

JESUS: MAGICIAN OR MIRACLE WORKER?

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## INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of Jesus' miracles has taken many twists and turns over the last two millennia. As scientific worldviews, social attitudes, and biblical scholarship have changed greatly over this time, so has the understanding of the significance and meaning of Jesus' many acts of healing, exorcism, and other wonders. From the earliest times questions have abounded as to the source of Jesus' miracle-working ability, including the charge that Jesus was a magician. Two questions now loom large in gospel studies today: first, is there a difference between miracle and magic (and if so, what is it)? Secondly, does the evidence support the claim that Jesus was a magician?

After reviewing the relevant literature on the subject, we will first examine the ancient context in which miracle and magic must be interpreted. This will include an examination of the ancient worldviews from which the gospel records emerged, including the Old Testament. Secondly, we will examine contemporary parallels to Jesus which may shed light on how he was perceived. Included will be the Jewish charismatic holy men, the Hellenistic tradition of the "divine man" (θεῖος ἄνθρωπος), and particularly the Greek Magical Papyri.

Once we have examined the distinguishing features of magic and miracle, we will be in a position to determine whether Jesus was a magician. We will explore the gospel miracle stories that appear to include magical elements, and determine whether they

indeed constitute magic. Of special interest will be those stories that include the use of material elements, such as spittle or mud, and those that include physical touch or mention of *power*. Included in this exploration will be an in-depth study of the story of the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:24b-34 // Matthew 9:20-22 // Luke 8:42b-48). We will examine its enigmatic use of “power” (δύναμις), and the seemingly automatic healing of the woman through touch.

CHAPTER 1  
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Gospels themselves indicate that Jesus' opponents questioned the source of his miracle-working power. In response to his healing of the blind and mute demoniac the Pharisees claimed, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (Mark 3:22, TNIV). This accusation by his opponents was evidently intended to suggest that Jesus was in league with Satan and that his powers were diabolical in nature. There is no suggestion that Jesus' methods, techniques, or results distinguished him from other exorcists. However, it is important to note that in the first century exorcism was considered in the repertoire of magicians, and magicians were regularly accused of being demon-possessed.<sup>1</sup> While it is debated whether this particular accusation constituted a charge of practicing magic,<sup>2</sup> by at least the middle of the second century we know that certain opponents of Jesus accused him specifically of being a magician.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Graham N. Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and False Prophet Who Deceived God's People?," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 178.

<sup>2</sup> Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Stanton, 166.

### Ancient Witnesses

If we look outside the biblical witness it becomes evident that by the second and third centuries opponents of the Christian faith were accusing Jesus of being a magician. In his debate with his Jewish adversary Trypho (c. 160 C.E.), Justin Martyr acknowledges that some witnesses to Jesus' miracles had considered it magic: "Yet, though they witnessed these miraculous deeds with their own eyes, they attributed them to magical art; indeed, they dared to call him a magician who misled the people."<sup>4</sup> Clearly then, being a magician carried a negative connotation (they "dared" to say Jesus was) and magic was in keeping with deception.

We know also that by the second century, if not before, the accusation of magic was used by the Jewish leaders in their anti-Christian rhetoric. Jewish tradition attributed Jesus' miracles to his magical power, and he is said to have been executed as a sorcerer.<sup>5</sup> In the Babylonian Talmud an older tradition (first or second century) is referenced claiming that, "On the eve of the Passover Yeshu [Jesus] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy.'"<sup>6</sup> According to Old Testament law, magic and sorcery were prohibited and punishable by death (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10; Exod 22:18). Here again the claim that Jesus was a magician was an accusation by his opponents intended to impugn his reputation, not a commentary upon his techniques or the results of his wonders.

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<sup>4</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 69.7 (Falls)

<sup>5</sup> John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology; Second Series, vol. 28 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1974), 1.

