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MAGIC & CHRISTIANITY IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES:
THE CONFRONTATION

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary in
candidacy for the degree of Master of Theology

Biblical Division
Department of New Testament

By Chandra Han
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“Magic and Christianity in the
Acts of the Apostles: The Confrontation”

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CHANDRA HAN

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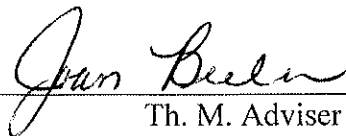
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ABSTRACT

Magic is an intriguing topic in the New Testament but compared to other topics of discussion in New Testament Studies, the significance of the theme of magic has been unjustly undermined as indicated by David E. Aune. From the all eight occurrences of magic in the New Testament, four are found in the Acts of the Apostles. Therefore, the Acts of the Apostles is the most significant source to understand magic. The purpose of this thesis is to figure out the understanding of magic and Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles. Since Christianity flourished in the Greco-Roman era, the understanding of magic with its practices in the Greco-Roman era is significant in order to enlighten the serious confrontation between magic and Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles. The discovery of the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM: *Papyri Graecae Magicae*) has evidenced the practices of magic which is evil before Christianity. The apologetic purpose of Acts is the best context to understand magic because all the five episodes of magic in the Acts of the Apostles are presented within the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world in fulfilling Jesus' commandment in Acts 1: 8. The lengthy episode of magic in Acts 8: 4–25 highlights the magician Simon whose reputation even reached as far as Rome, thus his confrontation with Philip and Peter is serious and also confirms the wickedness of magic. In each geographical area in the Roman world such as Samaria, Cyprus, Ephesus, Philippi, and Malta, Italy where the gospel is proclaimed, magic must be vanquished. Only when magic is vanquished, the word of God can spread unimpededly even until the "End of the Earth."

Chapter One: Introduction

Although magic is one significant theme in the New Testament and early Christianity, it has not been sufficiently examined compared to other themes. In a recent book, David Aune points out correctly that “Considered in relationship to early Christianity, magic has generally received a bad press.”¹ He moves further to say that many Biblical theologians seem to undermine the role of magic in the world of early Christianity. Albeit many scholars have addressed the topics of magic, the discussion is still too general in the sense that the significance of magic in a particular book or epistle has not yet been addressed to any extent. Therefore, a specific question such as how should magic be understood in the Acts of the Apostles is important to address a comprehensive understanding of magic in the New Testament and early Christianity.

Many attempts to address the issue of magic in miraculous works have been made. Mary Mills, for instance, examines the reality of cosmic power behind the miraculous acts in which magic is involved.² In the mammoth volume of collaboration works on the theology of Acts, the significance of magic is still not so

¹ David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 368. Aune provides a broader understanding of magic with the purpose that seems to be as a guideline for furthering the study on magic in the New Testament and early Christianity.

² See Mary E. Mills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power in Hellenistic Judaism and the Synoptic Tradition* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 21-35. In pp. 109-23, she does examine magic in Acts but focuses merely on the human as the agents of cosmic power to perform miraculous work.

obvious.³ Francois Bovon prefers to put magic within the contexts of the miracles of the Apostles found in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, rather than the canonical the Acts of the Apostles.⁴ Since his focus is more on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, again magic seems to be undermined. Presenting a more comprehensive and specific exposition of magic and paganism is the work of Stephen Haar⁵ and Hans-Josef Klauck.⁶ Although comprehensive, both works are distinct. Stephen Haar specifically examines Simon Magus, as he states clearly:

“The purpose of this book is to examine the literary portraits of Simon of Samaria, a contemporary of the Apostles of Jesus and Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, through a critical review of sources, including the New Testament account of Acts and other literature from the first four centuries of the Common Era.”⁷

Klauck’s exposition is also insightful, but he undermines the importance of magic when he argues that “We may begin conceding that the confrontation with magic and the Gentiles is not the only concern, nor indeed even the chief concern, of the Acts of the Apostles.”⁸ For Klauck the evidence that magic is not the chief concern is that Acts does not provide a complete description about magic.⁹ He argues that “the definition of the relationship with Judaism is much more urgent for Luke’s eyes.”¹⁰ Such conclusions are highly questionable since Judaism is also not really described in Acts.

³ See I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴ Francois Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 253-66.

⁵ Stephen Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003). Although the discussion is insightful, the main concern of Stephen Haar is on Simon Magus.

⁶ Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁷ Haar, *Simon Magus*, 2.

⁸ Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 119.

⁹ Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 119.

¹⁰ Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 119.

The text of Acts does not support Klauck's conclusion, for Luke's main concern is to exhibit the unimpeded outspread of the word of God.

Based on Aune's observation, it might be more obvious now to claim that the study of magic in the New Testament and early Christianity is truly a necessity as it will provide a great contribution to the scholarship discussion regarding magic. The purpose of this book is to examine magic specifically in the Acts of the Apostles¹¹ with the expectation that the result will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the life of the earliest days of Christianity. The main question I will ask is this: What is magic particularly in the Acts of the Apostles, and how should magic be understood?

Magic is usually related to miracles, signs or supernatural phenomenon in a negative sense in the book of Acts.¹² Here several important questions need to be recalled: How should magic be understood in the book of Acts? How is magic distinguished from the miracles in the five magical passages found in Acts? Is there any relation between magic and religion? It is crucial to understand magic appropriately when Christians have to confront it. The answer to the first question is the conclusion of this essay. Chapter two will address the next question. The relation between magic and religion will be examined generally in chapter one.

¹¹ The reason to focus on the Acts of the Apostles is because Acts, in a certain degree, represents the history of Christianity, the description of the birth of Christianity.

¹² Mills, *Human Agent of Cosmic Power*, 11-9; See also Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity*, 253-66; although Bovon places magic within the Apocryphal of the Acts of the Apostles, it does not negate the significance of magic; instead it indicates strongly its importance in the canonical Acts of the Apostles.

Miraculous acts¹³ are found substantially throughout the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁴ It is within this phenomenon that magic is disposed. Therefore, the crucial question to be asked is this: What is the relationship of Christianity to magic? The thesis of this treatise is to demonstrate that magic is essentially a cosmic power which has to be overcome by the saving power of the word of God. Therefore, magic should be understood within the apologetic purpose of the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁵

I will, at the very outset, provides the introduction in chapter 1 and examine magic in the Greco-Roman setting in chapter 2. This chapter 2 will include the definition of magic, its aspects, the relation between magic and religion, and the triangle relationship of magic, power, and the human being who is the agent of the magical power. After inspecting magic in the Greco-Roman Empire, chapter 3 will examine five so-called magical passages: Acts 8:4-25, 13:8-12, 16:16-18, 19:13-20, and finally 28:4-6. These passages will focus on the general structure of the book of Acts and how the structure of each passage fits the purpose of Luke.

Then in chapter 4, Acts 8:4-25 will be addressed as a primary example of magic. This chapter will be divided into four sections which include a grammatical examination, the structure, the historical background attached to Simon Magus,

¹³ Miraculous acts which include wonders, signs and exorcisms, refer to the supernatural phenomenon with the implication of both - positive, such as awe and joy - and the negative, such as fear and anger. In Acts, the apostles and the magicians are identified as these wonder-workers. Mary E. Mills argues rightly that in the level of phenomenon, the magicians are similar to the apostles. See Mills, *Human Agent of Cosmic Power*, 109-23.

¹⁴ See for instance Acts 2:6; 3:6-8; 4:30-31; 5:1-11, 5:12-16; 6:8; 7:55-56; 8:6-7, 8:18; 9:17, 9:40-41; 10:44-46; 12:5-11; 13:10-12; 14:8-12; 15:12; 16:25-31; 18:9-10; 19:6-8, 19:11-20; 20:9-12; 21:10-11; 23:11; 24:25; 26:28; 27:10, 27:23-25; 28:3-6.

¹⁵ The apologetic is in two senses. First, the Acts of the Apostles was written to defend the existence of Christianity against its opponent, and second, it is to exhibit the further triumphant actions of Jesus through his apostles, beginning from Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth, as recorded in Acts 1:8. The second sense is identified as the evangelistic purpose. See I. Howard Marshall, "How Does One Write On the Theology of Acts?" In *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 11; for a more comprehensive discussion of the purpose of Acts of the Apostles, see Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

literary and theological issues, as well as my conclusion. Chapter 5 will demonstrate the significance of the geography where magic is encountered during the spread of the word of God. The placement of the encounters with magic in the spread of the gospel and the different territories where these encounters occur will be examined, since these are considered important for the purpose of Acts. Finally, in the conclusion, I will provide several implications and applications of the conclusions to our contemporary era.

Chapter Two: Magic and Religion in the Greco-Roman World

Scholars have recognized that in the Greco-Roman culture, magic and religion are indispensable although both are not the same.¹ Both magic and religion are significant to the study of the New Testament since Christianity was surrounded with such beliefs and practices.² Therefore, it is important to define magic and then examine its relationship with religion, power, and also the human beings who are the visible agents of the invisible power.

Definition

To define magic (μαγεία in Greek) is a complex task. Many have recognized its complexity either in the method³ employed or in the relationship of magic with

¹ See Sarah Iles Johnston, ed., *Religion of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2004), 139-42; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1992), 17; Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 377.

² See Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 1-2; Mills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power*, 12; Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-2. Clinton E Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989) provides the practices of magic and the powers that surrounded Christianity in Ephesus, a very significant city in Asia Minor for Paul in proclaiming the gospel.

³ The meaning of “method” is whether magic has to be defined specifically or generally. “Specifically” means that it is limited to certain categories, while “generally” means that the definition can be applied to any situation. The general definition has received objection from scholars. See for instance Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 18-45; also Johnston, *Religion of the Ancient World*, 139-42. Aune in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 370-4 provides a helpful discussion.

religion and science or technology.⁴ Although the task of defining is difficult, it is necessary to define the term to serve as a guide and boundary in our discussion of the Acts of the Apostles. Two reasons behind such a necessity are: first, there will be no perfect definition that can work in any situation.⁵ Second, the fact is that Acts does not provide any definition of magic⁶ that is helpful for the study of the relationship of magic and Christianity. Thus we need to figure out its definition.

The attempt to distinguish magic from science, although important, seems to miss the context of Greco-Roman life, since the term science itself is either not recognized or it is very different from our modern understanding of science.⁷ Thus, in the following discussion, the aspect of science will be excluded. In order to understand magic in its Greco-Roman setting, we will attempt to define the term magic after looking at its semantics and how magic is perceived in the Greco-Roman setting, including the influence of Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian, Jewish and Christian texts.⁸

⁴ See Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 85-90; Also Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religion, Science and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-7. For a brief discussion on the methods and aspects involved in magic see Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 370-7.

⁵ See Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 18-9; Dickie in pp.22 proposes different reasons for the need to define magic.

⁶ See Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 119.

⁷ Although Jacob Neusner in *Religion, Science and Magic*, 3-7, tried to give a very general definition of “science”, it seemed to be the imposition of our modern definition of science into the ancient time rather than perceiving the ancient time in its own setting.

⁸ The existence of the Demotic spell is a very strong evidence of the influence of Egyptian beliefs. Betz also points out the syncretism of several such religions in Greek Magical Papyri in Hans Dietrich Betz, ed., *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Included the Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed., vol. 1: Texts (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), xlv, lv-lvii.

The semantics of magic (μαγεία) almost certainly originated in Persia.⁹ Magic is understood as the art of a magician (μαγός).¹⁰ In the very outset of its appearance in Greek culture, magicians (μαγοί) are understood as the Persian priests who affiliate with the royal sacrifices and rites and are experts in astrology, divination, and the interpretation of dreams.¹¹ The evidence for this understanding are found in several important Greek figures such as Pythagoras, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Pliny the elder.¹² Thus the features of association to the divine beings and their powers as well as the knowledge and the rites related to the divine have been identified from the beginning.

Several scholars have proposed various definitions of magic. Mills understood that “magic is the attempt to put the energy (δυναμικ) available in these stories of myth and ritual to work.”¹³ Betz proposes that magic gave an alternative way to solving the problems of life, when he contended that “magic is nothing than the art of making people believe that something is being done about these things in life about which we all know that we ourselves can do nothing.”¹⁴ While Matthew Dickie resists

⁹ See for instance Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 13-4; Also Haar, *Simon Magus*, 35-6

¹⁰ See Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20.

¹¹ See William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, BAGD (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 484-5. The term BAGD will be used when this lexicon is referred in the following notes. See also Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20; Haar, *Simon Magus*, 35.

¹² See for instance Haar, *Simon Magus*, 35-71; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20-63; also Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 46-76. They all provided the recognition of magician by these Greek figures.

¹³ Mills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power*, 35.

¹⁴ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xlvi.

any single definition to be applied universally, he defines magic as “a set of specific circumstances in which different forms of religious practice came into conflict.”¹⁵

Though magic is a complex issue, two significant features of magic, rites and the association with divine beings and their powers are consistently identified from its earliest appearance until the Greco-Roman era. The previous definitions overlook these two consistent features within magic itself. Therefore, magic in the context of Greco-Roman society can be defined as a set of specific phenomenon corresponding to the divine beings or powers whose purpose is to alter nature in order to fulfill human interest.¹⁶ Such a definition cannot of course be applied universally in any context, for the concept of magic may change depending on the context of life. What we contemporary people regard as magic may not be the case in Greco-Roman culture.

With such a definition of magic, there are several important issues to be clarified. The categorization of magic as a set of specific phenomena contains several implications. First, “a set” will mean that some specific actions are required which are customarily entitled sacraments or rites. Second, the term “specific” entails the consequence that magic is highly independent in its rites or sacrament, spell or charm. This independence is evident in the fact that even within the same category of magical spell, all the sacraments or rites can be entirely different.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 26. Dickie therefore, has removed the conflict between magic and religion from his definition.

¹⁶ Here, I agree with Dickie and Aune that magic in itself is a (specific) phenomenon, but distinct from both of them in the following explication of their definitions since it is more significant to highlight the two features of magic which have consistently appeared in its earliest form than to relate it with religion.

¹⁷ See for instance the difference of the sacrament or rites in PDM (the *Demotic Spell Papyri*) Supplement 7-18 and PDM Supplement 19-27. Both are the same type of spell, the spell for sending

The correspondence with the divine beings and powers has the sense of fellowship or even unity with the gods, so that the magician can obtain and manipulate their power.¹⁸ By manipulating the power of the divine, magic attempts to coerce the divine power and thus guarantee their effects. By understanding such correspondence, the distinction between magic and religion is obvious. Religion submits to and obeys the divine being rather than coerces and manipulates the gods and their power.

Although most of the magic in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) seems to provide human security by guaranteeing the immediate effect of magic, still the fulfillment of human needs in magic can be viewed in two ways, for good¹⁹ or evil.²⁰ Magic was used positively for the wellbeing of the magician as well as the people he practiced upon. Magic was also employed negatively to harm or curse others. Since the inclusion of human needs ranged from the spiritual life to the healing of almost any disease,²¹ only those practices of magic which correspond to the Book of Acts will be examined in the following discussion.

Positive Judgment over Magic

The positive judgment of magic in Greco-Roman culture is given mainly because it is practiced widely by all levels of society, from the lower class, the majority of the

dreams, but they are so different in their rites; see also the discussion in the following subtitle “Sacrament”.

¹⁸ See for instance PGM (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* / Greek Magical Papyri) IV. 850-929; PGM XIII. 930-5; PDM xiv. 295-308; PDM xiv. 594-620, that provide obvious expressions either on the fellowship or the unity with the divine beings and powers.

¹⁹ Such as PGM I. 195-222; PGM VII. 199-201; PGM XIV. 563-74; PGM CXXIIIa. 48-50.

²⁰ See PGM IV. 3255-74; PGM XII. 108-18; PGM CXXIV. 6-43; PDM xiv. 727-36.

²¹ The magical spells in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) meet all kind of human needs from searching for higher spirituality to healing diseases such as headache and insomnia.

society to the upper class which also included the senator or even the Caesar. The intention in practicing magic is positive in its claim.²² In its origin, magic was applied mainly to promote the goodness of human life.²³

The domination of the magical practices in the Greco-Roman culture is evident in two ways. First, the language used in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) is similar to that employed by the majority lower class which represents 90% of the population.²⁴ Second, although it is true that the lower class who dominated the population practiced magic, the upper class society did practice magic as well which included even the highest level people such as Caesar. Tiberius, for instance, was said to study occultism from his astrologer Thrasyllus,²⁵ Nero tried to learn magic but was unsuccessful;²⁶ the Emperor Vespasian was said to have the magical power of healing the blind and the lame.²⁷

²² Most parts of the Greek Magical Papyri are intended to fulfill the need of human life. Though the interpretation of all these magic practices could be positive and negative, the attempt to fulfill human need is obvious enough.

²³ See for instance the positive judgment of “μαγοι” in Matthew 2:1; despite of the distinction between miracle and magic, Moses in the Greco-Roman era is also famous as a great magician. It is almost certainly that in his time Moses had learnt all sorts of magic in the Pharaoh circle in Egypt. Several aspects such as astrology, wisdom to interpret dreams, and knowledge of nature are part of this understanding of magic.

²⁴ In the Greco-Roman age, the negative reputation of magic is said to be promoted by the upper class of Roman society since magic is much more popular in the lower class rather than the upper class. The evidence for the popularity in the lower class is found in the language used in magical papyri which is common language rather than an official or educated dialect. See for instance Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 382; Clinton, *Power and Magic*, 19; also Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, xli. Such a notion does not mean that magic is practiced only by the lower class since the upper class also practiced magic though privately. See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 134-9 who provides evidence of the practice of magic by the upper class, even the Roman Emperor.

²⁵ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars III.14*, as cited by Haar, *Simon Magus*, 137.

²⁶ Pliny, *Natural History XXX.17*, as Haar cited him in *Simon Magus*, 137.

²⁷ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars X.7* as Haar quoted him in *Simon Magus*, 137.

Another positive view of magic is evidenced in the earliest reference of “μαγοι” as the priests of Persian religion²⁸ with their wisdom and knowledge. However, it is highly questionable that this particular view can be maintained in Greco-Roman culture as Haar maintained in his conclusion.²⁹ In the Greco-Roman setting, the negative connotation of magic is more obvious than the positive image both in the political and social realms.

Negative Judgment over Magic

However positive the recognition of “μαγοι” can be at time, the negative connotation is present³⁰ even in the earliest phase. Plato in *The Republic*, for instance, labeled the magicians as “beggar Priests” who together with the diviners are described in this manner:

For their part, beggar priests and the diviners come to the door of the rich men and persuade them that they have obtained from their gods, by sacrifices and incantations, the power to heal them by means of games and festivals, of some injustice committed by themselves or their ancestors. And if one wishes to do harm to an enemy, they commit themselves for a small payment to harming a good man just like the wicked one by evocations and magic bonds, for, to hear them, they persuade the gods to place themselves at their service.³¹

Thus it is obvious already at an early stage that negative accusations have been identified with magic, and this continues throughout the Greco-Roman period.

Although the cause of this negative connotation is disputed, it is likely closely related to political and social aspects rather than merely religious aspects.³² First, the

²⁸ As contended by Haar, *Simon Magus*, 65.

²⁹ Haar, *Simon Magus*, 70-1.

³⁰ See Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 21-6; Haar, *Simon Magus*, 37-69.

³¹ Plato in *The Republic*, as cited by Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 22.

³² Haar followed the contention that the negative view of magicians was found in the post-Persian Wars authors.

absence of rites that could be applied universally by the μάγοι may imply that they are very independent and decisive in determining which rites are followed. Therefore the independent nature of each magician stands in contrast to a society that values public worship. Second, the μάγοι at first are associated with the Persian royal power. This means that the sustainability of the “μάγοι” depended upon royal powers. Therefore, the decline or defeat of Persian power by the Greeks triggered a change in a society’s attitude toward these “μάγοι”. Perhaps, losing the connection with Persian royal power served as a precipitating factor in the negative connotation that was attached to magic and magicians.

