

What's the Difference Between Magic and a Miracle?

Have you ever wished you could know or even control the future? Maybe a psychic could help! Watch this:

[Play commercial for California Psychics – 1 minute)

Wow! Two million people and it's only a dollar a minute! What could possibly go wrong? One of the great things about the Internet is the fact that there are former customer reviews. Ken tried California Psychics and he wrote this:

"I have spoken to almost every experienced psychic on California Psychics. None of them were accurate and I have waited long enough. Please heed my words and do not waste your money. I was in a very painful position and my life was not working. I called them to gain some insight and hope for the future. What I got was thousands of dollars of debt. Just don't call the first time and you won't be sucked into their scheme." ⁱ

Was Ken just an odd ball? No, go to the site Ripoff Report and you'll read dozens of reviews like Ken's.

In Numbers 22-24 we come to the mysterious character, Balaam. Who is he? What is he? Balaam claimed to be a follower of God and Numbers says that God spoke to him. But he also practiced something called "divination" (Num. 22:7) and "sorcery" (Num. 24:1). And in multiple other places of both the Old and New Testament, Balaam is mentioned and it is NEVER in a complimentary way. Of all the things we've seen in Numbers, nothing, NOTHING, is more relevant to our day than this study of Balaam. We'll need two weeks to examine it. Today we need to see...

I. Magic Cannot Be Mixed With a Miracle

Now, let's be clear about what we mean and don't mean by magic. By magic I don't mean "sight of hand" tricks that are basically illusions done for entertainment purposes. I'm talking about a Biblical definition of magic. Dr. Merrill F. Unger is the former professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Dallas Theological Seminary. He gives this definition of Biblical magic:

Magic may be defined as the art of bringing about results beyond man's power through the enlistment of supernatural agencies [other than God]. ⁱⁱ

If it's "beyond man's power" then this obviously excludes card tricks. So then, what does Biblical magic include? In Deut. 18, Moses is advising this Next Generation of Israel about what to look out for when they get into the New Land. Here's what he says: (Deut. 18:9-12)

When you enter the land... do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you 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.

Divination is predicting the future and sorcery is basically casting evil spells. Balaam practiced both of these. Balaam was NOT a prophet of God. Nowhere in Scripture is he called that. He used "God talk" and tried to get the pagan kings to THINK that he was a prophet of God, but he was not. So, did God speak to Balaam or not?

Yes, God spoke to Balaam and used him to accomplish His righteous purposes, just as God used the pagan Assyrians and Persians and even a donkey to accomplish His purposes. God is simply proving two things with the magician Balaam: 1) That He is in total control of all things and 2) That He will not let anyone curse His people – and if they do, the curse will backfire on them. So, the first principle we need to see in these chapters is that magic cannot be mixed with miracles. Only God can produce a miracle, a miracle being an action beyond man's power to produce that is exclusively caused by God. Why can't you mix magic and a miracle? Because magic DOES have power beyond the power of people but it is demonic power. The magicians of Egypt could imitate the first two plagues. Demon-possessed people in the New Testament DID have super-human strength, or a limited ability to convince or seduce someone into doing their (the demon's) will. But if you access demonic power, you will be cut off from God's power until you radically repent, because God will NOT share His power with Satan.

And there is a single, major distinction between God's power and demonic power. God's power is always for your benefit to bring blessing into your life. Demonic power will always work toward your destruction, dishonor and eventual enslavement. The Greek word for "sorcery" is *pharmakos*, which literally means, potions, poisons and drugs. Talk to any drug addict and he will tell you how his drug of choice made him feel so good at the beginning. It gave him more clarity, more energy, and he felt so much more alive. But over time, just the opposite became the reality. The lows were lower and the highs were lower. He needed more just to feel "normal" until his bank account was drained and his body was broken. Psychics are demon-influenced if not demon-possessed people who are pawns in Satan's ugly game. His goal is to wreck your life. God's goal is to save your life. You can't mix magic with a miracle. Secondly, we need to learn from Balaam that...

II. A Miracle Always Trumps Magic

So, here's the basic storyline of Balaam. The Israelites are massing on the border of the Land of Promise just across the Jordan River from Jericho. They've already wiped out the Amorites when the King of Moab, Balak, hears about it. He's extremely nervous so he does what any respectable pagan king would do in his day, he calls on a wizard, a sorcerer, to curse his enemy. He sends messengers to hire Balaam. Now, this is the first evidence that Balaam is NOT a prophet. Prophets were not for hire. Sorcerers were ALWAYS for hire. It's always about the money for a sorcerer.

Then, what do we see? Balaam starts playing games with the messengers to up the price. On the surface, he makes it sound like he can't do it because God won't let him. But Balaam finds a way to go anyway (after a second offer of more money) and it is then that the Angel of God stands in front of him and his donkey speaks to him. The angel asks Balaam: (Num. 22:32)

...Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me.

This is the second evidence that Balaam is not genuinely seeking God's will.

Thirdly, Balaam meets up with Balak, king of Moab, and where do they go? They go to Bamoth Baal, which is a mountain top sanctuary for the false god, Baal. In this sanctuary, Balaam has Balak build seven altars and says to him:

...prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me. (Num. 23:1)

Not altars for the Lord, but altars "for me." It doesn't say anything about burning the bulls and rams, which was the way God had taught Israel to offer a sacrifice, so this is likely the pagan sacrifice which was to cut open the animal and examine its liver. The pagan religions believed that certain animals represented certain gods and the core of the animal was the liver. So, as we might say, "I love you with all my heart," I guess these people would say, "I love you with all my liver!"