<sup>6</sup> *b. Sanh.* 43a (Epstein)

Celsus, a pagan philosopher writing in the late second century, argues that Jesus was a magician who picked up the tricks of his trade while laboring in Egypt (an argument that twentieth century scholars would revive):

After she [Mary] had been driven out by her husband and while she was wandering about in a disgraceful way she secretly gave birth to Jesus...because he [Jesus] was poor he hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and there tried his hand at certain magical powers on which the Egyptians pride themselves; he returned full of conceit because of these powers, and on account of them gave himself the title of God.<sup>7</sup>

Again, the accusation of magic comes from an opponent of Christianity, but now we have an argument that Jesus' miracles were learned techniques, rather than the result of demonic possession.

Origen's response to Celsus' claim is paradigmatic of the Christian anti-magic apologetic that would develop in the following centuries:

They [Jesus' miracles] might have been comparable if he [Celsus] had first given sufficient proof of the similarity to those who employ trickery. But in fact no sorcerer uses his tricks to call spectators to moral reformation; nor does he educate by the fear of God people who were astounded by what they saw, nor does he attempt to persuade the onlookers to live as men who will be judged by God. Sorcerers do none of those things, since they have neither the ability nor even the will to do so.<sup>8</sup>

Here, Origen asserts that Jesus is distinct from his contemporary magicians in respect to his *motives*. Magicians do not concern themselves with issues of morality and behavior, as Jesus did.

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<sup>7</sup> Origen, *C. Celsum* 1.28 (Chadwick)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.68

## The Enlightenment to World War II

During the Enlightenment, the field of biblical studies underwent enormous changes that would significantly impact how people understood the life and works of Jesus. Prior to the seventeenth century, the Bible was generally considered the ultimate authority in all fields of knowledge. By the end of that century, science, history, and philosophy became fields of their own, freed from biblical authority.<sup>9</sup> This new, rationalistic approach fostered a skeptical attitude toward the veracity of the Bible.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the historical-critical method had emerged, casting doubt upon the “supernatural” elements of the biblical record. According to the historical-critical approach, reality is uniform and universal and one’s experience of reality in the present can provide the objective criteria by which the historicity of past events can be determined.<sup>10</sup> Out of this stream of thinking emerged the “Original Quest of the Historical Jesus,” which sought to recover, using historiographical means, a “historical” Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this trend of thought led to a scholarly disinterest in Jesus’ miraculous activity, which was considered both unhistorical and irrelevant to modern audiences.

At the turn of the twentieth century, as the Original Quest dwindled, a new school of Protestant scholars in Germany emerged which would have enormous influence on biblical studies. Scholars such as Wilhelm Bousset and William Wrede sought to understand the religion of the Old and New Testaments within the context of their

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<sup>9</sup> Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1981), 87-88.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-161.

historical and religious environment (*Sitz im Leben*), including the other religions of their time and region.<sup>12</sup> This school of thought, known as the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* or the “history of religions school,” sought to demonstrate the enormous differences between the ancient and modern worldviews. These differences would have to be understood and applied to the interpretation of the Bible.

The *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and its progeny drew attention to the various parallels between the miracles of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels and the miracles (as well as magic) found in pagan and Jewish sources of the period.<sup>13</sup> Form critics (notably Bultmann and Dibelius, but including later scholars such as Gerd Theissen) then took up and expanded the approach, examining numerous Jewish and pagan parallels to the gospel miracle stories.<sup>14</sup> In these studies, scholars claim that Jesus’ miracles reflect the forms, themes, and motifs found in the pagan and Jewish miracle stories circulating at the time. Notable among the parallel sources used by this school are Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the rabbinic tradition of the holy man, and the Greek Magical Papyri (which we will explore later). While often valuable, these form-critical studies sometimes degenerate into pure formalism, in which the medium (form and structure) becomes the message.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 167-168.

<sup>13</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 1st ed., 3 vols., The Anchor Bible Reference Library, vol. 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 535-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 536.