Finally, the extremely subjective and individual determination of rites and mystical knowledge of the deity could be understood as a threat to the beliefs accepted by a society, even though such a society believed in many gods. Despite the attractiveness of obtaining the powers of any god and dispensing it at will, magic was considered dangerous, harmful and should be abandoned. This negative reputation of magic remained throughout the Greco-Roman period so that the positive view of magic never dominated the scene.

In the time of the Roman Empire, the constraints against magic remain and perhaps even grow worse. The negative reputation of magic is not only attached to the socially deviant, but even more dramatically, magic is forbidden in the Roman Empire.³³ Books regarding magic are burned,³⁴ magicians are expelled, the practice of

³³ See for instance Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 4; Dickie, *Magic and Magician*, 137-147, who also provides important evidence on how severe is the oppression against magic by the Roman authority; see also Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 11.

³⁴ As recorded in Acts 19:19.

magic is associated directly with evil, and those practicing magic are condemned.³⁵

The oppression and persecution of magicians and the practice of magic took place in cities throughout Roman territory. But, though magic had received a very bad image, still it provided an alternative solution when religion itself did not meet the life needs of people.³⁶ Therefore magic is associated with negative connotations but is still practiced widely.³⁷

There is a seeming contradiction found in terms of the practice of magic. On one hand, the Roman authorities proclaim that magic is officially illegal and must be restrained.³⁸ On the other hand, magic is still practiced widely even by the upper class.³⁹ The reasons for such a contradiction include the following. First, it is likely that the purpose of the restraint on magic is completely political. The Roman authorities severely restrained magic to ensure their dominion over their territories. Only when magic is politically beneficial did the Romans exalt those who practiced magic.⁴⁰ Thus the Roman authorities employed a double standard. Second, magic was used as a means to control the loyalty of a society to the Roman emperor. One way to eliminate someone's influence from the society was by accusing this person of

³⁵ See Dickie, *Magic and Magician*, 146; 137-55;

³⁶ See the definition of magic in the previous section under the subtitle "Definition"; see also Dickie, *Magic and Magician*, 124-136; Elizabeth S. Fiorenza, ed, *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 6.

³⁷ See Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 11.

³⁸ See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 138.

³⁹ See Acts 13:7 that records the influence of magic on the proconsul Sergius Paulus; Also Acts 16:13-20 that indicates implicitly the knowledge of the magistrate, the upper class, about the magic practice by the female slave. Thus the notion that only the lower class practiced magic cannot be accepted.

⁴⁰ See Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 2.

performing magic or being a magician.⁴¹ The conclusion is that magic in the Greco-Roman era carries both the positive and negative connotation, but the negative connotation seems to be more tangible than the positive one.

Aspects of Magic

Although magic is a complex phenomenon that involves many activities, we will address only two significant and basic aspects namely philosophy and the use of sacraments or rites.

Philosophy

Several significant assumptions underlie the use of magic: First, magic perceives that nature is controlled by many invisible divine beings or gods.⁴² The reality of this divine nature has various levels, the higher and the lower orders of divinity.⁴³ Each divine being has their role so that the existence of many gods with their specific authority over nature is inevitable. Here, magic adopts as many gods and their powers as there were in all the religions of the Greco-Roman world, including Greek and Roman religions, Christianity, Judaism, as well as the Eastern gods such as Egyptian deities.⁴⁴ Thus magic does not exclusively have its own gods.⁴⁵ Instead, it adopts the

⁴¹ See Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 1-2 who provides evidence on the cruelty on accusing someone as magician.

⁴² See Mills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power*, 13; also Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 377.

⁴³ Mills in *Magic and Human Agent*, 13, points out that the highest level is the Supreme while the lower ones are δαίμονες (demons). Magic is then able to make use of the power of the Supreme or demons (δαίμονες).

⁴⁴ See for instance PGM XXIIb. 1-26 that claims the God of Israel; PGM XXIIa. 18-27 that makes use Helios, god over the heavens; PGM XIII. 215-25 that lists many Greek gods and their powers; PGM XII. 190-92 that uses the name of Jesus; PDM xiv. 430-5 that claims the power of Isis and Osiris, gods of the Egyptian; PGM I. 300-5 that claims the power of Zeus.

gods of all the religions in the Greco-Roman world thus prompting a close relationship between magic and religion.

Second, magic assumes that nature is an open system of life.⁴⁶ This means that the intervention of the divine beings or powers to alter and fix the problems of nature is the ultimate norm. The manipulation of the divine powers can change the human situation through various magical spells. The capability of all these powers was thought to alter various human situations from prosperity to harming others, from offering a higher spirituality to becoming invisible before others.

Third, the magician can have communion with the divine beings through certain knowledge communicated in the rites or sacraments.⁴⁷ The main goal of communion with the divine beings is to acquire their powers, since it is mainly their powers that can alter nature to benefit human needs.

Fourth, the divine beings, particularly their powers, can be mastered and manipulated to perform miraculous acts or the submission of nature for the benefit of human who practice magic.⁴⁸ These powers are the guarantee of the efficacy of magic. This last assumption indicates that the role of human beings as divine agents is significant and decisive. With these four assumptions, it is no surprise that magic is

⁴⁵ Although Abrasax or Abraxas is a popular deity in magic, he is still not recognized as the main god in magic or used universally in all magical spells found in Greek Magical Papyri. See Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 331.

⁴⁶ The contrast to this assumption is the close circle of nature that does not allow any intervention of the divine into nature. The close system believes that nature is the only source to fix or alter the natural life. See Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 30-2.

⁴⁷ For the examples of the Greek magical papyri that expressed the communion with the divine through rites, see the above note 34. By using a certain knowledge, the independence of magic from religion becomes clearer and perhaps this is one factor that caused the opposition of religion toward magic.

⁴⁸ See Mills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power*, 13.

attractive since it offers an alternative to everything which seems to be impossible by natural means, or even by religion.

Such beliefs of magic seem similar to religion since magic adopts a similar philosophical framework to religion. An exception is perhaps with the last assumption where magic is understood negatively as manipulating the divine power and contrasts with the assumption of religion which submits to the gods and relies on their power.⁴⁹

Sacrament

The sacraments or rites used in magic mainly include two features: first, it consists of a set of required actions to prepare for the magical performance which involves the using of certain materials. Among the many materials used in sacraments, milk,⁵⁰ wine,⁵¹ and honey⁵² seem to be the commonest. Second, magic includes a certain formula that has to be spoken. This spoken formula consists of such elements as the mentioning of the names of divine beings, their status and power in the cosmic reality, and repetition of certain unknown or foreign and meaningless words. Although these two features appear in magical spells, there is no one action or practice or spoken formula that is applicable for every kind of magic. Even within the

⁴⁹ See Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 30-35 who provides several significant evidence (critics by Heraclitus that those of the initiates and the *magoi*he considered as obscene, also Plato who ranks the sorcerer among “those ... deny the existence of the gods and believe them either negligent or corruptible”. Another is the witness in the treatise *On the Sacred Disease* from the late fifth century BC that mentioned “the claim to influence the laws of nature through their rites” as taking the “powers that actually belong to the gods,” thus reduces the gods to nothing) that from the beginning magic has been labeled as forcing the gods to perform various miraculous actions rather than believing the gods.

⁵⁰ See for instance PGM I.5-10; PGM III. 380-5; PGM III. 410.

⁵¹ PGM II. 70-4; PGM III. 325-30; PGM IV. 1335; PDM xiv. 920.

⁵² PGM III. 187-90; PGM III. 325; 425-30; PGM IV. 755; PDM xiv. 930.

same sort of magic, the sacrament may be very different.⁵³ Again, the independence or subjectivity of magic, in the sense that it depends merely on the magician and not on a community, becomes obvious. An important characteristic of religion is its communal nature, but magic is inherently personal and thus must be contrasted with religion.

The necessity and significance of the sacrament or rite is attached to its two functions. First, sacraments manipulate the power of the divine beings. Second, sacraments are a channel to have communion with the gods to reach a higher spirituality.⁵⁴ Therefore, Bovon concludes that “the sacrament is an efficient sign.”⁵⁵ In religion, particularly Christianity, sacrament is not only seen as an efficient sign to have a relationship with God, but also to partake in community, while magic emphasizes merely the one side that is the efficacy of its magical result of having communion with the gods. Perhaps, this distinctive emphasis of sacrament by both magic and religion may also serve as another factor that causes the opposition of religion toward magic.

Although the accounts of magic in the Acts of the Apostles do not provide exact details how magic was practiced, still helpful details are provided. For instance, the first account of magic practiced by Simon is not entirely clear. However, there are external reports on the magic practiced by Simon in other sources. Justin Martyr

⁵³ See for instance PGM XII. 107-21 and PGM XII 121-43, where both are spells for sending dreams but they are so different in their rites. This is the same with the fetching charm in PGM CVII. 1-19 and PGM CVIII. 1-12; The love spell also employs various rites as seen in PGM XIV. 1026-45, PGM XIV. 1046-7, PGM XIV. 1047-8, PGM XIV. 1049-55.

⁵⁴ See for instance PGM IV. 850-929, that is intended to produce a trance or achieve a higher spirituality and PGM IV. 930-1114, a charm to produce direct vision with the introduction of prayer for divine alliance.

⁵⁵ Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity*, 262. Bovon is right when he comments further on the relationship of miracle and sacrament that “the miracle draws attention, and the sacrament retains it.”

reported that Simon practiced magic “through the agency of demons.”⁵⁶ Irenaeus recorded that the followers of Simon practiced exorcism and dream senders.⁵⁷

Presuming all these reports are trustworthy, then the Greek Magical Papyri illustrate several magic practices that are probably used by Simon. We can also discover the reason for the claim that Simon is “the great power of god”.

The assistance of demons to perform magic involves a broad range of activities. It is likely that prior to his claim as “the great power of god”, Simon seems to acquire for a demon assistant, the most powerful assistant.⁵⁸ This should be presumably of first importance before Simon performed additional magic. The Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) I.1-42 and PGM I.42-195 could be two representative instances to understand the magical practice “through the agency of demons” performed by Simon. These two magical spells, PGM I.1-42 and PGM I. 42-195 (see also note 59) demonstrate obviously the reference of many gods in acquiring for a demon assistant. In PGM I.1-42, the phrase “breathing fire” in I. 30-5 particularly, refers to the “voyage of the sun god, his changing age, and his journey through the underworld.”⁵⁹ Another reference is the appeal to Ra-Atum, the Egyptian god “emerging from the sea chaos in the primal month and his creation of the gods by masturbation.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 85, who cites Justin Martyr, *Apology I. 26, 3*.

⁵⁷ See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 93, who also cites Justin Martyr, *Apology I. 18* for the using of dream senders.

⁵⁸ See PGM I. 1-42; the phrase “breathing fire” in PGM I. 30-5 suggests the reference to the sun god. See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 4, note 8. Another god in this magical spell is Ra-Atum, the Egyptian god emerging from the sea of chaos, in I.35; see note 9; Also PGM I. 42-195, recites the spell of Pnouthis. Particularly is I.50-55 that recorded the spell of Pnouthis who “has the power to persuade the gods and all goddesses”. Beside this Pnouthis, there many gods listed as well such as the angel Helios who “can stand for the celestial body or for the deity representative of that body” in Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 335.

⁵⁹ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 4, note 8.

⁶⁰ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 4, note 9.

In PGM I.42-195 which is the spell of Pnouthis, several gods or deities are encountered. First, Pnouthis in I.50-5 is described as the god who “has the power to persuade the gods and all goddesses.” Second, “the angel” in I.85-90 “is also referred to as ‘the god’ throughout this spell.”⁶¹ Third, Helios who “can stand for the celestial body or for the deity representative of that body.” is appealed to.⁶² Fourth, Horus, the great Egyptian god, son of Osiris and Isis,⁶³ is also found in this spell as the demon assistant in I.130-5. Fifth, the Helioros who is the combination of Helios-Horus as a lion-faced figure is mentioned as well in I.140-5. Sixth, in the spell to Selene in I.145-50, the phrase “INOOUTHO” (O great god”) which is the beginning of an invocation⁶⁴ is also reported.

The results of this demon assistant magic are the following. First, magicians will attempt to acquire the most powerful assistant as recorded in I.125-30. Second, the gods will agree to everything the magician requires as in I.130 and I.180-5. Third, the command “God of gods, mighty, boundless, undefiled, indescribable, firmly establish Aion. / Be inseparable from me from this day forth through all the time of my life” as in I.160-5 will tell the magician about “the illness of a man, whether he will live or die, even on what day and at what hour and night” as recorded in I.185-90. Fourth, to the magician this god will give “wild herb and the power to cure” (I.190-5) so that the magician “will be [worshiped] as a god” (I.190-5) since such people “have a god as a friend” (I.190-5).

⁶¹ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 5.

⁶² See, Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 335.

⁶³ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 335.

⁶⁴ See, Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 7, note 34.

These two descriptions which presumably occur at the very outset stage of Simon's magic have obviously demonstrated the appeal to the various powers of many gods and the expected results of this magic. The claim as "great" must correspond to the manipulation of these many gods. The most significant result in terms of our topic is perhaps the fourth result that the magician will be worshiped as a god. This is obviously evident in the claim Simon made and the inscription written on Simon's statue that he is god.⁶⁵

Simon's followers are said to practice exorcism and dream sending. Although these two types of magic are said to be practiced by Simon's followers, it is sensible to assume that these originated within Simon himself. Again, the Greek Magical Papyri are helpful to understand the exorcism practiced by Simon and his followers afterwards. Furthermore, there are two significant spells in the Greek Magical Papyri are found in PGM IV.1227-64⁶⁶ which could also be relevant to the practice of the seven sons of Sceva, and PGM LXXXV.1-6.⁶⁷

In PGM IV.1227-64 several names in the initial spoken formula correspond to biblical people⁶⁸ such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus *Chrestos*,⁶⁹ the Holy Spirit, and the Son of the Father. The exorcism formula is "I conjure you, daimon, / whoever you are, by this god, ... Come out, daimon, whoever you are, and stay away from him,

⁶⁵ See the following subtitle "Magic and Religion" and note 99 ff for the discussion of Simon's statue.

⁶⁶ This is a Greek and Coptic exorcistic spell; see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 62.

⁶⁷ This PGM LXXXV.1-6 is highly significant because of its date which is first or second century A.D, though this spell is not fully disclosed for it is taken from only three tiny fragments.

⁶⁸ PGM IV. 1230-5.

⁶⁹ This "Chrestos" means excellent one instead of "Christos" which is "anointed one".

...⁷⁰ The using of all these names suggests a close connection between Christianity or Judaism and exorcism. Though, it is less likely that Simon and his followers practiced this magic, the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-20 who were familiar with the Old Testament figures may have practiced this magic.

The magical spell in PGM LXXXV.1-6 is divergent to PGM IV.1227-64. The exorcism formula does not seem to mention names associated with. The command is simply for the daimon to leave the possessed person. The resulting condition of the person whose daimons has left is “glad” and “knows not” of “the haunts of the spirits.” In the case of Simon where Samaria presumably had not heard the gospel, this sort of spell could possibly be practiced. The term “glad” may refer to the astonishment of the Samaritans to the magic performed by Simon.

The report of “dream senders” corresponds to the dream sending magical spell. There are number of dream sending magic formula in both PGM (the Greek Magical Papyri) and PDM Suppl. (The Demotic Magical Papyri Supplement). The number of dream sending spells is much higher in PDM Suppl. than PGM. Two important magical spells regarding dreams are PGM IV.3172-208, and PGM VII.407-10, while PDM Suppl. 28-40 and PDM Suppl. 117-30 are representative for their clarity.

The purpose of the dream producing charm in PGM IV.3172-208 is to ask the god to give a dream,⁷¹ to enter the practitioner to indicate someone the practitioner wishes to know.⁷² Two possible references to god in the formula of “MASKELLI

⁷⁰ See PGM IV. 1240-5.

⁷¹ See PGM IV. 3175-80.

⁷² See PGM IV. 3205-8.

MASKELLO ... OREOBAZAGRA” are Hekate and the moon goddess.⁷³ In the context of Simon, the moon goddess is more probable. The dream spell in PGM VII.407-10 is slightly different. Instead of asking for a dream, the practitioners “wish to appear to someone at night in dreams,” so that this someone may see the practitioner’s magic immediately and quickly. No god’s name is revealed in this spell. The efficacy of this spell lies in the frequent saying of certain formula to the “lamp that is in daily use.”⁷⁴

The dream sending spells in PDM Suppl. 28-40 reveal the same principles of dream spells in PGM. The god(s) is called to come to the magician and tell an answer to everything the magician commands. Then come the formula to give someone “in the form of his god ... a dream [about such and such] / a thing which I shall tell him today”.⁷⁵ The magician is significant since he knows all the dreams sent to those who are affected. If the reference of god in this spell is not clear because of the lack of a written text, the other spell in PDM Suppl. 117-30 discloses two gods, Osiris and Anubis, the son of Osiris and Nephthys.⁷⁶ The formula reveals that the forceful spirit is sent to someone and this someone will command Anubis to fulfill whatever is commanded.

From these four instances, one could draw several points: First, the god(s) is the real actor behind the scene. As the god is unlimited and could be any god, the practice of syncretism is obvious. Second, the magician has full access to someone’s

⁷³ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 336.

⁷⁴ This lamp is a special lamp used in spell, but what lamp is unclear. See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 128, note. 54.

⁷⁵ PDM Suppl. 35-40.

⁷⁶ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 336, for Anubis and pp. 337 for (On) nophris, the epithet of Osiris.

dreams and wish. Consequently, the magician knows everything about those who ask for their service. Third, the greatness of a magician is manifested in the ability to control the powers of all gods believed in the Greco-Roman world. If this is the case with Simon and his followers, his image would not correspond with Christianity which believes in only one true God.

Therefore, it is sensible to contend that the recognition of “the great power of god” closely related to many gods and their powers is something that Simon might claim to acquire. The reasons for the report on Simon as “the first god” is perhaps because Simon was the first one in Samaria who had successfully demonstrated the manipulation of as many powers of the divine beings as were there in Samaria. If this is true, then the claim of “the great power of god” is negative in Luke’s perspective, though before the Romans, this could be positive in the sense of politically useful. The claim of Haar, that historically the portrait of Simon is positive before the Roman period might be true, but when the theological perspective of Luke is included, then it is likely that Luke intended to demonstrate that the God of Christianity is the true and most powerful God.

Second, the magic performed by Elymas corresponds with two identifications, the epithet as a false prophet⁷⁷ and the identity as a Jew. Thus, these two identifications are significant to understand the magic he performed. As a Jew he was presumed to have known about the miraculous acts in the history of Israel, such as the renowned acts of Moses as a great magician.⁷⁸ The epithet of false prophet implies that his main task is to prophecy, but the attribute of “false” may have two meanings, the prophecy

⁷⁷ See Jeremiah 14:14 who notified that a false prophet did prophesy but their office did not originate in God as the sender.

⁷⁸ Pliny, *Natural History* 30.1, even credited Moses with starting his own school of magic as Betz in *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 172, note 2, cites Pliny. See also J. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 134-61.

is fake in the sense of not fulfilled,⁷⁹ or the origin of the office and prophecy is not from the true God.

The Eighth Book of Moses as found in PGM XII.1-734 may help us to figure the negative image of Elymas' magical practices. There are references to "ABRASAX", the main god in magic, in PGM XIII.85, 155-60, two names of the Jews' God, IAO (PGM XIII. 75, 145-50, 205) and ADONAIE (PGM XIII. 80, 145-50, and the seven Greek gods such as Helios, Selene, Ares, Hermes, Zeus, Aphrodite, and Kronos in PGM XIII.215-25. The combination of these gods implies the reality of syncretism which is unaccepted in Judaism. Among the many practices in this lengthy magical book, several practices that could be relevant to the context of Elymas in Acts 13:6-8 are: invisibility (PGM XIII.235), exorcism (PGM XIII. 240-5), healing (PGM XIII.235), to fix a thing in its place (PGM XIII. 250), to restrain anger and to break spells (PGM XIII. 250-5), the resurrection of a dead body (PGM XIII. 275-80), to release from bonds (PGM XIII. 285-90), and to send dreams (PGM XIII. 310).⁸⁰

The epithet of Elymas as a false prophet suggests that his authority is certainly not from God as evidenced in the Eighth Book of Moses in its earliest form. Consequently, the message or prophecy is likewise not true as this is also not from the true God. Therefore, the image of Elymas with his epithet is negative indeed.

