic. In addition, the defeat of the seven sons of Sceva by only one evil spirit stands as a strong affirmation that Jesus' name is powerful in a way that magic could never rival. The presentation of the competition

between the power of Jesus' name and magic is certainly apologetic in purpose. Again the apologetical purpose of Acts is reinforced.

Fifth, the burning of the expensive magical books strongly suggests that magic could not even cast out any evil spirit. It is only the real power of God given to Jesus' disciples that can cast out evil spirits. The burning of fifty thousand silver coins valued magical books indicates that among the magician, the belief that one magical power is more than others or there was the greatest magical power of all magic can no longer be maintained. The defeat of the evil spirit from Jesus' apostle, Paul and the defeat of the magician to the evil spirit proved that not power of magic but the power of God is the only real power. Thus the authority lies in the power of God on those who are Jesus' disciples and should not be understood and used as magic. The power of casting out evil is not a magic, it is the power of God. This is why Satan recognizes Jesus and Paul who has the authority of God's power. Such an apologetic presentation of magic and the power of Jesus' name confirm the claim that magic should be understood within the apologetic purpose of Acts.

⁵⁹ Luke in his Gospel never used the word "implore" for exorcism done by Jesus, see for instance Luke

4:35; 9:42. Jesus just directly commands the evil to go out.

Acts 28: 1-6

This last passage is included in the examination of magic since there are several features associated with magic, particularly when the intertwining of magic and religion is presented.

A Literal Translation

1) And at the time after being bought safely through, we recognized that the island is called Malta 2) and the foreigners offered not the ordinary kindness to us, for after lighting a fire, they accepted all of us because the rain come upon us also the cold 3) and when Paul gathered together a multitude of stick and laid on the fire, a viper out of the heat came out to seize his hand 4) and when the foreigner saw the creature hanging from his hand they kept on saying to one another “Certainly, murderer is this man who although having been saved from the sea, the justice did not allow (him) to live 5) then shaking off the creature in to the fire, he suffered no harm 6 but they were expecting him to be about to swell up and suddenly to fall down dead.

The Setting

This could be the only “magical” passage that has no direct correlation to Paul’s mission. The saving from the shipwreck and landing in Malta are unplanned.

The introductory narration seems natural until the seizing of Paul by a viper receives a lengthy description. Since Paul “suffered no effect”, he is recognized as a god.⁶⁰ Then Luke narrates the healings of “the rest who have weakness” which seems to be the primary concern of Luke. But such healings are narrated immediately after the snake handling by Paul.

The Structure

- A, Paul and his team are saved from the shipwreck (1-2).
- B, The negative image of Paul (3).
- C, The expected result from a “magical” perspective (4).
- C’, The unexpected no-effect result of the seizing (5).
- B’, The positive image of Paul as a deity (6).
- A’, The inhabitants of Malta are saved by Paul through healings (7-10).

The structure is arranged as chiasmic because the crucial turning point lies in verse four and five that deal with the magic connected with snake handling. It is likely that the main concern of Luke is to demonstrate that the “magical” perspective of the inhabitants of Malta is wrong. It is God who is powerful and not any other deities they may know.

The assumption of magic that divine beings control all nature is obvious in this passage. The shipwreck that endangers the life of all the crew and Paul and his team is

⁶⁰ In Acts, the word “God” only six times pointed to other than God of Israel. The one in Acts 28:6 is one

out of the sixth occurrences that does not refer to God of Israel who has raised Jesus from the death.

understood negatively as a sort of punishment by the divines to enforce justice. Paul's experience is seen as a sort of curse interposed by the gods to sentence the wicked. This assumption is evident in the accusation of the inhabitants of Malta that Paul "is certainly a murderer" when the snakes bites him. But in the end God demonstrates that he is superior to the laws of nature and any other gods.

Contextual Implication

The most relevant implication of these magical episodes fit to the mission of Christianity in the rural area where the belief of magic and mystical is still maintained. The fact that there is only one and true God as Christian believed that must be proclaiming. When the evil powers are trying to impede the proclaiming of the Gospel, Christian should witness the triumph over magic and casting out the evil powers by Jesus' name or power.

Many magical principles present in our life other than the evil powers. All these may lead us away from our faith to the world. Thus, these passages will serve as a reminder that the evil powers may use anything which seems amazing to lead Christians away from their faith. Also, this exposition should encourage us to stand firm on our faith in the only one and true God who alone save us by grace.

Especially in Indonesia where ma-

gic with all the facets is found abundantly, this article may serve as an encouragement in sharing the power of the Gospel. The gospel of Jesus is always the victory over magic. The gospel is the only power to overcome magic and transform those who still believe the false principles that the joy of Christian faith can be experienced by all who confess Jesus as Lord and savior. It is inevitable for Christians in Indonesia particularly to encounter with these many facets of magic as being mentioned in this article, therefore it is necessary to recognize the principles behind all the practices which oppose to Christianity. When the confrontation between magic and the gospel proclaimed, every believer should understand and believe that magic is no rival to Christian faith. It is very crucial for Christian to understand magic must be overcome for it impedes the spread of the good news. The faith in Jesus as the Lord and savior who has all authority must be firm in spreading the gospel. The gospel must be proclaimed to every nation and this is not an option. Only when the powers particularly magic has been overcome, then the joy as the result of accepting the gospel may lead to God's glory as Luke revealed to us through the magical episodes in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles.

CONCLUSION

Throughout these five passages, it is

obvious to conclude that magic is indeed evil and that confrontation by the power of God is the way to overcome it. All these five section in Acts with an exception to the final section Acts 28:3-6 clearly demonstrate evil as the reality behind magic; thus the confrontation between God's power and magic is inevitable for it is between God and evil. The confrontation between these two powers is always presented in the missionary context with the victory always going to the power of God. Only when the power of the evil is overcome can the word of God spread unimpededly. So the magic in Acts is best understood to further its apologetical purpose.

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