<sup>15</sup> See Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, ed. John Kenneth Riches, trans. Francis McDonagh, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

While the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* made great contributions to biblical studies and the study of miracle and magic, it was opposed in some degree by both liberal and conservative scholars. Rudolf Bultmann, in his existentialist theology, which dominated biblical studies for decades, dismisses the search for objective, historical knowledge as misleading and “objectifying.”<sup>16</sup> He insists that faith is rather a subjective response to the preached gospel, not an intellectual act dependent upon historical inquiry. Hence, Bultmann rejects miracles outright as objective “proofs” of God’s existence, which are contrary to the necessity of faith for salvation. Furthermore, he claims that miracles and magic are inherently repugnant to the modern man.<sup>17</sup> The study of miracle in the New Testament would remain dormant until after World War II and the emergence of the “New Quest” of the 1950’s and 60’s.

While not as dismissive of the miraculous as their liberal cousins, conservative scholars researching miracle and magic in the twentieth century were hampered by two presuppositions: first, that magic is easily separated from religion and second, that magic is a decadent cultural phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Classicists of this era and conservative New Testament scholars drew distinct lines between religion and magic, portraying the latter

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<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, trans. Schubert Miles Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> "We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament." *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," in *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 1510.

as a vestige of the early stages of religion, or as a corrupt form of religion.<sup>19</sup> Illustrative of this thinking is Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

In his monumental work on the origins of magic and religion, Frazer draws sharp distinctions between religious miracles and magic. Frazer examines the divergent worldviews at the heart of religion and magic, contrasting them at length. Central to the magical understanding are two laws that govern all interactions: the law of similarity and the law of contact (or contagion).<sup>20</sup> Simply, the law of similarity declares that like produces like, a principle at the heart of homeopathic medicine. The law of contact (or contagion) states that two things that were once in contact continue to exert influence upon each other. Both laws constitute the basis of *sympathetic magic*, the ability to influence the world through an invisible ether (e.g. *mana*,<sup>21</sup> invisible energy, unconscious forces).<sup>22</sup> The magician, understanding these sympathetic unions (theoretical magic), can, by use of the use of these principles, automatically effect his or her will (practical magic).

To Frazer, the chief difference between religion and magic lies in how they depict the forces that control the universe. Frazer contends that magic is a primitive form of science, a set of laws based on a (flawed) understanding of cause and effect. Unlike religion, magic is not involved with deities or higher beings who can influence events. Religion, in distinction, is concerned with belief in a higher, conscious being and the desire to please or persuade this being. Yet, because religion involves a higher will, such

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1511.

<sup>20</sup> James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 1st Touchstone: Abridged ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Mana* is a supernatural force or power, believed to reside in a person or sacred object.

<sup>22</sup> Frazer, 13-14.

attempts to persuade are not automatic or based upon techniques (unlike magic). To Frazer, the distinction between magic and religion is clear: “The former involves the direct coercion of natural forces, based on the assumption that like produces like, and that things once together influence each other after they have been separated; the latter is based on the propitiation of the gods by the believer.”<sup>23</sup>

Later in the twentieth century, yet reflecting the same anti-magic stream of thought as Frazer, was Walter Grundmann and his 1964 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* entry for δύναμις. There are several biblical texts that are troublesome for those who wish to clearly delineate biblical miracles from magical activity. One particularly troublesome text is the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:21-43 // Matt 9:18-26 // Luke 8:40-56).<sup>24</sup> With its peculiar use of δύναμις, which behaves in a seemingly automatic fashion, this passage has been used to suggest a magical understanding of Jesus’ healings.

In his article, Grundmann argues strongly for a non-magical understanding of δύναμις in the New Testament. He notes that Luke’s healing descriptions, especially his use of δύναμις, are at first glance in keeping with a magical worldview, but he deemphasizes this point.<sup>25</sup> Like Frazer, he sharply contrasts magic with religion, arguing that one is dealing with impersonal, pervasive, magical forces (*mana*), whereas the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 56-60.