Third, literally, the spirit of divination in Acts 16:16 is the spirit of Python. According to Strabo⁸¹ and Plutarch,⁸² Python is a serpent or dragon that lived in Pytho

⁷⁹ See Deuteronomy 18:22 that recites the way to distinguish the true and false prophet.

⁸⁰ All these types of incantations are highly probable to impress Elymas to influence the proconsul.

⁸¹ See BAGD, 728 who cites Strabo 3, 9, 12.

beneath Mount Parnassus, and guarded the Delphic oracle.⁸³ This Python was then slain by Apollo. The episode of Python in magic is also attested in a hymn in PGM III.235-55 which is a part of PGM III.187-262, a spell for revelation. The hymn is likely written to Apollo whom the magician had previously adjured to “Send me the daimon who will give response to me about everything which I order him to speak about” as in PGM III.225-30. The authority of Apollo over the Delphic oracle is evident also in PGM I. 262-347 which is an Apollonian invocation. In this invocation, particularly PGM I. 295-300, the god Apollo was invoked to “Give answer to my questions, lord, O master. Leave Mount Parnassos and the Delphic Pytho whene’er my priestly lips voice.” Also, in this source there are requests on prophecy, divination, sending dreams, obtaining revelation in dreams, causing disease, and even “about everything that is part of magical knowledge.”

The development of the spirit of Python to the spirit of divination is understandable since Python is the guard of the oracle of Delphi as is broadly recognized. Though this Python was slain by Apollo, the name Python was applied to those who prophesied under the inspiration of Apollo. Thus, the name of Python corresponds closely to Apollo, the god of prophecy.⁸⁴ The significance of the god Apollo in the magic of divination such as prophecy, foreknowledge, revelation, and direct vision is evident in PGM.

⁸² See I. Howard Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman, eds., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 992 who cites Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, 9, p. 414E.

⁸³ See Dean Deppe, *All Roads Lead to the Text: Eight Methods of Inquiry into the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2011), 167-9.

⁸⁴ See James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999), 93, who provides the list of the Greek gods.

In PGM II.1-64, a spell for revelation, Apollo is recognized as among the lords who “control this night, who are master of it, who hold the hour or prayer too.”⁸⁵ Another spell for revelation in PGM II.64-184, specifically II.75-80, identifies the “lord god” Apollo among the lord gods “who are in control of this night”. The relation of Apollo with prophecy is also evident specifically in II.85-90, the fourth invocation. The petition is written as “Stand here, Speak presage to a suppliant from your Ambrosian mouth, quickly, all-pure Apollo.” Despite of the syncretism, the request for revelation from Apollo is obvious. Though not every divination is designated to Apollo, from the above evidence, the practice of divination named after Python attests a close connection to Apollo as the god who gave the ability to prophesy.

Fourth, the exorcism performed by the seven sons of Sceva suggests that the using of various person’s or gods’ name is quite common in exorcism. In Jewish circles the name of Solomon was employed to exorcise demons.⁸⁶ The earliest date of the magic of exorcism reported in PGM LXXXV.1-6 belongs to the first century CE and is helpful to understand the practice of exorcism. Though the complete form no longer exists, it is sensible to presume the using of the divine names from the text. The incomplete phrase “THAE ...” could perhaps refer to a god’s name since the following phrase “... drive away, make the daimons” is likely to cast out the demons. If this is true, then the using of Jesus name by these seven sons of Sceva demonstrates syncretism. The implication is that such a practice is unacceptable in Christianity.

⁸⁵ See PGM II.10-5.

⁸⁶ Josephus in *Antiquities* 7.2, reports that Solomon himself was so powerful that even demons could be exorcised in his name.

Implications

The implication of the negative accusation of magic from its earliest appearance in Greek culture demonstrates that magic is a deviance from normal religious practice which involved social and political dimension. This caused the Roman authorities to continually attempt to restrain magic. However, magic could not be restrained by law since both magic and religion meet some basic human needs.

Magic and Religion

To understand the relationship between magic and religion, we need to understand the nature of religion in Greco-Roman society. If magic is a set of phenomena containing certain philosophical presuppositions and requiring certain rites to be effective, then religion is also constituted by beliefs, sacraments, and extraordinary phenomena in its practices. These features demonstrate the close relationship between magic and religion. In religion, the extraordinary phenomena are known as miracles and continually receive a good reputation. This is contrasted with magic that has a negative reputation and is even forbidden,⁸⁷ at least officially.

Greco-Roman religion is complex since there are many kinds of religions throughout the territory of the Roman Empire. There is no religion that can be called official Roman religion as John Scheid points out correctly:

“There was no such thing as ‘Roman religion’, only a series of Roman religions, as many Roman religions as there were Roman social groups: the city, the legion, the various units in the legion, colleges of public servants

⁸⁷ See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 372-7. Mills in *Human Agent of Cosmic Power* demonstrates the indispensability between both by focusing on the significance of human as the cosmic agent in performing miraculous works.

(*apparitores*), colleges of artisans, sub-districts of the city ('wards' and 'quarters'), families and so on."⁸⁸

Religion is closely related to social and political realities. This entails that an important characteristic of religion is its communal nature that consists of a certain group of people with approximately similar social status in a certain city (political) with their own gods. In terms of its practice, religion is understood as the communal obedience to the believed gods and is expressed mostly by participating regularly in worship rites as experienced in the public cult.⁸⁹ The concept of religion as communal is contrasted with magic which is individual in its manifestations. This distinction makes it understandable why magic was viewed as deviant to the Greco-Roman religious practices.

The emphasis of Roman religion on communal rites does not undermine the significance of miraculous acts in religion. The presence of miracles through human agents is important to acclaim a religion's authenticity and authority.⁹⁰ It is then no surprise if miracles which seem to be very identical to magical practices are abundant in religion as well, including Christianity.⁹¹

Despite the negative image applied to magicians, magic and religion in Greco-Roman culture are intertwined. If Roman religions involve the religious, the social, and the political aspect, then likewise magic, though individual in its manifestation,

⁸⁸ John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 19.

⁸⁹ See Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 18-22; also Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 90-1.

⁹⁰ Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity*, 253-265, particularly 258; 260; 265; Fiorenza, *Aspects in Religious Propaganda*, 2.

⁹¹ Two obvious pieces of evidence that show a close similarity between magic and miracles in Christianity are Acts 19:12 and the Apocryphal Acts of Peter 9 which records a speaking dog, as cited in Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity*, 255. Similar evidence of miracle and magic are found particularly in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles such as Acts of Thomas, Acts of Andrew, Acts of John, Acts of Paul, and Acts of Philip; See also Fiorenza, *Aspects in Religious Propaganda*, 2.

impacts these three aspects also. In the religious aspect, just as Roman religions believed in and worship many gods, so magic in its practices also claims the power of these gods and even used this power for personal benefit. The unique characteristic of magic is that it attempts to manipulate and coerce the divine powers personally whereas religion is communal in nature.

Concerning the political aspect, the recognition of many gods in Roman religion,⁹² particularly the worship of Caesar, became a means to express the domination of the Roman empire over its cities. The stories about gods and the necessity to worship Caesar⁹³ are the vehicle of religious propaganda to ensure Roman authority over its territories and cities. Even Judaism and Christianity seem to share the same means and methods of Hellenistic religious propaganda as Fiorenza points out:

They stressed the antiquity of their faith, gathered followers in small, private communities, attracted people through their worship, painted the great figures of their religion as heroes and demi-gods, exhibited the miraculous, magic, and ecstatic power of their religion, and proved that their religious association and customs were beneficial and accepted by the political power of the time.⁹⁴

One may see that all religions have a societal-political dimension. Certainly the necessity to worship Caesar meant subjection to Roman domination.⁹⁵ Thus, the rejection to partake in such worship can be viewed as an attempt to be independent or in rebellion against Rome with the consequence being repression from the Roman authorities. Although the existence of many religions is an obvious expression of the tolerance of other beliefs, such tolerance has a political dimension since groups need

⁹² Jeffers in *The Greco-Roman World*, 93, provides numbers of either Greek or Roman gods. Besides all these gods there are many cities or local gods worshiped by the inhabitants. For instance the famous goddess in Ephesus is Artemis, while in Thessalonica it is Cabirus.

⁹³ See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 100-3.

⁹⁴ See Fiorenza, *Aspects of Religious Propaganda*, 2.

⁹⁵ See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 100-1.

to seek recognition or registration by the Roman authority.⁹⁶ Therefore, it is likely that when magic is politically beneficial, it is tolerated. But when magic is a threat to Roman authority, then the consequence is repression.

Both religion and magic have social impact as well.⁹⁷ The nature of religion as involving a group of people indicates that the dependency of all the followers to this group is important. This implies that any religion has to benefit the society.⁹⁸ Thus, the practice of magic by a magician will be tolerated when it is beneficial to the society. The heavy emphasis on the social and political benefit is understandable in a society such as Roman society where standards for moral conduct do not really exist. Those who are highly influential in both politics and society would almost certainly receive a reward such as erection a statue to an influential person.

Such an ambivalent response toward magic could explicate the case of Simon whose statue was erected by Roman authority in honoring him as reported by Justin Martyr,⁹⁹ Irenaeus,¹⁰⁰ and Eusebius,¹⁰¹ but absent from Hippolytus.¹⁰² However, there

⁹⁶ See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 103-4.

⁹⁷ See Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 3.

⁹⁸ The benefit of religion lies in the reasons to worship many gods with their control over nature; See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 93 who provides a list of Roman and Greek gods and their association with the nature or life.

⁹⁹ Justin Martyr, *Apology I.26,3* as Haar cited him in *Simon Magus*, 85. Justin Martyr also reported that Simon was glorified as a god. By identifying Simon as a god is likely to say that Simon is powerful.

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses I 23,1-4* as cited by Haar in *Simon Magus*, 118. Irenaeus is said to use the report of Justin Martyr when he mentioned the phrase "It was said" regarding the statue of Simon.

¹⁰¹ See Eusebius, *Church History I.13* in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, vol. 1: Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 113-4. The inscription of the statue provided by Eusebius is "Simoni Deo Sancto" which means "To Simon the Holy god".

¹⁰² Hippolytus in *Book VII.15*, reported the death of Simon Magus as cited by Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 114. The absence of the report of Simon's statue was said as a significant argument against the report of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.

is a dispute over this statue, whether it points to Simon as recorded in Acts 8 or another Simon. The key to understand this issue lies in the inscription of a statue found in 1574 in the place described by Justin Martyr.¹⁰³ The statue was erected on the island which is in the middle of the Tiber river.¹⁰⁴ The inscription in Latin reported by Eusebius is “Simoni Deo Sancto” which means “To Simon the Holy God”. The text of the inscription found in 1574 is “Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio “. The accuracy of the report on the statue of Simon by Justin, Irenaeus and Eusebius has been doubted. It is not entirely clear whether the inscription found in 1574 is the inscription Justyn Martyr points to. Therefore, there is always a possibility that Justyn Martyr refers to another inscription which is unknown to us now.

The following arguments against the erection of a statue to Simon Magus have been proposed. First, Justin Martyr is believed to have misinterpreted the inscription which is supposed to refer to the “Sabine divinity Semo Sancus.”¹⁰⁵ Also it is said that Justin’s report on Simon “appears to have been derived from other sources.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Justin is said to grapple with “misunderstandings and prejudice of his contemporaries.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, “the reasons for the testimony of history and the account of Justin’s own hand had more to do with rhetoric than reality.”¹⁰⁸ Second, Justin is said to have no personal contact with Simon. It is said that “The report of Justin has little historical worth because Justin had no direct contact with Simon or

¹⁰³ See Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 113-4, note 10 and 11.

¹⁰⁴ Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene*, 114, note 10.

¹⁰⁵ See Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene*, 114; also Haar, *Simon Magus*, 84-6. The reference of the inscription to Semo Sancus is likely obvious but it could be that Justyn Martyr refers to another inscription which is unknown to us yet.

¹⁰⁶ Haar, *Simon Magus*, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Haar, *Simon Magus*, 84.

¹⁰⁸ Haar, *Simon Magus*, 86.

Simonians.”¹⁰⁹ Third, the additional episode of Simon traveling to Rome is said to be propaganda, making the historicity of the episode of Simon unreliable.¹¹⁰

The conjecture that Justin has misinterpreted the inscription is still disputed.¹¹¹ The witness of both Irenaeus and Eusebius who confirm the report of Justin should not be neglected since their era is the closest to the era of Simon. The misunderstanding and prejudice of Justin Martyr is questionable. In every other area he is seen to be an excellent witness to the conflicts between Christianity and the other religions and sects in the Roman world. Therefore, the accusation of prejudice and misunderstanding against Justin Martyr is not convincing.

For instance, Justin’s identity as an original Samaritan is strong evidence that his report is more reliable than others which are not Samaritans. Also, Justin is the first Christian who provides a record of the person of Simon found in the book of Acts. The absence of other records of Simon from Justin’s contemporaries is evident that Justin’s interest on Simon is more profound than others. Therefore, his report is highly reliable and of historical worth. Dependence on other sources and a polemical rhetorical purpose do not necessarily mean that the historicity of the account is unreliable. Thus the judgment against Justin’s report as historically unreliable based on his dependence on other sources is not convincing as well.

The absence of “direct contact” of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus with Simon does not necessarily prove the unreliability of the historicity of Simon’s episode. Simply put, both Justin and Irenaeus lived after Simon. But the distance of time between all of them is so narrow that it is sensible to maintain that the report of Justin and

¹⁰⁹ As argued by Haar, *Simon Magus*, 89.

¹¹⁰ As argued by Haar, *Simon Magus*, 102.

¹¹¹ See Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene*, 114.

Irenaeus is reliable and accurate. To doubt the report of Justin and Irenaeus seems to be more problematic than to maintain it. The conclusion is that it is more plausible to maintain the report of Justin, Irenaeus, and Eusebius on the statue of Simon than against it.

Additional information on Simon's visit to Rome is eventually admitted by scholars, but the purpose of such a report is disputed. Those who resist the reliability of the episode claim its purpose is Christian propaganda. But such a conclusion is dubious since propaganda would not necessarily imply that the episode is not real. Good propaganda is more powerful and successful if the account used to support the propaganda is real. The significant spread of Christianity is because the accounts involved are trustworthy and reliable and not because they are shrewdly made up without depending on historical facts.

The erection of a statue to Simon demonstrates that the state recognized the power of a magician. But to conclude from this that magic is basically positive should be understood only within the political and societal context since monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Judaism, will always be negative about magic.

A good parallel to the case of Simon is the temple of the goddess Artemis in Ephesus which is built to honor her. The temple of Artemis demonstrates that the significance of Artemis is not merely religious. Artemis is significant because her worship benefited the economic welfare of the society.¹¹² The context in Ephesus is helpful to understand that the statue of Simon reflects more than just religious convictions but also illustrates the political and the social aspects of magic.

¹¹² See Acts 19:21-39, demonstrates clearly the honor of Artemis involves religious, social and political aspects. This means that the temple building reflects the involvement of these three aspects.

The conclusion to the relationship of magic and religion is that in many spheres, magic and religion are indispensable, since the reality of magic appears as well in religion. Despite the official prohibition to its practice, magic and religion are intertwined.¹¹³ Just as all religions in Greco-Roman society have a political-societal dimension, so too magic, though individual in its manifestation has a religious, political, and social dimension.

Magic, Power, and Human Agent

Human agents express visibly the power of magic. There are many materials used in the magical rites such as rings, amulets, honey, wine, certain kind of wood, and so on,¹¹⁴ but still human agency is of the utmost importance. It is human agents who attempt to obtain and manipulate the divine power, determine the rites, and manifest the invisible power of magic. Praise is bestowed upon these human agents when their practices are effective. When magic is considered evil, the magician is the representation of evil. The materials employed are merely symbols to reach the divine powers. Only human agent could actively reach and manipulate the power of the divine beings. Consequently, a magician, and not the materials, however important they are, will be responsible for determining if the magic is interpreted as good or evil. Therefore, in the following discussion these two terms, magician and magic will be used interchangeably.

The conclusion of chapter one is that magic consists of a set of specific phenomenon corresponds to the powers assigned to divine beings to alter nature to fulfill the human needs. The evidence from the time before and during the Roman

¹¹³ See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 377.

¹¹⁴ The use of many materials contrasts to strict Judaism and true Christianity that may not use many required materials in their practices.

period and the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) demonstrates several characters of magic: First, the manipulation of all divine beings for the benefit of the magician and those who ask for the service is obvious in its philosophy. Second, magic is practiced by all level in the Roman Society including Roman Caesars, but it is also repressed during the Roman period. Third, there are positive and negative judgment on magic in the Roman culture, but for Christianity, magic is always negative. Fourth, there are many incantations in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) correspond to the practices of magic in Acts. Fifth, magic and religion are intertwined since magic manipulates all divine beings acknowledged by religion.

Chapter Three: Magic in the Acts of the Apostles

Of the eight times occurrences of the root term “magic” in the New Testament, four are found in Acts.¹ Though there is no detailed description of magic in Acts, this does not mean that magic is not a significant or primary topic² and thus, can be undermined. If Christianity is understood as rooted in the Greco-Roman context of life that was vastly dominated by magic, then, it is plausible to claim that the readers of Acts, which is likely more than just Theophilus but also groups of well-educated people, are familiar with the practice of magic and the negative reputation of a magician. Therefore, it is unnecessary for Luke to provide the description of magic in detail.

The examination of the purpose of Acts is complex since there are many options in the literature. The answers of the purpose of Acts³ vary from edifying or

¹ All the occurrences in Acts are: First, “μαγευων”, the participle of the verb “μαγευω” to practice magic, is found in Acts 8:9. Second, “μαγειαις” 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 This is a contra to Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 119.

³ For a comprehensive and insightful study of the Acts of the Apostles, see Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Acts*. For discussions on the genre of Acts in relation to its purpose, 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); I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980). 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

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 With such a variation on the purpose of Acts, it is appropriate to contend that the purpose of Acts is multilevel with more than one purpose assumed.

Among these many purposes, the apologetic purpose of Acts provides the best context in understanding magic in Acts as demonstrated in the following discussion of the so-called five magical passages. The apologetic purpose entails that Acts is written with two intentions: First, the author demonstrates that Christianity is the only true religion and superior to others so that neither Jews, nor pagan beliefs, nor even magic with its power can retain its spread. The rejection by Paul and Barnabas of any association with the pagan gods⁸ and the inability of the Jews to stop the spread of Christianity⁹ strongly suggest that Christianity is the true religion and superior to belief systems. The consequence of the superiority and the trueness of Christianity are reflected in the unimpeded spread of the word of God. Second, the author proclaims that Christianity is not harmful to Roman authority. The evidence of this can be found

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 Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 34-7, and 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; also Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 34-7.

⁶ See Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 21; also 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.

in the record of several authoritative Roman representatives who welcome Paul to witness to his faith in Christianity.¹⁰ Luke consistently shows that Paul is a valid Roman citizen with all its rights and advantages,¹¹ and not a rebel who opposes the empire. Even in his house-prison Paul can witness freely to the word of God.¹² The book of Acts is filled with significant evidence that Christianity is not a threat to Roman authority.

Magic in Acts, just as in Greco-Roman literature, is depicted negatively as an evil power in two senses. First, magic is shown as an attempt to manipulate the power of God for personal benefit.¹³ Second, its power led people away from the true God.¹⁴ Magic is then understood as power that impedes people to believe God and therefore has to be vanquished.¹⁵ Thus an apologetic purpose of Acts demonstrates a negative perception of magic that thwarts the spread of the word of God.