Anyway, the sorcerers believed that by examining the liver of the god's animal, they could discern the will of that particular god. So, do you see what Balaam is doing? He's mixing his demonic sorcery practices with Jehovah God-talk basically in an attempt to make his advice more valuable. Balaam isn't just conning Balak, he's trying to con God! Balaam's figuring, "If Balak doesn't pay me, maybe God will reward me." Balaam's playing to the deepest pockets he can find!

Eventually, Balaam gives five speeches which are recorded in Num. 23 and 24. Believe me, if Balaam thought he could get away with cursing Israel and not be struck down by God, I'm sure he would have. The proof of that is found in Joshua 24:9-10 where God says to the Israelites after they're in the land:

When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again...

Balaam wanted to curse Israel, but God would not listen. God was in control. God does not allow Balaam to curse his people.

What should we learn from all this? First, demonic power is real and it is most easily accessed through occult religious practices. What are occult religious practices? They're more common than you think. Divination, seeking to know the future, is accessible through horoscopes, tarot cards and psychic hotlines. They are as full of demonic power as the sorcerers of Balaam's day. Necromancy, seeking to speak with the dead, is accessible in every city of the United States through mediums and spiritists. In most cases, it's a complete fraud, but in some cases, you are actually speaking with a demon.

Some things aren't technically occult religious practices, but they lead you to that. For example, the vampire craze is hugely popular with students. Films like the *Twilight* series or the TV show *The Vampire Diaries* derive from the books by Stephenie Meyers. Are you aware that Ms. Meyers said in an interview that the ideas for the *Twilight* series came to her in a dream when the characters introduced themselves? After the dream she said she heard "Incessant voices in my head that wouldn't stop until I would type..."ⁱⁱⁱ

The media are also full of witches. The biblical word for "witch" is "sorcerer." The myth in most contemporary witch stories is that there is such a thing as "white magic" and "black magic," "white magic" being magic used to benefit people and

“black magic” used to curse people. But no such dichotomy exists – at least not according to Wiccan leaders. Doreen Valiente is a Wiccan high priestess and has had more influence on Wicca than any other woman. She writes:

The distinction between black and white magic has no validity. ^{iv}

Starling, another Wiccan leader, admitted:

This might actually offend some, but it hides one of the great truths of witchcraft, that there is not white or black magick, there is only magick... ^v

Friends, demonic power is real today and it is easily accessible in our culture.

But secondly, if you are a follower of Christ and you are living in an honest and transparent relationship with Him, not trying to “con” God but living truthfully and humbly before Him, then you do not need to fear anyone’s curse on your life!

Are you aware of how prevalent demonic curses are in this world? Maybe it’s not happening in your office... yet, but it’s happening around the world. Jodie Breaux is a pastor’s daughter from Rockford, Ill. After graduating from high school, she told her dad that she felt God didn’t want her to go to college right away but to spend a year in Haiti, helping in a medical missions ministry there. Her parents had some squeamishness about it, but they trusted their daughter, so off she went. One night, Jodie’s dad got the following e-mail from Jodie. It read:

Dad, tonight has been the most remarkable night of my life. I got called out to this hut to deliver a baby. Dad, I’ve only delivered one, and that was with somebody. I’d never done this by myself, but I was the only one around.

When I get to this hut, there’s this naked, screaming lady on the dirt floor...

To make matters worse, this lady from the voodoo religion walked into the hut, dressed in her red and blue voodoo garb, and began to chant some incantation in Creole. She put some kind of oil on the lady’s head, and when she started to walk away, she stopped at the woman’s belly, put some other kind of salve there, and walked in the opposite direction – all while chanting this Creole spell. I didn’t know what to do. She stood at the head of this woman and stared a hole through me. When I was getting ready to deliver this baby, I just looked back at her, and I started to sing. I knew she didn’t understand English, but I just started singing: “Our God is an awesome God, he reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power, and love, our God is an awesome God.

“The voodoo lady came completely unglued. She grabbed all her stuff and ran out of the hut. I knew then that that baby was going to be born with the blessing of God and not the curse of Satan.”

Her dad, Mark, the pastor, said he immediately thought, “Jodie, you get on a plane tomorrow! What are you doing in a hut with a voodoo woman??!!” But then he thought back on his daughter, who, as a middle schooler was so squirrely and so directionless, and he realized what God had done. So, his next thought was, “Way to go, Jodie!! Way to make a difference with your life! Way to put your life in the hands of the destiny-maker! Who knows who that little baby... will grow up to be and do for God because my courageous little girl said, “Okay, God, I put my life in Your hands. Help me make a difference for You.”^{vi}

In Mark 8:35 Jesus said something like this, “If you insist on saving your life-if you insist on the comfort of playing it safe - you’re going to lose your opportunity for life! Only those who give away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really, really live.”

So, what’s the difference between magic and a miracle? It’s the difference between life and death, heaven and hell, Godly cooperation and demonic manipulation. Friends, the Balaam fraud is still alive today. Don’t fall for it! Instead, fall in line with Jesus Christ because a miracle will trump magic every time. Amen.

ⁱ Ripoff Report #951814, submitted: Sat. Oct. 06, 2012

ⁱⁱ Dr. Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1965), p. 108

ⁱⁱⁱ This information is from Stephenie Meyer’s own website:
www.steheniemeyers.com

^{iv} Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1973), p.271

^v Starling, message #1420, Nov. 22, 2001 posted at Pagan Perspectives

^{vi} Mike Breaux, pastor of Heartland Community Church, Rockford, Ill. in a sermon at Willow Creek Community Church (5-26-02)