<sup>24</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot, 3 vols., vol. 2 (London: George Woodfall and Son, 1846; reprint, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), 2:314-23.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Grundmann, "Δυναμαι, Δυνατοσ, Δυνατεω, Αδυνατοσ, Αδυνατεω, Δυναμισ, Δυναστεσ, Δυναμοω, Ενδυναμοω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:306, 310, 312.

second is concerned with a personal deity. He focuses instead on the miracle-working word of Jesus, which he contrasts to the techniques or instruments used by magicians. Importantly, he emphasizes that Jesus' religious worldview and motivation, especially his announcement of the kingdom of God, was in stark contrast to the magical worldview of the magicians.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of his compelling arguments, Grundmann's claim that "The NT miracles of Jesus have no connexion with magic, or with magic means and processes, like the majority of miracles outside the NT" is overstated.<sup>27</sup> His view reflects a somewhat uncritical understanding of Jesus' miracles, is a broad generalization, and does not represent the case for many biblical examples. Several miracle stories have undeniable magical overtones, including the use of methods and materials (e.g. mud, spittle, washing),<sup>28</sup> but especially the seemingly *automatic* healing of the woman with the hemorrhage. Grundmann is criticized by later scholars for not acknowledging the materialistic view of divine power evident in the usage of δύνανμις in this passage.<sup>29</sup>

In 1965 the Dutch scholar Hendrik van der Loos, in his immense *The Miracles of Jesus*, continued the tradition of conservative evangelical scholarship. Loos, like Grundmann, is wary of the magical overtones in Jesus' healing miracles, and anything "too reminiscent of 'mana' and those charged with it."<sup>30</sup> For example, Loos portrays

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2:294, 302.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2:302.

<sup>28</sup> The healing of the deaf-mute (Mark 7:32-35); the healing of the blind man (Mark 8:23); the use of mud in healing (John 9:6); the woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:30)

<sup>29</sup> Aune, 1536.

<sup>30</sup> Hendrik van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. W. C. van Unnik et al., trans. T. S. Preston, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. 9 (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1965), 316.

Jesus' use of spittle not as magical, but as condescending to the predominant magical worldview, by which he "enters the mental world of the patient and gains his confidence."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in regard to the use of anointing oil, Loos explains the medicinal benefits of such practice, minimizing any possible magical interpretations. Rather than attributing magical techniques to Jesus, he places Jesus among his religious and medical contemporaries in terms of therapeutic methods.<sup>32</sup>

### **After World War II: The New Quest**

After World War II anthropologists began in varying degrees to treat religion and magic as non-distinguishable phenomena. One of the earliest scholars to assert that miracle and magic were less than clearly distinguishable was John M. Hull. His 1974 *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* is an assessment of Hellenistic magic based primarily on the Greek Magical Papyri. Hull begins his study by correctly noting that there existed an ancient belief that Jesus was a magician, notably among the Gnostics, Celsus, and within the Jewish tradition. He notes that a magical interpretation of the Synoptic miracles is possible and that there was no clear distinction among the ancients between miracle and magic.<sup>33</sup> While Hull does not argue that Jesus was a magician, he contradicts the assertion that there exists a clearly definable difference between magical and religious worldviews.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 311-2, 315.

<sup>33</sup> Hull, xiii, 2-3, 36.

Hull asserts that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between magic and miracle in the ancient world and he often refers to what he calls “miracle-magic.” He outlines some characteristics of what might be considered *pure* miracle and shows that even unarguably magical acts can contain these elements, and vice-versa.<sup>34</sup> For example, although miracle is generally characterized as being independent of ritual, many of Jesus’ (religious) miracles involve the use of prayer (the raising of Lazarus), techniques (the use of spittle or mud), or verbal imperatives (the exorcisms and healings), which can all be considered ritualistic.

Important among Hull’s assertions is that the earlier traditions of Jesus’ miracles were less self-conscious and more freely reported healings and exorcisms that contained magical elements (e.g. the use of spittle, words of power, δύναμις). He maintains that later, in response to accusations that Jesus was a magician, the gospel tradition was purged of magical elements, which is reflected chiefly in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>35</sup> It is by this supposition that Hull portrays Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels as more clearly portraying the earlier understanding of Jesus’ miraculous activities.