The Book of Acts is vastly dominated by the miraculous works of the apostles and the victory over the negative power of magic and human agents, particularly the Jew's authority who try to thwart the proliferation of Christianity. If Fiorenza is right that such features of Christianity are rooted in the Hellenistic religious propaganda,¹⁶ then this will be significant evidence to the contention that magic should be understood within the apologetic purpose of Acts. The victory over magic is then

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

¹¹ Acts 16:38-9; 22:23-9.

¹² Acts 28:30-1

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 chapter 2 note 94.

obviously a feature of Christian propaganda to testify that Christianity is the true and superior religion compared to others and thus cannot be stopped. We will examine several passages to demonstrate that magic should be understood within the apologetic purpose of Acts.

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 verses¹⁷ 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

¹⁷ Acts 8:1-3.

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 contrasted Philip and Simon the magician. 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). 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 rejoicing of the city of Samaria (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 (9) is escalated in the claim of the people that Simon is divine (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 positive 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.¹⁸ 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 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 having a false view of God.¹⁹ 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 teachers²⁰ is highly questionable, even illegitimate.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 193, who cited Cicero that the μαγοι were “that clan of wise men and teachers dwelling in Persia.”

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.²¹ 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. 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 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 apologetic purpose of Acts.

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

²¹ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109.

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.²² 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 Simon²³, 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 implicitly 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)

²² 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.

²³ 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.

The confrontation (9-11)²⁴

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 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”²⁵ and “Jesus” is in 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.²⁶ As Paul was in the mission to proclaim the true gospel of Jesus Christ, he encountered a magician whose name was

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ See BAGD, 133.

²⁶ 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.

similar to heart of the gospel. 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. If this contention is proper, the true gospel is in danger, so the false “Jesus” has to 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”²⁷ 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.

²⁷ 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.

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.²⁸ 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 magician 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

²⁸ See for instance Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 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.

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 “μαγος” 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 Python²⁹ 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.

²⁹ 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 “πιθωνια” which is the accusative of “πιθων” (Python). “Πιθων” 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.

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 confrontation 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.

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 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 δε" is obviously a literary device Luke uses to introduce a new section in the progress of his narration.³⁰ 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 syntax of the sentence strongly indicates that the female slave is the subject who initiates the action to meet Paul. This implies that magic is no longer a passive power encountered in the spread of the gospel as in the previous passages.

³⁰ This phrase is Lukan. The function of this literal device is to mark the progress of a narration, see BAGD, 159.

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.³¹ The practice of divination for the benefit of the practitioners is prevalent in magic along with the Romans’ readiness to accept foreign deities³² in their polytheistic beliefs.³³ Ferguson mentioned that the practices of magic “continued to flourish in Hellenistic and imperial times”³⁴ and “came to rule supreme in the late antiquity”³⁵ 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).”³⁶

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

³¹ See the note in the literal translation that provided the information of what Python really is.

³² Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 98; see PGM IV.2373-2440; PGM VII.348-58; PGM VII.1009-16; Deppe, *All Road Lead to the Text*, 169; also Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 14.

³³ See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 92-93; Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 134.

³⁴ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 178.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 180.

the Greco-Roman culture, the power behind the female slave in Act 16:16-18 becomes obvious, the evil power. Since Christianity 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”³⁷ 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

³⁷ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 132.

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.”³⁸

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 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.

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

³⁸ Deppe, *All Road Lead to the Text*, 168.

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

The literal translation will focus on verse 13-20 that deals specifically with the impact of the victory of Jesus' power over magic.

13 then attempted also some of the Jewish exorcist who used to go³⁹ 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 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.

³⁹ The present participle "των 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.

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.⁴⁰ There are several evidences both within the Bible and external evidence that attest the significance 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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, λιζ, τετραξ, δαμναμενευς,

⁴⁰ An insightful and comprehensive 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.

⁴¹ These two terms are closely associated to the powers beyond the visible phenomenon, see for instance Eph.2:2; 6:12.

⁴² See BAGD 206.

and ἀΐσιν.⁴³ These letters are laden with apotropaic powers, that is, in warding off the demons.⁴⁴ Therefore, evidence from the cultural background confirms that Luke presented 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.⁴⁵ The summary in verse 12 of the miraculous work performed by Paul is closely parallel to the miracles done by Jesus⁴⁶ and Peter.⁴⁷ But for Luke, it is God who performed these miracles "not the common power."⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ See Arnold, *Magic and Power*, 15; several uses of these letters are also provided by Arnold.

⁴⁵ See Susan, *The Demise of the Devil*, 90-1.

⁴⁶ See Luke 8:44 where even the fringe of Jesus' cloak could heal the bleeding of a woman.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ 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).

⁴⁹ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 266-7.

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 context, 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.⁵⁰ 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. The seven sons of Sceva think that through imitation they can manipulate the power of God,⁵¹ 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”⁵² 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 discussions⁵³ confirm that merely the phrase “those who practiced magic” carries a negative perception.

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

⁵⁰ See Susan, *The Demise of The Devil*, 92.

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² Plato in *The Republic* as cited by Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 22.

⁵³ Those are Acts 8:4-25 and 13:6-12.

used to employ. There is no other text similar to such a saying,⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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. 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

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 266.

presentation of magic and the power of Jesus' name confirm the claim that magic should be understood within the apologetic purpose of Acts.

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.⁵⁶ Then

⁵⁶ 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.

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 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.

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. In Acts 8:4-25, the evilness of magic as represented by Simon, the magician is understood in two ways: First, by the claim of the magician as Great and therefore having the power of God; Second, the motif of the magician who attempts to obtain, manipulate, and dispense God's power which is the Holy Spirit. The association of magic with evil power is almost certainly the main concern of Luke. To claim that historically the portrait of magic is positive before the Roman age resulting in a positive view of Simon-the magician,⁵⁷ misses the intention of Luke and his readers. Within the apologetical purpose of Acts and the context of the Christian mission it is obvious that magic is negative. Since magic is evil, therefore it has to be overcome afterwards by proclaiming the word of God so that the power of God is revealed.

In Acts 13:6-12, the evil of magic is found in the disclosure of the real figure behind the magic, namely the devil. Here magic is understood as the power of the devil in opposition to God by restraining the proconsul to believe the teaching of Jesus. The accusation that the magician is the enemy of all righteousness, full of every kind of deceit and fraud, certainly conforms to the power of the devil who "will not stop to pervert" people to come to believe God. Again, the reference to magic as the power of the devil is the understanding Luke intended to demonstrate. The rebuke of Paul who declared "the hand of the Lord is upon you" strongly suggests that such an evil power is the real enemy to be vanquished. Therefore the confrontation between God and evil is inevitable and once the evil is conquered the word of God spreads

⁵⁷ See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 158.

unimpededly. The victory over evil is obvious in the punishment of the magician to be blind and the result of the victory is the spread of the word of God.

Acts 16:16-18 demonstrates another facet of magic. On the surface level magic seems to be positive in two ways: First, through the magician who is a female slave the spirit of Python brings huge material profit to her master. Second, the speech of the magician confirms rightly that Paul uses the power of God to preach the message of salvation. Such a seemingly positive image of magic is eventually an annoying one since the real figure behind the magician is an evil power, the power of Python. The casting out of Python's spirit by Paul affirms that an evil power worked on the female slave. With such an understanding of magic, it is legitimate to conclude that again magic is about the power opposed to God. Again, the inevitable confrontation between these two powers is presented.

Acts 19:13-20 depicts magic in a rather different way. At the very outset magic is depicted in the itinerant Jewish magicians who keep trying to use the power of Jesus' name to exorcise a demon-possessed person. The making use of Jesus' name for the magicians' benefit demonstrates the evil of magic. Instead of casting out the demon, these magicians are overpowered by the demon as they ran out of the demon-possessed person's house. Here again the recognition of magic as power remains the ultimate reference. Here, the confrontation between God's power and the devil's power is demonstrated implicitly in the episode since the evil spirit recognizes God's power in Jesus and Paul, but not in the seven sons of Sceva. The recognition of Jesus and Paul designates clearly the power of God that is superior to that of the evil spirits. The fear of the people in Ephesus and the magnifying of Jesus' name reveal the implicit confrontation between God's power and devil's power resulting in the victory of God's power.

The final section in Acts 28:3-6 provides a broader understanding of magic. The intertwinedness of the philosophy of magic and religion is implicitly disclosed. The understanding of the divine power in establishing the justice in the shipwreck experience suggests that it is God's power rather than the forces of nature which is highlighted. The snake bite is not the power of evil magic over Paul but an opportunity to demonstrate the great power of the gospel. The healing of the people on Malta confirms that God's power instead of magic is the theme of the passage.

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.

Chapter Four: Acts 8:4–25: Simon Magus, the Primary Example of Magic

The account of Simon Magus is chosen as a primary example on understanding magic¹ for several considerations: First, this is the initial confrontation with magic where Luke introduces the victory of the Gospel over magical practices. Second, this is the lengthiest account regarding magic. Third, Simon, the magician is reported as an inhabitant of Samaria and Jesus himself mandated and commissioned his disciples to travel to the city for mission work in Acts 1:8. This is not to say that other cities are not important, but perhaps the success of the mission in Samaria will serve as an affirmation that the command to be witnesses of Jesus to the end of the world will be successful. Such a lengthy account of the magician Simon in a city unrenowned with magic may indicate that the understanding of magic can be carried out by this passage as a representative. Fourth, the massive influence of the magician Simon with his magic is also important since he becomes a prominent representative to the power of magic with massive personal influence even in the capital city of Rome. Fifth, this

¹ The attention of this passage has frequently emphasized more the sources Luke used to compose. Since this chapter will examine Simon as the primary example of magic, the issue of source will be addressed only when it is related significantly to the discussion. Not only is the examination of source speculative but also the relevance to the intention of Luke in presenting the episode less important compared to the confrontation between Philip, Peter, and Simon, the magician. See for instance C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles ICC*, vol. I (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 396, and Gerd Ludemann, *Early Christianity according to the Tradition in Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 94-7. For a brief yet helpful discussion on source see Haar, *Simon Magus*, 73-6. For a more comprehensive discussion see Jacques Dupont, *The Sources of Acts: The Present Position*, translated by Kathleen Pond (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964).

section allows Luke to describe the difference between demonic magic and godly miracles.

The most significant issue is how wicked is the magic that it has to be vanquished through confrontation? This chapter three will demonstrate that indeed magic is seriously wicked (as obviously represented in Simon Magus, the magician) and it has to be overcome through confrontation only, so then the gospel can be proclaimed freely. The passage will be divided into four sections with the grammatical examination of each section followed by the exegesis of each section as well. In the conclusion a table that shows the contrast between magic and the power of the gospel throughout the Book of Acts, is provided.

The Structure

This lengthy passage will be divided into four sections² for examination: first, the section that deals with Philip in Acts 8:4-8; second, the section that presents Simon as in Acts 8:9-13; third, the section that describes the sending of Peter and John and the significance of the Holy Spirit found in Acts 8:14-17; and the fourth section that discloses the confrontation of Peter and Simon covering Acts 8:18-24. The conclusion in verse 25 creates an inclusion with the introductory section in verses 1b-3.

Introduction: the scattering of believers into Judea and Samaria (1b-3)

I A Philip and the power of Jesus' name (4-8)

II B Simon, the first wickedness of his magic, and his submission (9-13)

III A' Peter and the power of the Holy Spirit (14-17)

² See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 134-39, who also divided this periscope into four sections that ended in verse 24; see also Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 398.

IV B' Simon, the wickedness of his magic, his petition, (18-24)

Conclusion: the preaching of the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans (25)

The unit of Acts 8:4-24 is actually part of the larger unit of Acts 8:1b-25. Several features that bind this lengthy unit of Acts 8:1b-25 as one unit are: 1) the literary device “ἐγένετο δε”³ which is Lukan narrative style to mark a new section and at the same time further the progress of his narration; 2) the inclusio of Jerusalem and Samaria found in verse 1b and verse 25; 3) the change of the geographical location and the theme in the following passage of Acts 8:26-40. However, Acts 8:4-25 does evidence many features that hold it together as a single narrative. First, the pattern ABA'B' is prominent. Second, the lexical coherent of “Samaria” is found in verses 5, 8, 9, 14, 25. Third, the theme has moved from the persecution of believers found in verse 1b-3 to the confrontation with magic and the further spread of the gospel in all the cities of the Samaritans. Fourth, the figures in Acts 8: 4-25 are specific to merely Philip, Simon, and Peter instead of “all” including Saul the persecutor in Acts 8:1b-3. Fifth, a further inclusio in the two accounts, the preaching of the gospel (“εὐαγγελίζω”) in verse 4 and verse 25, obviously binds this unit as one. Moreover the precise phrase “μὲν οὖν” (therefore) found in verse 4 and 25 strongly suggests that Acts 8:4-25 can be examined as an independent unit within the larger unit.

The Grammatical Examination

The examination of the grammar will be done by section. In each case a very literal translation will be given first so that the original Greek is transposed even though the English might sound wooden.

³ For the general function of this phrase “ἐγένετο δε” to indicate the progress of the narrative, see BAGD, 159.

The Literal Translation of Section I, Acts 8:4-8

4 Therefore those who were scattered, they went through preaching⁴ the word⁵ 5 and Philip, going down into the⁶ city of Samaria, kept on proclaiming⁷ to them the Christ 6 and paying attention were the crowd⁸ to the word continue to be said⁹ by Philip with one accord when¹⁰ they hear and see the signs he was doing¹¹ 7 for many of those who having the unclean spirits shouting¹² with a great voice they were coming out,¹³

⁴ The Greek word “εὐαγγελιζομενοι” literally means “preaching the good news”. The conjugation of this word is present participle middle nominative masculine plural, thus it carries the aspect of continuation action of preaching the good news. The phrase “the good news” is omitted because of the redundancy in English.

⁵ The addition of “του θεου” (of God) is found in E p^c t w vg^{cl} sy^p bo^{mss}, but it does not influence the meaning of the whole passage. Either “the word of God” or “Lord” is basically the same since both carry the identical understanding, the word about Jesus Christ, the Lord.

⁶ The addition of this article “την” is recorded in C D E Ψ 33. 1739 M | txt P⁷⁴ κ A B 1175 pc. With such support, the presence of the article is maintained. The impact of this article to understand which city of Samaria is referred is disputed among scholars. See the following discussion under the title “The Exegesis”.

⁷ The Greek word “εκήρυσσεν” is in the imperfect tense. This means that the emphasis is on the continuation of action in the past.

⁸ This is the Greek arrangement of the sentence. The verb is placed before the subject “the crowd” while the adverb “with one accord” is put after “Philip”. The tense of the verb “were paying attention” is imperfect that emphasizes on the continuous action in the past.

⁹ The translation as such is to demonstrate the present participle passive dative plural “λεγυμένοις” used in the Greek text.

¹⁰ The time “when” is expressed by Luke by using the articular infinitive of the dative, which is the combination of preposition “ἐν”, the dative article “τῷ” with two infinitives “ἀκουεῖν” and “βλεπεῖν”, while the subject is the accusative “αὐτούς”.

¹¹ The tense of the verb “was doing” is imperfect. Thus, Philips consistently performs signs and not just once.

¹² The Greek word is “βοῶντα” which is present participle accusative neutral plural. This accusative neutral plural of the participle is the same with the accusative neutral plural of the noun “unclean spirit”.

¹³ For the right arrangement of this clause see the discussion under the title “The Grammatical examination of section I” in the following.

and many who had been paralyzed¹⁴ also lame they were healed 8 and there existed¹⁵ much joy in that city.

The Grammatical Examination of Section I

Four grammatical examinations are addressed in this first section. First, the particle “οὖν” (therefore) found in verse 4 functions both as the conclusion of the previous section about the persecution of believers and at the same time presents the consequences in the following section. The main clause is “they went through”. The tense of the main verb is aorist indicative but more important is the present participle used to explain the verb “went through”. The importance of the present participle “preaching” lies in the aspect of the present that suggests the continuous action of preaching the word. The subject of the verb “went through” is explicated by using a participle, “those who were scattered,” which implies many places rather than just one.

Second, the using of imperfect tense of the verb in verse 5 once again confirms that those who are scattered including Philip keep on preaching the good news. The focus of this verse 5 is Philip. The main verb is “kept on preaching”, and the tense is Imperfect that emphasizes on the aspect of repetitive action which is identical to the same aspect of the word “preaching” in verse 4. The city Philip keeps on preaching is explicated by the participle phrase “going down into the city of Samaria”. That Philip goes inside the city (and not nearby the city) is clear by the using of preposition “εἰς” combined with accusative. Christ is the heart of Philip’s

¹⁴ This is the perfect participle passive of Greek “παρὰλελυμένοι”; the passive mood implies that such a paralyzed one does not occur naturally but is likely caused by powers other than God.

¹⁵ Though the formula “ἔγενετο δε” is similar to the one in verse 1b, here this formula does not share the same function as a mark of a new section in the narration. It is likely that here, the consequences of Philip’s deeds are concluded.

proclamation while the designation of the proclamation is “them”, the people of Samaria (Dative Masculine Plural in Greek). Luke in verse 5 has narrowed the figure from those who are scattered to Philip with the consistent action of preaching the word just like those who are scattered.

Third, the paying attention of the people of Samaria presented in verse 6 is prominent since the same word is also used even two times when Luke presents Simon. The “paying attention” as the main verb with an adjectival participle “τοις λεγομενοις” (what that are said) explains that the people of Samaria are paying attention to the message of Philip which is Christ. There are two significant infinitives connected to the main verb “paying attention”. The first is the phrase “ἐν τῷ ἀκουεῖν” which is a particle “ἐν” combined with the dative of articular infinitive “τῷ ἀκουεῖν” (to hear). The meaning of this dative of the articular infinitive is to express a temporal aspect. The translation of this phrase is: “when they hear” therefore, this phrase explains clearly that it is when the people of Samaria hear Philip’s message of Christ, they pay attention to Philip. The second infinitive is “βλεπεῖν” (to see) which is also connected to the articular infinitive. The tense of these two infinitives are present which carry the emphasis of the continuation of an action. Thus these two infinitives indicates that when the people of Samaria keep on hearing Philip’s message and seeing the signs Philip performed, then they pay their attention. An adverb “ὁμοθυμαδον” (with one mind) is important in relation to the “paying attention” since this adverb clearly shows how the people of Samaria pay attention; also this adverb is not found when Luke depicts the paying attention of the people of Samaria to Simon in the following section II.

Fourth, at first sight, the order of the clause in verse 7 seems unusual, but with a careful examination, this unusual order can be clarified. The particle “gar” provides an explanation on what Philip has done in previous verse 6. The noun “πολλοι” (many) occurs two times and clearly describes that many people are recovered. Two negatives features need resolved. The first phenomenon is those who had unclean spirit. It can be also translated as such: “Those who have the unclean spirits they (these spirits) kept on coming out shouting with a great voice.” since the tense of the participle is present. The subject of the verb “kept on coming out” is clearly the unclean spirits rather than the person possessed. The verb “coming out” could have only one meaning, namely that it is these unclean spirits who come out of the persons since it is impossible for the possessed man to come out of himself. The participle “shouting” also points to the same subject, since both the participle and the unclean spirits share the same case, gender, and the number which are accusative neutral plural. The second phenomenon is the healing of the lame and paralyzed. The tense of the verb “ἔθεραπυέθησαν” (be healed) is aorist that indicates the healing is indeed happened.¹⁶ The “παραλελυμένοι” (those who paralyzed) and the “χωλοὶ” (the lame) point to the one category of sickness with different type. The result of Philip’s ministry is surprising and concluded by Luke in verse 8 as “And there existed much joy in that city”

The conclusion of this first section is that Philip, one of the scattered believers, goes down to Samaria and consistently, preaches the message of Christ as other

¹⁶ See William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek 3rd ed.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 201-3 who presents the meaning of aorist tense that depends much on the context. The meaning of aorist can be ingressive (to begin an action) or proleptic (describing the action in future) or gnomic (a timeless truth) or constative (describe the action as a whole without explain the nature of the action). However, there is one certain meaning of aorist that the action is indeed happened although it tells nothing about the action of the verb (undefined). The constative and the undefined meaning of aorist is likely the case here. See also Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 239-43.

believers do. Philip's proclamation comes along with the signs he performed and gains attention of the people of Samaria so that the final result of Philip's ministry is very positive since joy existed in the city.

The Literal Translation of Section II, Acts 8:9-13

9 now a certain man, in name Simon who used to exist before¹⁷ in the city keeps on practicing magic¹⁸ and amazing the nation of Samaria saying (in respect of) himself to be¹⁹ someone great 10 to whom paying attention were all from the small until the great saying "This man is the power of God which is being called²⁰ great" 11 and they kept on paying attention to him because²¹ in a sufficient time they have amazed to the magic deeds 12 but when they believed Philip preaching (good news) concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, they were baptized men and also women 13 and also Simon himself believed and after being baptized he was attaching to Philip, looking at the signs and great power he kept on amazed

The Grammatical Examination of Section II

Two significant genitive phrases need to be examined. First, the genitive in the phrase "the nation of Samaria" seems to employ the genitive of the kind of nation or people. Another genitive found in the phrase "the power of God who is being called

¹⁷ The translation is presented as such to express the imperfect tense of the verb "προϋπήρχεν" which means existed before.

¹⁸ The present participle active "μαγεύων" which suggests a continuous action of performing magic is used by Luke. The verb "μαγεύω", magician (μαγός) and magic (μαγεία) share the same root.

¹⁹ The structure of the clause is somewhat awkward, although the meaning is obvious enough that Simon himself claims to be someone great.

²⁰ Such a translation is intended to show the present participle passive of "ἡ καλουμένη" in the Greek text.

²¹ The causal conjunction in this verse employs the articular infinitive introduced by a preposition "δια" instead of a particle "γάρ" or "ὅτι". The formula is constituted by the combination of preposition "δια" and the accusative of the articular infinitive "το ... ἐξεστακέναι" with the accusative "αυτούς" (they) as the subject.

great” in verse 10 is more complex. There are at least two possibilities to classify the genitive in “the power of God”. One possibility is the genitive of apposition so that the meaning will be “the power which is God”. Such a meaning is possible if the power is God, but this might not be true.²² Another possibility is the genitive of source or belonging, thus the meaning will be the power which is from (or belongs to) God. This meaning could be true particularly when Simon himself is understood as the power which is great and not that Simon is God.²³ This later sense is likely the meaning in the light of the previous verse 9.

There are at least six main clauses found in this section II. One lengthy clause is found in verse 9, another one is in verse 11, one is in verse 12, and three in verse 13. The primary concern of all these clauses is Simon and his role either in performing magic in his past or afterwards in believing, following, and being amazed by the signs performed by Philip. The lengthy main clause in verse 9 is identified with the main verb “used to exist before”. His role before the coming of Philip is disclosed by two participles “practicing magic” and “amazing” that modify the main verb. The tense of both participles “μαγευων” (practicing magic) that explain Simon’s deeds of magic and “ἐξιστανων” (amazing) the result, is present, thus indicating that the magic performed by Simon is not a spontaneous one time action but a consistent action of performing magic in Samaria. It is important to notice that the “ἐξιστανων” (amazing) is put immediately after “μαγευων” (practicing magic). The adverbial participle “λεγων” (saying) refers to Simon’s claim “ἐἰναί τινα ἐαυτὸν μέγαν” (on himself to be

²² See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 407.

²³ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 407.

someone great).²⁴ Therefore it is evident that Simon's claim to be great originated in his magic performance.

The relative pronoun “ὃ” (to whom) in the beginning of verse 10 suggests that the following clause is antecedent to the main clause in verse 9. The grammatical examination of verse 10 is not simple especially the last part. As for Philip, here the magical performance of Simon results in “προσειχον”, the paying attention of the people of Samaria. The tense of “προσειχον” is imperfect which indicates that the paying attention has continuously happened. The implication of the “προσειχον” (paying attention) is the saying²⁵ of the people to Simon that “This man is the power of God which is being called great”. The claim of Samaria's people needs to be clarified since there are several possibilities of understanding. In Greek the word “the power”, “great” and the adjectival participle “ἡ καλουμένη” share the same case, gender and number (nominative, feminine, singular). The combination of these three words can be read as “which is being called the great power”, therefore the whole saying of Samaria's people can be read alternatively “This man is which is being called the great power of God”.²⁶ Although both translations (the translation presented in the previous section in this chapter and the alternative one) are grammatically right, but from the light of Simon's claim to be someone great in verse 9, the translation presented in the previous literal translation of section II is preferred.

²⁴ See Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts Paideia Commentaries on The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 115, who refers to A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament 3 vols.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930-1933) to suggest that the combination of the indefinite pronoun “τις” (someone) with an adjective is rhetorically emphatic and Ironic.

²⁵ The tense of the participle “saying” in Greek is present which means that the saying of the people of Samaria happens continuously rather than a spontaneous action.

²⁶ See New American Standard Bible (NASB); New International Version (NIV) Bible (TNIV as well) also shares the same translation with slight change in the first phrase.

Just like verse 10, the main verb in verse 11 is “paying attention” while the following phrase provides the cause of “paying attention” and how long has the magical work amazed Samaria’s people. By putting the main verb in the beginning, Luke seems to show that Samaria’s people indeed pay attention to the impressiveness of Simon’s magic. The following dative “αὐτῷ” after the main verb refers obviously to the person of Simon while the dative “ταῖς μεγείαις” (with his magics) definitely points to the magical performance. Just as the presentation on Philip, here in verse 11 Luke uses preposition “διὰ” combined with the accusative of the articular infinitive “το ... ἐξεστακεῖναι” (to be amazed) that provides the reason why Samaria’s people kept on paying attention to Simon. Although different in mood, the word “amaze” (ἐξίστημι) in verse 8 (participle mood) is precisely the same used in this verse 11 (infinitive mood). Simon’s magical performance has amazed Samaria’s people for a long time²⁷ as indicated by the temporal dative “for a sufficient time” (ἰκανῶ χρόνῳ). It is interesting to notice that in the episode of Philip, Luke provides the temporal aspect explicitly by using the “ἐν” with the dative of the articular infinitive with an implicit reason, while here in verse 11 Luke describes both time and reason explicitly. A surprising feature found in both verse 9 and verse 11 is the recurrence of “amaze” and “practicing magic” concurrently. Therefore it is sensible to conclude that the amazement of Samaria’s people is because of Simon’s practicing of magic.

The figure of Philip in verse 12 is peculiar since the episode is basically about Simon. Therefore, the particle “δέ” is understood better as a contrast than a transition. The translation of the particle “δέ” as “but” is then preferred. The conjunction “ὅτε” (when) provides not only a temporal aspect of the following drama in the episode but it also reveals the confrontation between Simon and Philip. The evidence is obvious in

²⁷ See BAGD, 374.

the change of the figure from Simon to Philip. Moreover, this verse 12 provides Philip's deeds and the positive response of the people of Samaria. Several grammatical details in verse 12 need examination. First, the verb "ἐπιστευσαν" (they believed) is found in aorist tense emphasizing a concrete action in past time. Second, the dative phrase "τῷ φιλιππῷ εὐαγγελιζομένῳ" is appealing. Most English bibles have translated this phrase as "Philip as he preached the good news"²⁸ while an alternative translation "Philip who keep on preaching" perhaps could fit better to the context as will be argued in the following. This dative phrase "τῷ φιλιππῷ εὐαγγελιζομένῳ" itself consists of three elements, a dative article, a noun and a present participle. All these three words share the same case, gender and number (nominative, masculine, singular). The key element to understand this phrase is the connection of the dative article. In most translations the article relates to Philip rather than the participle. In such a translation the participle is considered as verbal participle and the translation is "as he preached the good news". This is understandable since Philip is a name that used with the article. However, grammatically the article may link to the participle and the noun "Philip" may not need an article.²⁹ There is one occurrence in this passage Act 8:5 where the noun "Philip" does not have an article and thus the absence of an article to the noun "Philip" is possible. If the article belongs to participle, then the participle is an adjectival participle and the translation is "Philip, the one who keeps on preaching (the good news)" with "the one" so that the translation turns out to be "Philip who keeps on preaching (the good news)". This alternative translation that categorizes the

²⁸ See for instance New English Translation; New International Version Bible; also Revised Standard Version.

²⁹ The word "Philip" in all cases occurs four times in this passage Act 8:4-25; they are in verse 5, 6, 12 and 13. Three occurrences of "Philip" carry an article, but there is one occurrence in verse 5 that does not have the article.

participle as an adjectival participle seems to fit better with the context. However, whichever translation is adopted, they both share the basic understanding that the people of Samaria believed Philip's preaching.

The third examination of verse 12 is the following phrase “περι της βασιλειας του θεου και του ονοματου Ἰησου χριστου”. The preposition “περι” stands with the genitive to give “the object or person to which an action refers or relates”.³⁰ In this verse 12, the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ are clearly the object to which the preaching of Philip refers. The genitive “of God” in the “kingdom of God” needs clarification since there are several possibilities of understanding. It can be the apposition genitive that gives the meaning as the kingdom which is God, which is not likely. Another is the genitive of kind to mean the kind of kingdom that is God's kingdom. This is also unlikely since the context does not indicate another kind of kingdom as a contrast. The subjective or objective genitive is not possible here. The genitive of belonging or source that makes the meaning as the kingdom which belongs to (or from) God seems to fit the context. The other genitive “Ἰησου χριστου” (of Jesus Christ) in “the name of Jesus Christ” also need to be analyzed because of several possible meanings. It could represent the genitive of kind to give Jesus as a kind of name. This is of course unlikely. Another category is the genitive of belonging to make the meaning to be the name belongs to Jesus Christ. However, the focus of Philip's preaching is indeed Jesus rather than just merely a name. The best meaning comes perhaps from the category of genitive of apposition to make the translation as the name (which is) Jesus Christ. This fits best the context of Philip's preaching about the kingdom and the Samaritan's faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

³⁰ See BAGD, 644.

The fourth element to be examined in verse 12 “ἐβαπτίζοντο ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες” (They were being baptized, men and women) is the key verb “ἐβαπτίζοντο” (they were being baptized). The tense of the verb is imperfect that emphasizes a repetitive action in the past. This means that the baptism of Samaria’s people is not a one-time action. Such a repetitive action of baptism is confirmed by the report that many of these people, men and women. The double particles “τε” and “καὶ” (translated as and also) is likely to intensify the number of those who were baptized. The record of men and women as well confirms that the number of the baptism is indeed significant.

In verse 13, the figure Simon returns to the drama but with an ironic twist that Simon who used to amaze the people of Samaria, now was amazed by Philip. There are three elements (the last two elements are very significant) to be examined in verse 13. First, the particle “δὲ” (and) stands clearly more as a connection than as a contrast to the previous verse 12. Second, the combination of “Simon” and the “αὐτος” denotes the emphasis on Simon, thus the meaning has to be “Simon himself”. Such an emphasis intensifies greater the irony of Simon in his confrontation with Philip. The third element, which is the most important as well, is the response of Simon after the confrontation with Philip (as implicitly revealed in verse 12). There are three verbs to be examined in this third element, “ἐπίστευσεν” (he believed), “ἦν προσκαρτερῶν” (he was attaching to) and “ἐξίστατο” (he kept on amazed). The verb “ἐπίστευσεν” (he believed) points to the report that Simon who was once believed himself becomes a believer. Since this verb is followed by the dative, “τῷ φιλιππῷ” (Philip) seems to be the person to whom Simon believes. Is Simon’s faith true? The answer to this question is hidden until his confrontation with Peter in verses 18-25. In describing the following response of Simon after his faith, Luke uses “ἦν προσκαρτερῶν”, an

imperfect periphrastic tense which is a combination of the imperfect of “εἶμι” (a verb to be in Greek) and the present participle.³¹ In classical Greek, such a combination may carry an emphasis on the aspect of the action.³² One participle “βαπτισθεις” (being baptized) located before this imperfect periphrastic tense is appealing since it tells us that Simon was baptized also. This is a verbal participle whose function is to explicate the main verb “ἦν προσκαρτερων” (he was attaching to). There are several meanings of a verbal participle such as concessive (translated by adding an “although”), causal (adding “because”) or temporal (by adding either while or when or after). Among these three possibilities, the temporal meaning (adding an “after”) is the most sensible. The main reason to apply the meaning of the participle as after being baptized lies on the report that Simon keeps on attached to Philip. Simon’s continuous attachment to Philip is of course a consequence following his belief and baptism. There is no reason for Simon to attach himself to Philip if he is still the great one.

Simon’s attachment to Philip is expressed by the main verb “ἐξιστατο” (he kept on being amazed) while the focus of Simon amazement is explicated by two phrases: “θεωρων τε σημεια” (and wondering at the signs) and “και δυναμεις μεγαλας γινομενας” (also a great power that keeps on happening). The tense of the main verb “ἐξιστατο” is imperfect which signifies a continuity of the amazement. The continuity of Simon’s amazement is apparent through the use of the two participles that convey why Simon keeps on amazed. The tense of the first verbal participle “θεωρων” is present which emphasizes the continuity of the wondering. Here, the meaning of the verbal participle “θευρων” is temporal. Therefore the interpretation is “while

³¹ The present tense of the participle clearly denotes an emphasis on a continuous action. Thus the translation of this periphrastic tense is “he was attaching to”.

³² See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 281; also BAGD, 224.

continuing to wonder at”. The accusative plural of “σημεία” (signs) is definitely the object to which Simon keeps on wondering. This phrase is significant for it reveals that Simon’s attention is not on Jesus who Philip proclaims but the signs which Philip performed.

The second verbal participle “γινόμενας” is also a present participle that emphasizes the continuity of things happening. The things that keep on happening are identified by the accusative plural “δυναμεις μεγάλας” (great powers). Again, this second reason for Simon’s amazement is also about powers, the great powers. These two participle phrases seem to anticipate that Simon does not truly believe and of course his baptism should be understood negatively and not as a symbol of true repentance.

This grammatical examination of section II indicates that Simon though he amazes the people of Samaria with his magic for a long time and even claims himself as someone great, he is no rival to the power of God as reflected in Philip’s proclamation and miraculous performance. Yes, the text shows that he seems to believe and to be baptized, but through a careful closer examination his belief and baptism is basically a fraud since his only concern is on power.

The Literal Translation of Section III, Acts 8:14-17

14 and hearing the apostles in Jerusalem that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent³³ to them Peter and John 15 who going down prayed for them in order that they may receive³⁴ the Holy Spirit 16 because not yet³⁵ it had fallen³⁶ on anyone of

³³ The tense of this verb “ἀπέστειλαν” is aorist which means one time action in past time. The same tense is the verb “prayed” (προσηύξαυτο) found in verse 15.

³⁴ The addition of “may” is because the mood of the verb “λάβωσιν” is subjunctive that indicates a wish or an expectation. The tense itself is aorist.

them and only they had been baptized³⁷ into the name of the Lord Jesus 17 then they kept on laying upon³⁸ the hands on them and they kept on receiving the Holy Spirit

The Grammatical Examination of Section III

Several grammatical details will be carried out in this section. First, the participle “hearing” in verse 14 is best classified as a temporal adverbial participle³⁹ which explains when the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to the nation of Samaria. The whole participle phrase in verse 14 that explicates the main verb “ἀπεστειλαν” (they sent) provides a significant detail of when and why Peter and John are sent. The “ὅτι” in this verse 14 signifies a dependent clause and is translated as “that”.⁴⁰ The genitive “του θεου” (of God) in the phrase “τον λογον του θεου” (the word of God) must refer to “about”⁴¹ and give the sense of the phrase as the word about God. The tense of the main verb “ἀπεστειλαν” (they sent) is aorist which emphasizes a concrete action in the past, thus the sending of Peter and John by the apostles in Jerusalem is indeed happened.

³⁵ Literally, two negative “οὐδέπω” (not yet) and “οὐδενὶ” (no one), appear in this formula, but in Greek, the two negatives will remain negative and never turn to positive as in English.

³⁶ The periphrastic pluperfect formula, the construction of the Imperfect “ἦν” and perfect participle “ἐπιπεποκόσ” is used here.

³⁷ Another periphrastic pluperfect is employed here, although the imperfect “ὑπῆρχον” is used instead of the imperfect of “εἶμι”.

³⁸ The translation is as such to maintain the aspect of the imperfect tense used in the verb “ἐπετίθεσαν”. The same case is with the verb “kept on receiving” from the verb “ἐλάμβανον”.

³⁹ Another possible meaning of this participle is the causal adverbial participle. Either temporal or causal meaning is employed the understanding remains the same that the journey of Peter and John to Samaria is due to the fact that the people of Samaria have received the word of God.

⁴⁰ It is unlikely to understand the “ὅτι” as a causal use and translates it as “because” since there is no causal indication of the clause before and after “ὅτι”.

⁴¹ Several other meanings such as “which is” (the genitive of apposition) or “from” (the genitive of separation) or genitive of kind, seem to be unlikely.

The second examination concentrates on verse 15. There are two substantial verbs to be examined in this verse 15, “προσευξαντο” (they prayed) which is modified by a participle “καταβαντες” (having gone down) and a subjunctive verb “λαβωσιν” (they may receive) that combines with “ὅπως”. Both verbs “προσευξαντο” and “λαβωσιν” are significant and closely correlated. The meaning of the participle “καταβαντες” is obviously temporal. Among several alternatives such as when, or as, or after, the translation “after” is the most likely because Peter and John have to be in the city before they pray for the people of Samaria. Another reason to apply “after” is the function of the verbal participle which is to explicate the main verb “προσευξαντο” (they prayed). Here, the participle “καταβαντες” should not stand independently since the main verb “προσευξαντο” occurs. The person to whom Peter and John pray is identified by the combination of the preposition “περι” (for) and the genitive “αὐτων” (them).⁴² The “ὅπως” (in order that) combined with the aorist subjunctive “λαβωσιν” (may receive) is crucial for this combination and denotes obviously the purpose⁴³ of the prayer that the people of Samaria may receive the Holy Spirit.

The reason for the necessity of Samaria’s people to receive the Holy Spirit is provided in verse 16 as identified by the particle “γὰρ” (for/because).⁴⁴ The pluperfect periphrastic (the combination of “ἦν” (imperfect of “εἶμι”) and “ἔπιπεπτοκώς” (perfect participle) is employed to explain the reason to receive the Holy Spirit. The subject of the verb “ἦν” (it has) is the Holy Spirit in verse 15 as also confirmed by the perfect participle “ἔπιπεπτοκώς” which is the same neuter gender with the Holy Spirit in verse 15. The double negatives in verse 16, “οὐδέτω” (an adverb which means not

⁴² See BAGD, 644.

⁴³ See BAGD, 576.

⁴⁴ See BAGD, 151.

yet / still not) and “οὐδενὶ” (the dative case of an indefinite pronoun followed by a preposition “ἐπι” to mean “upon no one”) emphasizes that the Holy Spirit indeed has not yet fallen upon the people of Samaria as expressed by “αὐτῶν” (of them). The conjunction “δέ” indicates another fact that the people of Samaria have been baptized⁴⁵ in the name of Jesus Christ. The presence of “μόνος” (only) is appealing since it can be an adjective or an adverb with a variety of meanings. The meaning of this word as alone or isolated can be ruled out since it does not fit the context at all. It is likely that this “μόνος” is used as an adverb combined with the periphrastic formula of “βεβαπτισμένοι ὑπῆρχον” (have been baptized only) to denote a limiting action involved in the Samaritan’s baptism.⁴⁶ The genitive “Ἰησοῦ” in “τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ” is obviously a genitive of apposition to mean “of the Lord Jesus”. What is lacking from a baptism into the name of Jesus is uncertain.