In his chapter “Luke: The Tradition Penetrated by Magic,” Hull examines the story of the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:42b-48) from a magical perspective. He asserts that δύναμις “is regarded by Luke as a substance, a *mana*-like charge of divine potency, spiritual in so far as it emanates from the world of spirits, but as actual, as vital as the beings who possess it.”<sup>36</sup> He notes that there is an “impersonal” nature to the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54-57.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 116, 144.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 105.

δύναμις-power insofar as it is transmitted immediately and impersonally.<sup>37</sup> However, he also notes that merely touching Jesus was not sufficient for the transmission of power, but that a deliberate, willful act was necessary. In his discussion on the parallel passage in Matthew (Matt 9:20-22), Hull notes that the author retains the motif of touch (possibly because the author did not associate touch with pagan Hellenistic techniques, but rather with Old Testament themes), but changes the order of events to make it clear that there was no automatic healing.<sup>38</sup>

Chief among works that compare Jesus with magicians is Morton Smith's 1978 *Jesus the Magician*. Smith begins his work with the assertion that in order to understand an issue fully one must explore *both* sides of the debate. Most of his work, however, explores the records of those critical toward Jesus, both during his lifetime (e.g. the Pharisees and Scribes) and in the centuries to follow (e.g. Celsus, Tacitus, Lucian, and Jewish leaders). His primary point of comparison with Jesus is the Greek Magical Papyri and Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.<sup>39</sup>

Smith makes numerous comparisons to demonstrate that Jesus' methods were similar to those of contemporary magicians. Importantly, he effectively demolishes the popular notion among some conservative scholars that the first-century magician was merely "a miracle worker whose wonders are illusory, transient, produced by tricks or by the help of demons controlled by spells, sacrifices, and magical paraphernalia."<sup>40</sup> Smith's work is an important refutation of this simplistic attitude toward magic. He provides

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 1, 75, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 83.

evidence that there were at least a few ancient magicians of that day (e.g. Apollonius) who had significant similarities to Jesus, and that some of Jesus' activity indeed had magical parallels and overtones.

Smith argues that we should expect the gospel authors to minimize or erase any evidence that Jesus was a magician, but emphasize any points of distinction.<sup>41</sup> He therefore minimizes any features of the gospel record that distinguish Jesus from the magicians of his day (e.g. his teaching, his kingdom theology, his emphasis on the necessity of faith) while emphasizing the similarities (e.g. both performed healings and exorcisms). Unlike Hull, who notes that "the records of magic contain nothing like the self-sacrifice of the Gethsemane Christ,"<sup>42</sup> Smith portrays Jesus as exemplifying a first-century Jewish magician and dismisses all distinguishing features as the work of later Christian apologists. Smith asserts that Jesus' contemporaries, both his followers and opponents, viewed him as a magician (suggesting that the Beelzebul controversy, among other things, proves this), but mostly relies on later witnesses to prove his point.<sup>43</sup>

David E. Aune, in his 1980 work, *Magic in Early Christianity*, adopts a sociological approach to the study of Jesus' miracles. Aune acknowledges that many have already articulated the differences between magic and religion (or miracle) and he provides a good outline of their arguments.<sup>44</sup> However, he notes that both magic and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>42</sup> Hull, 145.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 31, 32, 77, 98.

<sup>44</sup> Aune summarizes the distinctions as follows: 1) Magic is manipulative, religion is supplicative, 2) magic is for specific goals, religion is an end in itself, 3) magic focuses on the individual, religion focuses on the group, 4) magic adopts a professional-client relationship, religion a shepherd-flock relationship, 5) magic tends to act impersonally

religion share similar goals, namely, “Providing protection, healing, success and knowledge for magical practitioners and their clients, and harm for their opponents.”<sup>45</sup> Their difference, he argues, lies in the fact of magic’s illegality. He cites M. Mauss; “A magical rite is any rite which does not play a part in organized cults – it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite.”<sup>46</sup>

Aune goes on to develop this sociological approach, adopting a structural-functional definition of magic as,

That form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution...Goals sought within the context of religious deviance are magical when attained through the management of supernatural powers in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed.<sup>47</sup>

Using this structural-functional definition, Aune concludes that the gospel records include characteristics similar to those found in magical accounts of Jesus’ time. Like Smith, Aune bases his comparison primarily upon the Greek Magical Papyri. Although he regards Jesus’ wonderworking as essentially magical in nature, he concludes that sociologically Jesus was not a magician but rather a messianic prophet.<sup>48</sup>

Howard Clark Kee’s 1983 *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* adopts a sociological approach to interpreting the gospel miracles. Kee insists that we must exercise a proper hermeneutic when reading the miracle stories, trying to understand and experience them as the original audiences would

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with little emotion, while religion makes greater use of emotion and evokes awe and worship. Aune, 1512.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1518.

<sup>46</sup> Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972), 24, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Aune, 1515.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1527, 1538-9.

have. He argues that it is not helpful to simply compare the superficial similarities of miracle stories from disparate sources, but that it is necessary to understand the *significance* of the miracle stories to the communities involved.

Kee argues against other scholars that miracle and magic are quite distinguishable. While religion involves communication with beings, magic consists instead of the manipulation of impersonal forces.<sup>49</sup> While most scholars would fault Frazer's work for its oversimplification, Kee defends the central premise of Frazer's argument, namely that "magic and religion are two different modes of the social construction of reality in the attempt to bring order and meaning to personal and social existence."<sup>50</sup> It is this analysis of the *metanarrative* in which the miracles stories exist (in both Christian and pagan contexts) that distinguishes Kee's work from his contemporaries.

Kee points out many important differences between Jesus' miracles and the work of magicians. Chiefly, he roots the miracle tradition in the overarching gospel theme: God's saving work in history. Healing and exorcism are not merely acts of kindness or compassion (to say nothing of mercenary motivations), they reveal the in-breaking kingdom of God, as prophesied in the Old Testament. It is this controlling theme, the defeat of Satan by the in-breaking kingdom of God, *not* particular techniques or methods, that distinguishes Jesus' exorcisms and healings from those of his contemporaries.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 62.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

Kee notes that significant work has been achieved in distinguishing miracle from magic. He cites Lucy Mair:

The efficacy of magic may be thought to depend essentially upon the correct treatment of substances used (includes words spoken over them) independently of assistance from any supernatural being... If resolution of the difficulty is sought through the manipulation of forces, the activity is primarily magical. If aid is sought through communication with beings, then the activity is primarily religious.<sup>52</sup>

While this definition may not hold true for some magical activities that involve spiritual beings (namely magical exorcism), it applies as a general rule. Also, of primary importance in magic is *efficacy* (whether or not a technique works), whereas religion (and thereby miracle) is concerned foremost with morality and relationship with a divine being.<sup>53</sup> Kee acknowledges that some aspects of the gospel healing stories closely resemble magic, especially the seemingly automatic healing of the woman with the hemorrhage. He does not explain this resemblance, but warns against imposing absolute distinctions and rigid categories in the analysis of ancient worldviews.<sup>54</sup> While Kee allows that “there are traces of magic-type thinking in some of the healing stories,” he goes on to assert that “the worldview of the writers of the Gospels and Acts is fundamentally religious rather than magical.”<sup>55</sup>

Gerd Theissen’s 1983 *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* is a structuralist interpretation of the gospel miracle stories. Theissen does not chiefly argue for or against a distinction between miracle and magic, or whether Jesus was a magician

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<sup>52</sup> Lucy Philip Mair, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 225, 229.

<sup>53</sup> Kee, 213.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

or not. His chief aim is to analyze the function and form of these miracle accounts and to study their role within communities. Nevertheless, his observations regarding many of the motifs employed in the miracle stories impact our understanding of Jesus as a miracle worker.