The adverb “τοτε” (then / at that time) in verse 17 clearly indicates the further action performed by Peter and John after the baptism of the people of Samaria. Both verbs “ἐπέτιθεσαν” (kept on laying hand) and “ἐλάμβανον” (kept on receiving) are imperfect and confirm the repetition of laying hand to receive the Holy Spirit. The conjunction “καί” here functions both to connect the two verbs “ἐπέτιθεσαν” (kept on laying hand) and “ἐλάμβανον” (kept on receiving) and to introduce a result (the receiving of the Holy Spirit) which comes from the preceding action (the laying on of hands by Peter and John).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ A pluperfect periphrastic (the combination of the perfect participle and the imperfect of “εἶμι”) is also employed as in the previous section of this verse 16, but here the “ὑπῆρχον” (the imperfect of ὑπάρχω) is used instead of the imperfect of “εἶμι”. For the emphasis of periphrastic tense which is on the aspect of the verb, see Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 281.

⁴⁶ See BAGD, 528.

⁴⁷ See BAGD, 392.

This section III demonstrates that although the people of Samaria have been baptized but they have not yet received the Holy Spirit. This is likely the reason to send Peter and John to Samaria and dispense the free gift of God which is the Holy Spirit through prayer and by mean of the laying on of Peter's and John's hand. The episode of receiving the Holy Spirit may also anticipate the power of the Holy Spirit (manifested implicitly in the rebuke of Peter) to reveal the wickedness of Simon request for power and the evilness in his heart in the following section IV.

The Literal translation of Section IV, Acts 8: 18-25

18 and Simon seeing⁴⁸ that through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles is given the Spirit⁴⁹, offered them money 19 saying “give me also this authority in order that on whom when I lay the hands one may receive⁵⁰ the Holy Spirit” 20 but Peter said to him “The silver of you together with you may (be) in destruction because the gift of God you supposed through the wealth to acquire 21 there is no part for you not even a portion in this word, for the heart of you is not right before God 22 therefore repent from this evil of you, ask of the Lord if then there will be forgiven you the intention of your heart 23 for into a gall of bitterness and a bond of unrighteousness I see that you are” 24 but answering Simon said “You,⁵¹ pray on behalf of me to the Lord in

⁴⁸ The translation is maintained as such to show that the participle “ἰδων” is used.

⁴⁹ The addition of “the Holy” (τό ἅγιον) is found in κ B cop^{sa, meg}; Most manuscripts such as P^{45, 74} A C D E Ψ 33 36 81 181 307 453 610 614 945 1175 1409 1678 1739 1891 2344 Byz put only “the spirit” (πνεῦμα). However, there is no significant impact to the meaning of the passage.

⁵⁰ There are two possibilities to understand this phrase: one possibility is that this is a conditional sentence as identified by the using of “ἐάν” and aorist subjunctive “ἐπιθῶ” in the protasis (the “if” clause) and present subjunctive “λαμβάνη” in the apodosis (the “then” clause). The other possibility is to understand the “ἐάν” as temporal to mean “when” or “whenever” and the subjunctive “λαμβάνη” remains the expected consequence. Although both possibilities provide the similar basic understanding, the latter fits better to the context.

⁵¹ The addition of “you” (ὁμεις) is emphatic since in Greek no any pronoun is actually needed in the second person singular of aorist imperative “pray”; See also Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 416.

order that nothing may come (upon me which you have said)⁵² 25 Therefore they who testified solemnly and spoke the word of God continued to return to Jerusalem, and to many villages of the Samaritans they continued to preach the gospel.

The Grammatical Examination of Section IV

The first grammatical examination in this section IV involves verses 18 and 19 which are one sentence. The particle “δε” (and) provides a link to the following scene of Simon, while the participle “ἰδὼν” (having seen) functions temporarily to provide the time (when) the main verb “προσήνεγκεν” (offered) occurred. The temporal aspect can be “when” or “after”, however, when seems to fit the context as the tense the participle is present. The meaning of “ἰδὼν” (having seen) is not an apathetic seeing but a considerable and contemplative sense of seeing.⁵³ Thus Simon is seriously putting his eyes on what happened. The “ὅτι” (that)⁵⁴ introduces the the laying on of the apostles’ hands upon the Samaria’s people, which impresses Simon. It is interesting that the prayer is missing from the scene.

The tense of the main verb “προσήνεγκεν” (offered) in this verse 18 is aorist that emphasizes on the fact of Simon’s offer.⁵⁵ The accusative plural “χρηματα” signifies a certain amount of money⁵⁶ for “αὐτοῖς”, the dative plural refers to Peter and John. The main sentence in verse 18 is actually Simon offering money to them,

⁵² This addition are found in P⁷⁴ ⋈ A B Ψ 33 36 81 181 307 453 610 614 945 1175 1409 1678 1739 1891 2344 Byz.

⁵³ See BAGD, 371.

⁵⁴ See BAGD, 588.

⁵⁵ See Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, 201-2.

⁵⁶ Though it can also mean property or wealth as in BAGD, 88; here money seems to fit better to the context.

while the participle provides the temporal aspect of Simon's offer and the "ὅτι" informs the object Simon wants to buy with his money.

The participle "λέγων" (saying) in verse 19 presents Simon's offer. The main verb in his saying is "δότε" (give) which as an aorist imperative emphasizes Simon's request. The "καμοὶ" is a combination of "καί" (also) with the dative "μοι" (to me) and confirms Simon's appeal to be one of Peter and John. The thing Simon wishes to buy is the accusative "τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην" (this authority). The "ταύτην" (this) designates the thing that has immediately preceded,⁵⁷ namely, the authority to dispense the Holy Spirit. This is surprising since Luke does not disclose the word authority in the preceding scene when Peter and John lay their hands upon Samaria's people. The request for authority confirm to his magical principle that manipulate the divine beings and to have authority over them. The purpose of Simon's appeal for authority is identified by "ἵνα" combined with the subjunctive "λαμβάνη" (may receive). The conjunction "ἐάν" (if or when) combined with the aorist subjunctive "ἐπιθῶ" (I lay on) can refer either to a conditional sentence that the "ἐάν" is understood as "if" or refers to temporal use that give the meaning of "ἐάν" as when or whenever.⁵⁸ The later meaning as time is preferred since it fits better to the context that Simon may use the authority whenever he intends to.

Turning to the verse 20, the particle "δέ" indicates the contrast⁵⁹ between the expectation of Simon and Peter's response. Thus Peter's rebuke in contrast to Simon's intention is expected. What is surprising is the lengthy rebuke of Peter that takes three verses from verse 20 to 23. Peter's rebuke also reveals many wickedness in Simon's

⁵⁷ See BAGD, 596.

⁵⁸ See BAGD, 211.

⁵⁹ See BAGD, 171.

character than merely addresses Simon's offer. The capability of Peter (who has never encountered with Simon before) to reveal many wickedness of Simon even the invisible evilness implies the power of the Holy Spirit who empowers Peter. Two verbs are found in Peter's rebuke in verse 20, the verb to be "εἶη" (the optative mood of "εἶμι") and the verb "ἐνόμισας" (you thought) in aorist tense. The rebuke is that Simon's money together with⁶⁰ his person (introduced by the preposition "συν" (with) combined with "σοι") will suffer destruction. The phrase "εἰς ἀπώλειαν" (in to destruction) is not overstated since the "ὅτι" (because) indicates the reason why Peter rebukes Simon. The phrase after the "ὅτι" (because)⁶¹ is "τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνόμισας διὰ χρημάτων κτᾶσθαι" (you thought to acquire the gift of God through silvers), and it reveals the sinful thought and behavior of Simon. Therefore Simon's appeal for the authority is not a naïve request. The verb "ἐνόμισας" (you thought) is aorist and it signifies that the thought of buying the power of God is a fact, while the infinitive "κτᾶσθαι" (to acquire) indicates the purpose of Simon's thought.⁶² The genitive "τοῦ θεοῦ" can be a genitive of possession⁶³ (belongs to) or source⁶⁴ (comes from). Both meanings are identical meaning that the Holy Spirit belongs to (or is) God and also is also a gift given by God. Thus there is absolutely no chance to buy

⁶⁰ The preposition "συν" usually followed by a dative case denotes an accompaniment and association with someone; see BAGD, 781.

⁶¹ Among three functions of "ὅτι", the mark of direct statement, the use as indirect statement or dependent clause, and the causal use, the later causal use is likely the case here.

⁶² See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 256.

⁶³ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 46-7.

⁶⁴ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 56.

such a gift as obvious in the meaning of “τὴν δωρεάν” which is a gift without payment.⁶⁵

The third examination is the further rebuke of Peter to Simon in verse 21. The double negative “οὐκ” (not) and “οὐδὲ” (not even), and the two identical nouns “μερὶς” (part) and “κλῆρος” (portion) in verse 21 intensify the inability for Simon to take any part “ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ” (in this word). Luke does not provide the reference of “this word”. The particle “γὰρ” (because) gives the reason why Simon never takes part in this word. The following phrase reveals that “ἡ καρδία” (the heart) of Simon⁶⁶ is not “εὐθεία” (right).⁶⁷ The shift of the object of Peter’s rebuke is obvious from Simon’s thought (verse 20) to Simon’s heart (verse 21).

The fourth grammatical examination is verse 22. The particle “οὖν” indicates an inference⁶⁸ to the Peter’s rebuke. The conjunction “καὶ” (and) implies that there are two inferential phrases “μετανόησον ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης” and “δεήθητι τοῦ κυρίου” which consist of two commands “μετανόησον” (repent) and “δεήθητι” (ask).⁶⁹ The tense of both verbs are aorist imperative to emphasize the need for repentance and asking. In the first phrase the preposition “ἀπὸ” (from) combined with the genitive carries the basic meaning of separation from something or someone.⁷⁰ Thus

⁶⁵ See BAGD, 210.

⁶⁶ The genitive case of the second person personal pronoun “σου” (of you) is employed. The meaning of this genitive is the genitive of possession to give the meaning as “the heart belongs to Simon”

⁶⁷ The “εὐθεία” is an adjective, the literal meaning is “of a way” but here the meaning is likely “right” as the opposite of wrong; See BAGD, 321.

⁶⁸ There are several meaning of “οὖν” when functions as inferential such as consequently, accordingly, then or therefore. The later meaning sounds the best to the sentence. See BAGD, 593.

⁶⁹ The meaning of “δεήθητι” when combined with the genitive of a person is likely “ask” rather than “pray”; See BAGD, 175.

⁷⁰ See BAGD, 86.

the repentance of Simon should be in the sense of being separated from “τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης” (this wickedness heart of you).⁷¹ In the second phrase, the genitive “τοῦ κυρίου” (of the Lord) stands as the person to whom Simon’s prayer is addressed. The translation is then “(ask) from the Lord”.

The last phrase of verse 22 is “εἰ ἄρα ἀφεθήσεται σοι ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου” (if then the thought of the heart of you will be forgiven to you). The combination of “εἰ” and “ἄρα” is translated as just “then” instead of “if then” or “if possible”. The “ἄρα” also expects a further event to occur namely “ἀφεθήσεται σοι ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου” (the thought of the heart of you will be forgiven to you). Though the phrase “ἀφεθήσεται σοι” (will be forgiven to you) is awkward, the meaning remains clear that Simon’s thought will be forgiven. The genitive “τῆς καρδίας” is likely the genitive of source⁷² to give the meaning as “(the thought) that comes from the heart, while the personal pronoun genitive “σου” is obviously a possessive genitive. The translation is then “the thought that comes from the heart which belongs to you”.

The fifth examination is verse 23 that details the wickedness of Simon’s heart. The whole phrase is “εἰς γὰρ χολὴν πικρίας καὶ σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας ὀρώ σε ὄντα”. Several elements to be addressed in this fifth examination are: first, the particle “γὰρ” (for) provides a further reason of forgiving Simon as in verse 22. Precisely, the content of reason is recognized by Peter’s capability to see - expressed by the verb “ὀρώ σε” (I see you) - the real condition of Simon. The present participle “ὄντα” functions adverbially to be translated as “who are”. There are two real conditions of Simon as expressed in “εἰς χολὴν πικρίας καὶ σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας” (into a gall of

⁷¹ The genitive “σου” (of you) is certainly a possessive genitive to give the meaning as “the heart belongs to you”

⁷² It can also be the attributive genitive to give the translation as the thinking heart, but this is not likely the case.

bitterness and a bond of unrighteousness). The first condition is “χολήν πικρίας” (a gall of bitterness). The meaning of the genitive “πικρίας” can include bitterness (a genitive of material),⁷³ full of bitterness (a genitive of content),⁷⁴ “that makes bitterness” (an objective genitive),⁷⁵ or in association with bitterness (a genitive of association),⁷⁶ or the quality of the gal (the genitive of quality).⁷⁷ The genitive of quality and the genitive of content are preferable because both words “χολήν” and “πικρίας” basically share the same sense of bitterness, thus it is likely that this is to intensify the bitterness of Simon⁷⁸ who was once honored as the great one but now is rebuked. Consequently, the preposition “εἰς” (into) could no longer denote the destination, although in general its function is similar to the dative “ἐν”.⁷⁹ The second condition of Simon is identified by the phrase “σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας” (a bond of unrighteousness). The genitive “ἀδικίας” can be understood unrighteousness (a genitive of material), or full of unrighteousness (a genitive of content) with the later meaning fitting the scene better. The content of “the unrighteousness” is left unexplained.

The sixth examination is verse 24 where the scene returns to Simon who begs for avoiding Peter’s condemnation. Simon’s request is identified by the aorist imperative “δεήθητε” (ask). The pronoun “ὑμεῖς” (you) is plural thus it obviously refers to Peter and John. This addition of nominative pronoun carries an emphasis that

⁷³ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 50.

⁷⁴ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 50-2.

⁷⁵ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 58.

⁷⁶ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 62.

⁷⁷ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 416-7.

⁷⁸ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 416-7.

⁷⁹ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 416.

involves a contrast.⁸⁰ The “ὑπὲρ” combined with genitive “ἐμοῦ” indicates that the request is for Simon’s sake. Just as the earlier “ὑμεῖς” (you), the longer form of the first person pronoun “ἐμοῦ” also carries an emphasis. Therefore the contrast in Simon’s request is between “you” (Peter and John) and “me” (Simon).

The designated person of the request is the Lord as expressed by the preposition “πρὸς” (to) combined with the accusative “τὸν κύριον” (the lord).⁸¹ The particle “ὅπως” (in order that) combined with the aorist subjunctive “ἐπέλθῃ” (may come upon) indicates the purpose of Simon’s request that “μηδὲν ... ὧν εἰρήκατε” (nothing that you – in plural - have said) may come upon “ἐπ’ ἐμέ” (upon me). It is appealing to know that the subject of the verb “εἰρήκατε” is second person plural. Thus, it is likely that John is involved in delivering the rebuke although the text presents Peter only.

Finally, we will examine verse 25. Although the narration is somewhat strange since the episode of Simon is left unfinished without a conclusion, the presence of “οὖν” (therefore) ties verse 25 to the whole episode. The particle “οὖν” indicates the result or the end and the inference⁸² of the whole episode. The particle “μέν” is in anacoluthon and thus is omitted.⁸³ The two participles “διαματυράμενοι” (testifying) and “λαλήσαντες” (speaking) are obviously adverbial to modify the verb “ὑπέστρεφον” (they were returning).⁸⁴ The meaning of these two participle can be concessive

⁸⁰ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 142-3.

⁸¹ The meaning of the combination of “πρὸς” and an accusative case is “toward” and not “into”.

⁸² See BAGD, 592-3.

⁸³ See BAGD, 503.

⁸⁴ The tense of this verb is imperfect; it emphasizes the ongoing action of returning to Jerusalem.

(although) or causal (because) or manner (by) or temporal (either after or when or while or as).⁸⁵ The temporal meaning that employs “after” or “when” fits the context. The article “οἱ” refers back to Peter and John since they come from Jerusalem and consequently they will return to Jerusalem. The genitive “τοῦ κυρίου” can be “about” or “comes from” (the genitive of origin or source) with the previous meaning “about” preferable. The other verb “εὐηγγελίζοντο” (kept on preaching the good news) is imperfect that emphasizes the iteration action of preaching. The particle “τε” (and) implies the preaching to many other villages in Samaria.

The Exegesis

The exegesis of this lengthy pericope will be taken by section rather than by verse. Since the intention of this chapter is to study magic as primarily represented in Simon, the exegesis will focus more on issues related to magic and not address all the issues within the scholarship discussion.

The formulized division into four sections has raised the question of the historicity of this passage. As is obvious from the pattern of the structure A (Philip) B (Negative image of Simon) A' (Peter) B' (A more negative image of Simon), the sharp distinction of figures and theme in such a pattern has led scholars⁸⁶ to argue that Luke composed this passage from literary sources. Various theories have been proposed to solve this issue, but no any satisfactory theory has won the day. The question of why Luke places the account in Acts is more important than how many sources he may have used. Therefore, the discussion on the source will be ruled out

⁸⁵ See Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 272-7.

⁸⁶ See for instance Barret, in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 399; H. Conzelmann, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by J. Limburg, A. T. Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 62-6; also Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. by Bernard Nobel and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971). For a helpful discussion on the source in this particular passage see Haar, *Simon Magus*, 73-76.

from the sectional exegesis; instead, the apologetic purpose of Acts will underlie the following discussion.

Section I: Acts 8:4-8

Two significant features are found in section I. First, the primary character is Philip with all his miracle performances and his message. Second, the place is Samaria. Philip, one of the “seven” mentioned in Acts 6:1, is certainly one of “those who had been scattered” who went about preaching the word.

A dispute involves in which city of Samaria Philip proclaims the Christ. The presence or omission of the article “the” (την) in the phrase “the city of Samaria”⁸⁷ is critical to single out which city of Samaria does Philip really proclaim the Christ. If the article is maintained, the city must refer to either the main or the capital city of Samaria. But if the article is omitted, the city is merely any city in Samaria. Besides the support of the manuscripts, the presence of the article also fits to the intention of Luke in mentioning Samaria with reference to a region or district.⁸⁸ Thus the option is limited to either the capital city or a certain significant region or district in Samaria. It is likely that Luke recalls the commandment of Jesus in Acts 1:8 that his disciples will be his witness in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and until the end of the earth.⁸⁹

A city that could represent the region of Samaria must be significant in religious influence, although the population or the size should also be considered.

⁸⁷ See the literal translation section I in this chapter 3 for the textual variant of this phrase and the support to maintain the presence of the article.

⁸⁸ See for instance Luke 9:51-5; 10:25-37; Also Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 145; Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 402; Also Martin Hengel, “The Geography of Palestine in Acts” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting vol. 4*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 70.

⁸⁹ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 136.

Scholars⁹⁰ have proposed four cities such as Sebaste, Gitta, Sechem, and Sychar. The last one, Sychar proposed by Hengel is interesting particularly when the religious significance is underlined. His argument on the close distance of Sychar with Mount Gerizim as the religious center of the Samaritan is convincing.

In verse 5-8, the crucial episode is verse six with its main point lies in the verb “kept on paying attention”.⁹¹ The articular infinitive introduced by the preposition “ἐν” clarifies that they pay attention after they hear and see the signs Philip keeps on performing. The hearing of Samaria’s people refers implicitly to Philip’s message about the Christ. Thus it is significant to notice that the paying attention of Samaria’s people is caused by both Philip’s message about the Christ and the miraculous signs Philip performed that confirmed his message. However, the emphasis is likely put more on the signs as evident in verse 7. The signs are certainly the miraculous works visible to the people of Samaria. First is the exorcism of the unclean spirit which signals the battle between God’s power and Satan’s.⁹² This seems to anticipate the confrontation between God’s power and magical power in the story of Simon in section II.⁹³

⁹⁰ See for instance Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 136; Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 108; Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 402-3; Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 154; Martin Hengel, “The Geography,” in Bauckham, 70-6. Gaventa and Barrett believe that Sebaste is referred, Dunn proposes Sechem, while Hengel accepts Sychar as the city. Marshall inclines to focus on the story though also provide three possible cities: Sebaste, Shechem, and Gitta.

⁹¹ This imperfect tense “προσεῖχον” occurs three times in this pericope. The other twice belongs to Simon. For the meaning of imperfect tense see the discussion in the translation and grammatical examination of section I.

⁹² See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 136; also Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 146.

⁹³ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 136.

Second is the healing of many who have been paralyzed⁹⁴ and the lame. All the signs Philip performed implicitly reveal that God's power is behind all his deeds. The silence regarding who Philip is may mean that Philip is merely "a servant of the word" as Luke perceived.⁹⁵ The result of Philip's performance of God's power is concluded in verse eight that there is much joy in that city. The phrase "in that city" strongly suggests the escalation of reception from merely "they" to "that city" which most probably means the entire inhabitant. By referring to "that city" Luke has hinted the spread of the gospel is fulfilling Acts 1:8.⁹⁶

A critical question in this section is why the people of Samaria seem very enthusiastic in welcoming Philip's message about the Christ? Although Luke does not provide explanation, still several reasons can be involved. The expected figure of "taheb" (restorer) among the Samaritans can serve as one reason. When Philip's comes with the message about the Messiah (the Christ) it is highly probable that the Messiah fits to the figure of "taheb". Another reason is that the miracles Philip performed are an apparent and visible exhibition of restoration experienced by many people in that city of Samaria. Does this "taheb" prompt Luke to use the word "Christ" instead of Jesus? The answer is speculative since the text is silent. All three reasons may answer the question why Samaria's people seem to immediately pay attention to Philip's message. Since the text is silent about the cultural context, it is better to list these three reasons as merely possibilities.

⁹⁴ The perfect passive of the participle "παρὰλελυμένοι" suggests that there is a causer of such a paralytic.

⁹⁵ For Luke 1:2 even the eyewitnesses of Jesus are understood as merely the servants of the word. In Acts the true actor behind the scene is God. See Steve Walton, "The Acts -- of God? What is the 'Acts of the Apostles' all about?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (October 2008): 291-306, who convincingly argued that God is the real actor in the book of Acts in order to support the apologetic purpose of Acts.

⁹⁶ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 404.

The combination of “paying attention”, the miraculous signs, and the person of Philip foreshadows the coming figure of Simon. The “paying attention” occurs in the narration of Simon, even twice, while the miraculous signs occur also in Simon’s narration but in a negative term, magic. Moreover, the claim of Simon seems to be very comparable to the “saying” of Philip.

The conclusion in verse eight represent the positive reception of the gospel Philip had preached. The much joy occurring in the city is a more positive term than the “amazement” caused by Simon. Once again “in that city” implies that nothing can resist the reception of the gospel. Thus, this conclusion may implicitly serve as an introduction link to the account of Simon in the following section, since he was one of those in that city.

Section II: Acts 8:9-13

In section II the main character is Simon while the location remains the same, Samaria. The verb “προϋπήρχεν” literally means existed before, thus suggesting that this is a flashback to the account of Philip.⁹⁷ The disposition of the story of Simon separately from the account about Philip is because Luke intended to highlight Simon and the confrontation between God’s power and magic as represented by Simon.⁹⁸ Where does Simon come from is likely insignificant to Luke since his primary concern is Simon’s identity associated to his works which is negatively depicted. However, questioning who Simon is will be helpful to understand better the seriousness of the confrontation between Philip, Peter and John and Simon.

⁹⁷ See Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 146.

⁹⁸ See the structure in the outset of this chapter 3.

Simon, his magical works and his influence are recorded in the extra biblical writings. Simon is far more than merely an extraordinary person, indeed he is a great person due to his tremendous influence in the history.⁹⁹ In contrast he is interpreted negatively by Christianity due to his magic. The Bible does provide facts about Simon, but they are limited to his magical performance and his self-exaltation. The record of Simon can be traced back in the writings of the church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Hippolytus.¹⁰⁰ The significance of Simon is recognized by the report of Justin Martyr about Simon's journey to Rome during the reign of the Emperor Claudius and won many followers using his magic. Justin reports that a statue of Simon was erected by the Roman Empire to honor him.¹⁰¹ Such an honored statue must imply that Simon is a great and yet influential person in the Roman culture. One factor that makes Simon very influential is definitely his magic and the principles behind the magic. The principles behind his magic remain long after Simon's death and can be identified by the presence of the Simonians (Simon's followers) whose doctrines were reported by a third century church father Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 AD) in his work "Philosophumena".¹⁰² Hippolytus provides extensive quotations from "Apophysis Megale" (Great Revelation) which the author is believed to be Simon Magus. With such records about Simon, it is clear that the

⁹⁹ Simon's influence exists even until now as evident in the term "simony" which means an act of selling church office and roles. This word simony is originated in his name, Simon the magician who desires to buy the Holy Spirit with his money.

¹⁰⁰ There are other writings in the apocrypha such as Acts of Peter, Acts of Peter and Paul, and Pseudo-Clementine literature that provide information about Simon, but since these writings are considered incredible, they are excluded from the discussion.

¹⁰¹ See Justin, *Apology I.26*; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses I 23*; also Eusebius, *Church History II, 13*. The report of Justin Martyr about Simon is not accepted by all scholars. Some doubt the credibility of the report. For the discussion on this subject, see chapter I under the subtitle "Magic and Religion".

¹⁰² See Hippolytus of Rome, *Philosophumena*, vol.1, ed. W. J. Sparrow, W. K. Lowther Clarke, trans. F. Legge, (New York: MacMillan, 1921), 36 ff. The "Philosophumena" (Against All Heresies) is also called "the Elenchus". In his writing, Hippolytus mentions pagan beliefs and 33 gnostic teachings which are heretic.

confrontation with Simon is very serious and critical since it involves a great power of magic which is real and tangible at the time.

Verse nine through eleven provides the biblical information on who is Simon. Two participles “keeps on practicing magic”¹⁰³ and “keeps on amazing the nation of Samaria”¹⁰⁴ are used to depict the works of Simon. The existence of Simon lies in the magic he used that amazed the people of Samaria,¹⁰⁵ since there are no other works of Simon is reported by Luke. It is important to notice that from the grammatical examination section II, it is Simon magic and not his self-exaltation saying that the people of Samaria amazes and pay their attention and then they exclaim that Simon is the power of God.¹⁰⁶ Two results come out of the magic Simon practiced: First, the self-claim Simon made that he is someone great. Second, is the fact that all from the small to the great were “paying attention”. The negative image of magic is disclosed through the claim Simon made for himself. The arrogant self-saying of Simon as someone great is intensified by the saying of all that Simon is indeed “the power of God which is being called great”. The recognition of Simon as “the power of God” and the two repetitions of “great” highlight the great power of Simon’s magic.

It is likely that the way Luke portrayed Simon is intended to demonstrate a sharp contrast with Philip. On one hand, Philip is depicted positively to lead people to Christ. The work of Philip involves miraculous signs and his saying is about Christ

¹⁰³ The participle “μαγεύων” (practicing magic) is used here.

¹⁰⁴ The word “amaze” occurs three times in this section. Two times intensify the amazement of Simon while the third time is to show the irony of Simon who used to amaze people and now he himself is amazed by Philip’s signs.

¹⁰⁵ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 406, who contended that the two participles “μαγεύων” and “ἐξιστάων” are supplementary or even adverbial to the verb “προὑπήρχεν” (exited before).

¹⁰⁶ This is contra to the notion of Haar that Simon, just as Philip, gets the attention from Samaria’s people because of his saying; see Haar, *Simon Magus*, 167-9.

and the power of Jesus' name. On the other hand, the portrait of Simon is negative. Simon's work is magic, and magic always carries with it a negative connotation. The twice repeated saying is that Simon is the great power of God, but the reference of God in such a saying is a certain divine being (or even many divine beings) that can be manipulated to perform magic and not the true God who corresponds to Jesus Christ, the Lord. A divine being alien to the true God is absolutely wicked. Finally the result of Simon's magic cannot rival the signs of God and the power of Jesus' name.

The confrontation between God (and Christ) and magic is implicitly disclosed in the conquering of Simon who turns to believe and is amazed at the signs Philip performs. Twice the word "amaze" is associated with the work of Simon and his claim of great power, but now, he is the one who believes and is amazed at the signs and great power Philip demonstrates. This statement is full of irony. The following table 1 shows the contrasts more lucidly.

Table 1: The Sharp Contrast of Philip and Simon

Verse	Philip	Simon	Verse
	Work (positive)	Work (negative)	
6, 13	“σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει”: Signs which he keep on doing	“μαγύων” Practicing magic	9
13	“δυνάμεις μεγάλας” (perform) great power of God	“μαγείαις” With magic	11
	The saying (to God, positive):	The saying (to self, negative):	
5	“ἐκήρυσσεν τὸν χριστόν”	“λέγων ἑαυτὸν μέγαν”	9
6	“λεγυμένοις”	“λέγοντες οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δυναμις...μεγάλη”	10

Section III: Acts 8:14-17

Peter and John arrive from Jerusalem to observe what is happening in Samaria. Scholarly discussions attempt to harmonize the lack of the Holy Spirit in the baptism Philip had done with the presence of the Jerusalem apostles to pass on the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who had been baptized in Jesus' name. In the grammatical examination section III, the word “μονος” (only) may carry the sense of lacking something that is likely the receiving of the Holy Spirit. It has been widely understood that Luke intended to ensure the continuity of the “Hellenist” Philip and the Apostles in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷ However, the key element to solve the dispute is the receiving of the Holy Spirit since the following episode presents the implicit power of the Holy Spirit who through Peter, rebukes Simon and reveals extensively his wickedness heart. While the continuation of Philip with Jerusalem may remain true, there is probably a more important issue Luke intended to foreshadow, the escalation of the negative image of Simon, the magician revealed by the Holy Spirit through Peter.¹⁰⁸ A very significant occurrence in this section III is that the Holy Spirit is a gift and a prayer is uttered prior to the dispensing of the Holy Spirit. So, any attempt to buy the Holy Spirit as Simon clearly demonstrates, is then intolerable and wicked because such attempts turn the Holy Spirit into an object to be manipulated rather than a subject

¹⁰⁷ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111; He moves further to say that “Luke knows no silent comings of the Spirit,” moreover this manifestation “could validate the major step forward.” For a more discussion on this issue see Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 409-13. Gaventa in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 138 declines the contention of Fitzmeyer that this section is about to give approval on Philip's work.

¹⁰⁸ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111; Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 138 who also points out correctly that verse 20 has sharply overturned the conclusion of giving approval to Philip's work; also Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 412 with a slightly different emphasis.

that empowers the believers. Section III confirms the hint Luke had given in verse 13 that magic is a wicked power. Also, the reason Simon keeps on being amazed is because he keeps on looking at the signs and the great power Philip had performed rather than to be a true believer. Therefore, Luke hints at the wickedness of magic which he will demonstrate afterwards.

The mentioning of the Holy Spirit has to be understood in the context of section II as contrasting with the term “great power”. Thus, the Holy Spirit which is given through the laying on of Peter’s hand is intended to reveal the wickedness of magic that attempts to obtain the authority to control God’s power. Just as Simon observes Philip to obtain his power, so he observes the action of Peter to obtain the power to dispense the Holy Spirit. The continuous laying on of Peter’s hand is evident in the use of the imperfect tense in Greek. This continuous action will give enough time for Simon to keep on observing prior to the offering of his money for the authority to master the Holy Spirit.

Section IV: Acts 8:18-24

The way of giving the gift of the Holy Spirit so fascinates Simon that he offers money (silvers) to obtain the power. The offering of his money to obtain the authority to bestow the Holy Spirit implies that again he wants to use his magic to obtain profit for himself. It could be that he used to buy the authority to perform magic and charge people for any magical performances.¹⁰⁹ Simon’s offering of money discloses several implications. First, his baptism is evidently a fraud. His baptism is only a camouflage used as a means to approach Philip and observe Philip’s power and later the apostles and to offer money to obtain the authority over the Holy Spirit. Second, he never

¹⁰⁹ See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 413.

repents (his baptism never represents his repentance), Simon is still a magician with the wicked magical principle of manipulating the divine being for his own sake. Simon's thought to buy the power of the Holy Spirit confirms this wicked principle. Third, consequently Simon never experiences the joy of Samaria's people; instead his heart is bitter and unrighteous. The rebuke of Peter reveals the truth of the third implication. All these explain why Simon is interested only on the miraculous performance rather than to believe and submit to Jesus.

The rejection of Simon's money and even Simon himself for his desire to obtain the gift of God is consistent to the claim of Peter in Acts 3:6. Money has no part in receiving the spiritual gifts.¹¹⁰ It is clear for Peter that the attempt to buy the gift of God¹¹¹ is a serious violation to the authority of God. The consequence of such a serious violation is destruction or death as described in verse 20. The rebuke of Peter in verse 21 is addressed to two issues: First, Simon has no share at all in this matter (λογος).¹¹² Second, Simon's heart is not straight before God. Peter points to Simon's heart since it is the center from which all the wickedness comes.

The presence of the particle "οὖν" (therefore) in verse 22 indicates a conclusion to Peter's rebuke. The repentance and pray to the Lord for Simon's serious violation of God's authority is the action expected from him but the episode does not inform Simon's final response. The reason to repent is because of a gall of bitterness and a

¹¹⁰ See Barrett, *The Acts in the Apostles*, 414 who provides support of the condemnation over "the use of spiritual gift for money making."

¹¹¹ It is likely that the genitive of source or belonging is employed. Thus it is the gift which is from God. It is certainly that this gift refers to the bestowing of the Holy Spirit as in Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 414.

¹¹² Two proposals are given to the understanding the term "λογος" (word / matter); it is about the bestowal of the Holy Spirit or Christianity. So Simon has no part in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit or in Christianity. Both are possible, but in term of the previous context in verse 18-20, it is likely that the bestowal of the Holy Spirit is the meaning. See Barrett, *the Acts of the Apostles*, 414-5.

bond of unrighteousness in Simon. It is likely that Peter saw the state of Simon's heart.¹¹³ Although it is not entirely clear what Luke intended to show, the response of Simon to ask Peter to pray for him imply that the evilness of Simon is still bound to his seeking of magical powers. Luke is clear that magic is now definitely conquered. Therefore the primary attention should be paid to the spread of the Gospel as evident in the positive report in verse 25.

Conclusion

The grammatical examination and the exegesis demonstrate that the magic as represented by Simon is wicked. The wickedness can be identified from the purpose of practicing magic which is to amaze the people of Samaria and to claim and gain recognition as the great power of God as demonstrated in section I and II. Moreover in section III and IV, the wickedness of magic is obvious in the intention of Simon's heart to obtain the authority to control the Holy Spirit, the gift of God. The consequence of this very serious sin which is destruction or death affirms the wickedness of Simon's heart. Finally, the reply of Simon to the rebuke of Peter confirms the total victory over magic after the two confrontations with Simon. The positive report on the further proclamation of the gospel is possible only after the victorious confrontation with magic.

As presented in this paper that throughout Acts the confrontation between (the power of) magic and (the power of) God represented by Jesus' disciples is inevitable. Therefore, the clear contrast between magic and miracles (the signs) needs to be highlighted. The following table 2 clearly demonstrates the contrast between magic and the power of the gospel.

¹¹³ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 112 who contended that this is the apostate of Simon, but Barrett in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 417 declines to see this as a sin of Simon.

Passage	Miracles or signs	Magic (the magician)
Act 8:4-25 (Simon – the magician)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirm to the power of Gospel (4-6) - Lead to believe Jesus not the sign doer - Deliver human’s afflictions - Result: joy (in heart), be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit - Nature: God’s gift, redemptive, unable to learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manipulates of divine beings - Leads to the magician - Obtain self-exaltation as divine - Result: bitterness & bound to unrighteousness in heart - Nature: Learnt, bribable and deceptive
Act 13:6-12 (The case of Proconsul Sergius Paulus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead to believe the word of God - Lead to the Lord’s straight path (11-12) - Result: astonish to the teaching of the Lord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deceitful - Pervert the way of the Lord - Associated with evil - Full of unrighteousness
Act 19:10-17 (The miracle of Paul’s apron, the Sons of Sceva)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirm to God’s power (10-11) - Lead to believe the word of God - Power is recognized by the evil spirit - Result1: deliver people affliction (12) - Result2: The exaltation of Jesus’ name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attempts to manipulate God’s power (13) - Result: disintegration & ruination - Manifests as exorcist as well
Act 28:1-10 (Malta’s event)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preceded by prayer (8) - Manifestation of God’s power (9) - Result: honor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Believe many divine beings (verse 4 and 6)

Chapter Five: From Jerusalem to Rome: The Geographical Aspect

The statistical data of geography and characters in the narrative is impressive in the book of Acts. Within only twenty eight chapters, Acts “mentions over thirty three countries, more than fifty towns or cities, numerous islands, and nearly one hundred persons.”¹ It is entirely unclear whether Luke employed a map to collect this considerable data. Moreover the accuracy of this data is also disputed.²

In Acts, the mission to spread the gospel is significant³ in four ways: First, it is the mission of the true God (Jesus and the Holy Spirit are included) through believers, although Peter and Paul are narrated the most. Second, the message of the mission is of utmost importance with continual references to the word of God or the word of the Lord. Third, to whom the mission is addressed is another critical issue with the inclusion of gentiles likely the intention not only of Luke but of God as well. Finally, the outreach of the mission is not neglected since Luke places it prominently in Acts 1:8.

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 211.

² Martin Hengel, “The Geography,” in Bauckham, 76, contends that “Luke is basically as free over geographical details as we find him in connection with Palestine” though he does not indicate any map Luke may have used. See also pp. 77-8 on a more thorough discussion on the geographical aspect in Acts.

³ See Peter G. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” in Marshall, 192-214, who seems to miss the significance of the outreach of the mission.

The result of such an important mission is the impressive acceptance of the gospel by every geographical area where it is preached.⁴ Therefore, geography is significant in it fulfills of Jesus' commandment to bear witness "until the end of the earth."⁵ The acceptance of the gospel is also important to the apologetic purposes of Acts so that magic and the opposition of the Jews are overcome by the gospel. Specifically to magic, in almost every crucial place where the gospel is spread magic as an adversary of God, pokes up its head. This observation affirms the domination of magic throughout the Roman territories. In this chapter we will examine how the geographical areas where magic is encountered call attention to the spread of the gospel throughout the world fulfill Jesus' commission in Acts 1:8. There are five distinctive regions where the confrontation between God's power and magic occurs. The first area is Samaria which is the broader Palestine region. This region is significant since it is explicitly mentioned in Acts 1:8 that the gospel will reach Samaria. The second region is Cyprus, the Mediterranean island in southern Asia Minor which capital city is Paphos, a city under a senator administration. The third region is the province of Asia, specifically Ephesus a strategic major city of Asia Minor which is under Roman governance. The fourth region is Europe as represented by Philippi, part of the province of Macedonia. The fifth region is the island of Malta which is the closest place to Italy, the center of the Roman Empire. It is likely that Paul in his missionary journey crosses all these five boundaries to confront and overcome magic that the gospel can spread successfully afterwards.

⁴ See Brian S. Rosner, "The Progress of the Word." in Marshall, 221-3.

⁵ See Martin Hengel, "The Geography," in Bauckham, 64-5.

Samaria: The broader area of Palestine

The reference to Samaria is consistently described as a region or district and never a city name.⁶ How many villages are found in Samaria is not clearly enumerated in Acts, though several cities such as Sebaste, Shechem, Sychar and Gitta, the birthplace of Simon, are certainly part of the region of Samaria. Since the primary concern of Luke is the mission of the gospel, such details of this district such as population, its significant to Roman authorities or to Christianity, and the physical terrain is totally absent from Luke's episode. Nevertheless, Samaria is significant not only in contrast to the Jews who refuse to accept the gospel,⁷ but also to highlight the inclusion of Samaria as the uniting of a divided Israel.⁸ Therefore, our main concern will be with what Luke intended his readers to comprehend.

Just as Luke is familiar with the enmity between Samaritans and the Jews,⁹ so, it is likely that he sees Samaria as the center of the "northern" kingdom deported from the one kingdom of Israel. Once this "northern" kingdom is established, the center of the religious worship is located on Mount Gerizim instead of Jerusalem and the enmity between Jews and Samaritans intensifies.¹⁰ The people of Samaria are then no longer considered as true Israel, but as outsiders, even gentiles.¹¹ On the one hand, the

⁶ See Martin Hengel, "The Geography," in Bauckham, 68.

⁷ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 135; also Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 397.

⁸ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111.

⁹ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111.

¹⁰ See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 107.

¹¹ See Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 135-6.

Samaritans claim themselves to be the true Israel. On the other hand, the syncretism in Samaria distinguishes the Samaritans being the true Israel according to the Jews.¹²

An evidence of the syncretism is almost certainly the pervasion of magic. As the Greco-Roman was dominated by magic, so also was Samaria. The territory of Samaria which is located in the eastern Roman Empire strongly suggests that Samaria may be pervaded even before the six century BC and the Assyrian annexation. The presence of many demotic magical papyri found in the Greco-Roman period is evidence to the pervasion of magic in the territory which included Samaria. Since this is not Luke concern, he does not offer the reader any hints about the significant of magic in Samaria. However, the lengthy account of magic in Samaria can lead to the conjecture that magic also vastly dominated Samaria.¹³ The fact that “all man from the small until the great” proclaim the greatness of Simon confirms the significance of magic throughout Samaria. It is therefore surprising that resistance to the gospel is not found among the people of Samaria since they “paid attention” and were amazed by the magic of Simon and even called him “The great power of god”. As the geography of Samaria is significant to the mission of the gospel so it illustrates the domination of magic.

¹² See Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Books of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 63.

¹³ The phrase “the great power” in Simon’s claim indicates the evidence of magic in Samaria. See for instance Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 283-5; Howard Clark Kee, *The New Testament in Context: Sources and Documents* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1984), 219-22; also PGM IV. 1225-29. This phrase may also refer to “Kore” the goddess whose statue was found in the stadium at Samaria as mentioned by Andre Parrot, *Samaria: The Capital of the Kingdom of Israel*, trans. by S. H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1958), 113-9.

Cyprus: the Mediterranean island, southern Asia Minor

Cyprus is found in the magical episode of Acts 13:4-13. Cyprus is the third-largest island in the Mediterranean with an area about 3,571 square miles.¹⁴ Four districts (Paphos, Salamis, Amathus, and Lapethos) are found in the imperial period and two cities are mentioned in Acts 13, Salamis and Paphos. The island of Cyprus is significant since it was located along important sea routes.¹⁵ The island of Cyprus was annexed by Rome in 57-58 BC became an imperial province in about 27-30 BC.¹⁶ Not long after being an imperial province, in 22 BC Caesar Augustus handed it over to senator administration so that it was governed by a proconsul¹⁷ as confirmed by Acts 13:7. Previously the capital city was Salamis, but when an earth quake ruined the city in 15 BC, the capital city was shifted to Paphos (Nea Paphos).¹⁸ These two cities Salamis and Paphos seem to be the most significant due to their location and commercial function.¹⁹ Jewish influence is significant as evidenced by the fact that there was more than one synagogue in Cyprus and also by the Jewish name of the false prophet Bar-Jesus.

The significance of magic in Cyprus is demonstrated by its influence over the highest ruler of the capital city, the proconsul Sergius Paulus. The name Sergius

¹⁴ See Mark Wilson, "Syria, Cilicia, and Cyprus" in *The World of The New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 498.

¹⁵ See Mark Wilson, "Syria, Cilicia, and Cyprus," in Green, 499.

¹⁶ See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd revised and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 294-5; also Mark Wilson, "Syria, Cilicia, and Cyprus," in Green, 499.

¹⁷ See Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 295.

¹⁸ See Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 395; also Mark Wilson, "Syria, Cilicia, and Cyprus," in Green, 499.

¹⁹ See Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 295; also Mark Wilson, "Syria, Cilicia, and Cyprus," in Green, 499.

Paulus is evident in three inscriptions, the Soloi inscription, the Kythraia inscription and the Tiber inscription which is the most promising in relating the Lucius Sergius Paullus with Proconsul Sergius Paulus in Acts 13.²⁰ It is also postulated from the children of Lucius Sergius Paullus that the whole family was Christianized.²¹ These records reveal several implications: first, the fact that magic influences the upper level of the society such as the proconsul and even the Roman Caesars.²² Second, magic also widely spread geographically from Samaria, the broader area of Palestine to Cyprus. The significance of magic is both geographically wide spread and evident in every level of the society is then obvious. Third, victory of God's word over magic is confirmed by the Christian's faith of the proconsul and his family. It is sensible to conclude that the faith of the whole family of the proconsul in Christianity came after the overcoming of magic by God's power. Fourth, just like in Samaria, in the capital city of Cyprus, magic is also no rival when it confronts to God's power. Jesus' commandment to preach the gospel confronts and overcomes the spread of magic in regions of Asia Minor as well as Palestine.

Ephesus: A major city of Asia Minor

The province of Asia refers to the western part of Turkey which was a Roman province.²³ Historically, the province of Asia from the time of Alexander the Great to Augustus is treated positively by authors although there are many inflections that

²⁰ See Alanna Nobbs, "Cyprus," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting vol.2: The Books of Acts in Its Greco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 282-7.

²¹ The monument of Lucius Sergius Paullus in Pisidia Antioch is erected by his son whose name was also L. Sergius Paullus and his daughter Sergia Paulia, see Alanna Nobbs, "Cyprus," in Gill, 287; also G. L. Cheeseman, "The Family of the Caristani at Antioch in Pisidia," *Journal of Roman Studies* 3 (1913), 252-66.

²² See the discussion in chapter 2 for the involvement of Roman Caesars in obtaining magic.

²³ See Paul Trebilco, "Asia," in Gill, 300-1.

repress this province.²⁴ The province of Asia is massive including Troas, Miletus, Thyatira, Phrygia, Ephesus, and Iconium to Pisidian Antioch.²⁵ This provincial sense of Asia is meant in Acts 19:10, 26-7. Ephesus is a major city in Asia Minor and its location is so strategic that it “was a major center of international trade.”²⁶ Particularly the sea traffic “from the Aegean to the west, The Bosphorus and Dardanelles to the north, from Palestine to the east, and from Egypt to the south all called at Ephesus.”²⁷ Therefore it is reasonable to propose that such an important city attracted many people including the magicians.

The episode of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-20 happen in Ephesus. Magic so vastly dominated the city of Ephesus that the terms “power” and “principalities” are found the most in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians.²⁸ Some of Paul’s astonishing and magic like such as the healing of the sick, the curing of the illness, and the expulsion of evil spirits only by handkerchiefs or aprons are also presented in the episode about Ephesus. The episode of magic in Ephesus in Acts 19:10-20 is narrated before Paul’s journey to Jerusalem which is significant since Paul mentions his expectation to visit Rome with the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. Thus this incident is tied together with the farthestmost fulfilment of Jesus command to preach the gospel until the end of the earth in Acts 1:8.

²⁴ For an insightful discussion on the history and the economy of the province of Asia, see Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 292-302.

²⁵ See Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 301-2; also Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting vol. 5: The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 137-52.

²⁶ Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 308.

²⁷ Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 308.

²⁸ See Arnold in *Power and Magic*, who examines the relationship of power and magic particularly in Ephesus. See also for instance Ephesians 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12 in the Revised Standard Version.

The City of Ephesus

Although there are several periods of infliction before the reign of Augustus, during his reign Ephesus “experienced tremendous growth and participated fully in the general prosperity which resulted from the Pax Romana.”²⁹ The wealth and the tremendous growth of this strategic city of Ephesus since the era of Augustus can be identified by the buildings within the city and the witness of several ancient figures concerning the city’s growth. Moreover, its influence as a religious center also emerges substantially as exhibited in several religious temples dedicated to the gods of Ephesians. Several indications of the wealth and the growth of the city Ephesus that express her greatness are such as “the temple of Artemis the main God in Ephesus, the Magnesian gate, the Heroon, the Upper Agora, the temple of Dea Roman and Divus Iulius, the temple of Isis and Augustus, the monument of Pollio, the Octagon, the Tetragonos Agora, the Theatre, the Temple of Apollo, the Stadium and the Koressian Gate.”³⁰ With the city located on many significant land and sea traffics, the greatness of Ephesus is even more enormous.³¹ The realm of magical powers also dominates and influences not only the pagan cult but also the church in Ephesus as evident in the Epistle to the Ephesians.³²

The population of Ephesus is estimated at about 200,000-250,000 inhabitants included the Jews.³³ With such number Ephesus is probably “the third largest city in

²⁹ Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 305.

³⁰ See Guy Maclean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesus: Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (London: Routledge, 1991), 86-107, 128-35; also Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 307.

³¹ See Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 308.

³² See Ephesians 1:19-22; 2:2, 12; 3:7-10; 4:11-15, 17-19, 31; 5:5-6, 11-13; 6:11-12.

³³ See Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus* (New Rochelle: Caratzas Brothers, 1979), 54; see also R. E. Oster, “Ephesus and Ephesians,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), 301. Bruce

the Empire after Rome and Alexandria”³⁴ As a city of important land and sea traffics, Ephesus is actually the center of where people from all over this Roman province may have met. Therefore, the spread of the gospel could happen very fast. Once the gospel had reached Ephesus, the whole province of Asia might have heard quickly the good news. This explicates the spread of what had happened to the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:17-19.

If Ephesus is so important to the mission of the gospel, it is also a center of magic. Even before the gospel reached Ephesus, these magicians had influence in this great city with their magical powers. The calling of the seven sons of Sceva to come to the evil possessed man evidences the impressive influence of magic in Ephesus.

Beyond the record in Acts, the domination of magic is evident in the *Ephesia Grammata*, the “Ephesian Letters,” which “constitute written magical spells and are well attested in the literature.”³⁵ These letters “seem to be laden with apotropaic power, that is, in the warding off of evil demons.”³⁶ Still, the number of evidence³⁷ may increase if the overlap of magic and religion is highlighted. Therefore, it is legitimate to conclude that in Acts, the geographical aspect is extremely important for magic and as also for the mission of Christianity. Again, wherever the gospel is preached there was already magic to impress the people and at the same time pervert the people from coming to the word of God. Just like in the previous geographical

in *The Acts of The Apostles*, 398-9 mentions a great number of Jews and their privileges granted by Caesar’s lieutenant, Dolabella.

³⁴ See Paul Trebilco, “Asia,” in Gill, 307.

³⁵ See Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 15.

³⁶ See Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 15; for a more discussion on this “Ephesian Letters” see also pp. 16-7.

³⁷ Indeed, the discovery of the Greek Magical Papyri which is the written magic, although most of those are not the document of the first century BC is very crucial in providing the evidence of magic practices.

area, here magic has to be overcome through confrontation so that the gospel may then spread unimpededly.

Philippi: Part of Macedonia (Europe)

Philippi is a city within the province of Macedonia. There are four districts in Macedonia,³⁸ and Philippi is located in “the eastern (first) district of the province.”³⁹ Until 360 B.C. the original name of Philippi was Crenides but was re-founded by Phillip II of Macedon in 356 B.C. who named the city after himself.⁴⁰ The province of Macedonia is significant due to its location where the Via Egnatia (the link between the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire with the Rome itself) ran and Philippi is strategic because its location is on this very important artery.⁴¹ As a Roman colony the privileges of Philippi included the rights of the *ius italicum*, so that it was legally and could be characterized as makes this Philippi is “Rome in microcosm.”⁴² With such a privilege, one can easily see the connections between Philippi and Rome in almost every aspect of life.

As the city of Philippi is significant to the Roman Empire, so it is significant to the influence of magic. A range of cults are present in Macedonia with the primary cult being the worship of the Emperor.⁴³ The most intriguing in relation to magic is

³⁸ The four districts originally are divided by Aemilius Paullus, those are Amphipolis, Thessalonike, Pella, and Pelagonia. See David W. J. Gill “Macedonia” in Gill, 404-6. The capital city of the province of Macedonia is Thessalonike.

³⁹ See David W.J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in Gill, 411.

⁴⁰ See Bruce, *The Acts of The Apostles*, 357; also David W.J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in Gill, 411.

⁴¹ See David W.J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in Gill, 397.

⁴² See Witherington III, *The Acts of The Apostles*, 488, who also provided several implications of this *ius italicum*; Bruce, *The Acts of The Apostles*, 357; also David W.J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in Gill, 411-2.

⁴³ See David W.J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in Gill, 408.

the presence of the oriental cults, particularly the Egyptian cults such as Serapis and Isis.⁴⁴ As both Serapis and Isis are found significantly in the magical incantations, the presence of magic is indisputable. Just like the oriental cults are present in Philippi, thus it is sensible to understand the presence of the magical practitioners as evident in the slave girl who bears the spirit of Python in Acts 16:12-19. The evidence of the cults and consequently the magic reveal the geographical spread of magic also throughout Europe. The presence of magic in Philippi ensures the domination of magic geographically throughout the Roman Empire. Therefore, it is no surprise that everywhere where the gospel is proclaimed, magic is also there to pervert the spread of the word of God. Therefore magic has to be eradicated prior to the unimpeded spread of the gospel.

Malta, Italy: the center of Roman Empire

Malta is actually an island as one approaches Italy in the Mediterranean Sea. The reference of the inhabitants as “βαρβαροι” (foreigners)⁴⁵ in Acts 28: 2 is evidence to the fact that the mission to the gentiles is emphasized. There are several indications that this land is important to the narrative. First, the term “βαρβαροι” (foreigners) clearly signifies that the inhabitants are completely gentiles and Luke emphasizes the mission to the gentiles. This is the only place Luke-Acts but here where the Jews are unidentified. Second, ships regularly visit this island as in Acts 28:11 indicate that the sea traffic is significant. Third, Luke mentions the existence of a “πρωτος” (chief official),⁴⁶ as a representative of the Roman government on this island. But magical

⁴⁴ See David W.J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in Gill, 408-9, 412, who mentioned that more than 140 reliefs connected to the Egyptian gods such as Serapis and Isis are found.

⁴⁵ See BAGD, 133.

⁴⁶ See BAGD, 726.

superstitions also had visited this island. As discussed in chapter 2 the interplay of magic and religion is presumed in this passage. Although very few reports are available, we certainly can assume the dominance of magic in their religious beliefs. It is likely that wherever religion is found magic also competes and cooperates with it. If the island of Malta is important for religion, it is also for magic. Finally, Malta's close proximity to Rome indicates the gospel encountered magic also as it approached Italy and the capital of the immense empire. And so this encounter as Paul approaches Rome ends the accounts of magic in the Book of Acts.

"The End of the Earth"

If the gospel and God's power could reach Malta which in Acts, is the closest island to Rome, then Rome as well was filled with magic. Moreover, if the witness to the gospel is until the ends of the earth, it is likely that the confrontation with magic will occur until the ends of the earth as well. The crucial question is what is the meaning of "the end of the earth" for Luke? Is it Rome? The understanding of the end of the earth may be crucial to the application of the understanding of magic in our modern era.

The term "the end of the earth" is found in the very outset of Acts 1:8, the commandment Jesus gave to his disciples to be his witnesses from Jerusalem, and Judaea, and Samaria, and until the end of the earth. Many attempts have been done to figure out Luke's perception of "the end of the earth." and the dispute continues.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See for instance Barrett who seems to understand that Rome is likely the reference of the end of the earth, in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 80, though he also contended that "If the Gospel can be preached and the church is established in Rome there is no limit to their possible extension." Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 26-7 also provides several useful data, the most significant is perhaps *Psalms of Solomon 8.15*, other than Acts to support his opinion that Rome is likely the reference. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 65-6, also provides several possibilities such as Ethiopia or Rome or Cornelius, the gentile convert who marks the movement to "the end of the earth", but leaves the readers to ponder

Though Rome seems to be the commonest reference by scholars, two considerations support the possibility of outreach beyond Rome. First, the episode of the Ethiopian eunuch may indicate the end of the earth is more than just Rome. Second, if Luke is familiar with the Septuagint, then, it is plausible if he might be familiar with certain eastern kingdoms all the way to India. It is also probable that the end of the world means more than just Rome so that once Rome is reached there is no more limit to the spread of the gospel.

If there is basically no limit to the places where the gospel could reach, it is also the case with magic. Magic is found everywhere. The significance of the geographical aspect of magic is parallel to the significance of the geographical aspect in the spread of the gospel. If Luke understood that the confrontation with magic will always be found wherever the gospel is preached then implicitly he may have such a view that the geographical aspect is significant in both contrasting magic and in promoting the Christian mission.

the conclusion. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 10-1, though inclines to point to Rome as the end of the earth he still opens for the extension beyond Rome.

Conclusion: The Victory of Christianity over Magic

In chapter 2, the role of magic within Greco-Roman society was discussed. Although there were both positive and negative connotations given to magic in its earliest appearance in Greek culture, by the time of the New Testament magic in the Greco-Roman empire was basically negative with the official authorities attempting to restrain its development.

In the Acts of the Apostles the negative image of magic is confirmed in all the passages dealing with magic. In Acts the negative understanding of magic has to be understood within the apologetic purpose of Acts since Acts is composed to defend the superiority of Christianity. The confrontation between magic and God's power is dispensed in the context of the spread of the Gospel unto the ends of the earth. The many facets of magic and its association with power, the attempt to manipulate God's power and even to make use of the name of Jesus as well as the practice of spirit of divination are carried out to demonstrate the wickedness of evil magic that the gospel confronts.

The lengthiest account of magic involving Simon Magus pitted against Philip the evangelist and Peter and John the apostles demonstrates the spiritual warfare of the gospel against those who seek after magical powers. From the grammatical examination and the exegesis, the wickedness of magic is attested in the character,

motivation, and goals that the practitioners of magic exhibit. Bottom line, magicians are described as those who attempt to obtain and manipulate God's power to personal exaltation and pride.

The widespread use of magic throughout the Roman territories confirms the conjecture that the geography is a significant aspect in Acts. In all the significant cities where the gospel is spread, there also magic is prevalent. Particularly in the great city of Ephesus, a number of influential magic practices are found. In conclusion, no place is out of the reach of the attraction and power of magic. In every new venture of mission the church confronts magic and in the end is victorious because of the power of the gospel. The geographical aspect shows that magic is prevalent in every new territory which Christianity confronts, from Samaria in broader Palestine, the Mediterranean islands, Asia Minor, Europe, and Italy.

Implications

The overall implications of the negative understanding of magic include in the following. First, magic is about power that has to be conquered instead of avoided. Second, the victory over magic can be demonstrated in the context of proclaiming the powerful word of God. Third, the way to vanquish the power of magic is through the power of Jesus' name. Fourth, the Holy Spirit gives the church the insight, discernment, and power needed to recognize and confront the power of magic. Fifth, though the confrontation with magic is inevitable, believers should not purposely seek for confrontation with magic in order to prove the superiority of Christianity. Sixth, the power of magic should not be underestimated by any believer since evil is the real figure behind magic. Seventh, the using of the power of Jesus' name cannot be

superficially imitated, since the power of Jesus' name is closely bound to the identity of believers as Jesus' disciples.

Applications

To personally conquer the power of magic, it demands obedience to the commandment of Jesus to be a witness to the gospel to the ends of the world. The reality that many Christians do not have this awareness to fulfill the commandment in Acts 1:8 is a strong indication to the powerlessness of Christians to deliver people from the power of magic. The magical power contextualizes itself differently in the context of western and eastern culture. In the most general sense magic is understood as powers that lead people away from faith in Christ. Thus, in western culture, the magic of football, basketball, wealth, and even sex lead people away from their faith in the Lord and could be described as having magical power. But, in the eastern culture, the magic of witchcraft, sorcery, voodoo, animism and superstitious legends are evidence of the reality of magic.

For church life, the lack of encouragement to proclaim the gospel may weaken the power of the Church to stand up against the influence of magic. If the mission to spread the gospel is significant and eagerly proclaimed by believers, the church will thrive in its fight against magical practices. The Acts of the Apostles offers the church a vision about the reality of magic and how to confront it. As in the ministries of Philip, Peter, Paul, and many other believers in the first century, we know that the church can again vanquish the evils of magic from our various cultures.

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