In his study on the motif of *faith*, Theissen notes, “The interaction of faith and miracle can even be regarded as the distinctive feature of the New Testament belief in miracles which places it far above all ancient magic and miracle-seeking.”<sup>56</sup> He contrasts the concept of faith in the ancient world with that in the New Testament. In the former it was an attitude *to* a miraculous event (by those listening to the miracle story), whereas in the latter it is an attitude on the part of the people involved (the principal actors in the story itself) that is *internal* to the miraculous event.<sup>57</sup> The necessity of faith is an important distinction between magic and religious miracles, which other scholars have examined at length.<sup>58</sup> In this light, he sees the story of the woman with the hemorrhage as exemplifying a faith motif which emphasizes the crossing of boundaries (the boundary between an unclean, bleeding woman and a holy man), rather than as a magical transfer of energy. This passage demonstrates “faith as a crossing of the boundary created by the barriers of legitimacy” rather than “magical faith.”<sup>59</sup>

Theissen argues that “most rituals and religion contain magical features,” but that three features distinguish ancient magic from religion: cosmopolitanism, individualism,

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<sup>56</sup> Theissen, 130.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>58</sup> See Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, ed. G. N. Stanton, Monograph Series; Society for New Testament Studies, vol. 64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>59</sup> Theissen, 134.

and optimism. In magic, “Anything that has power is recognized,” regardless of its origin. Practitioners often included ritual elements from divergent origins. Secondly, because power is dissociated from official religion and religious communities, magic is individualizing. Finally, magic was optimistic in contrast to the predominately apocalyptic religious beliefs of the time. According to these criteria, Jesus and his disciples were not magicians, but were instead “charismatic miracle-workers.”<sup>60</sup>

In his 1994 *A Marginal Jew Volume 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, John P. Meier asserts that there is a substantive difference between magic and miracle. The ancient audience made a clear distinction between the two, regarding miracle as positive and magic as negative. Rather than claiming that there are no clear distinctions between miracle and magic (e.g. Hull, Smith, Aune), or that there are no similarities (e.g. Frazer, Grundmann, Loos), Meier argues for a magic-miracle continuum with an “ideal type” of magic on one end and an “ideal type” of miracle on the other (and a gray area of magical-miracle in-between). Meier then goes on to show that the gospel miracles tend to fit the ideal type of *miracle*, while the Greek Magical Papyri tend to fit the ideal type of *magic*.<sup>61</sup>

Meier dismisses those who allege that magic and miracle are basically the same thing and systematically demonstrates their differences, using the Greek Magical Papyri and a gospel miracle (the raising of Lazarus) as points of comparison.<sup>62</sup> Summarizing Meier’s distinctions, the characteristic typology of miracle includes: 1) a personal

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 238-43.

<sup>61</sup> Meier, 539, 541, 547.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 541-52.

relationship with a deity, 2) a worshipper or disciple rather than a business client who receives the benefit, 3) brief commands, rather than lengthy incantations, 4) a response to an urgent request, instead of coercion, 5) the gospel context of obedience to the Father, 6) symbolism—the kingdom of God, and 7) a non-punitive action. On the other hand, the characteristic typology of magic includes: 1) manipulation or coercion of a deity, 2) benefits that are often petty or selfish, 3) requests for magic as discrete cases, without overarching context, 4) no circle of followers or disciples, 5) multiplication of names and nonsense syllables in magic spells, and 6) a secret, esoteric nature.<sup>63</sup> Insofar as a particular wondrous event demonstrates one set of properties over another, it is definable as magic or miracle (or in-between).

Graham H. Twelftree's 1999 *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* is a thorough overview of the gospel miracles. Of particular relevance to our study is his discussion of Luke's redactional tendencies and distinctive emphases. In the story of the healing of the hemorrhaging woman in Luke, Twelftree acknowledges that the δύναμις-power seems to work impersonally at times, but he does not accept a magical interpretation. Instead, he emphasizes the contributing role of faith in the healing and the fact that the δύναμις is connected with God, not an intermediate force (as in the magical worldview). He argues that the δύναμις-power is to be associated here with the Holy Spirit, bestowed upon Jesus by God. Twelftree maintains that Luke's use of δύναμις in this story, while admittedly carrying some magical connotations, originates in the biblical worldview, not the Greco-Roman magical worldview of that day. In addition, Twelftree emphasizes that in

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 548-50.

Matthew's parallel account we are clearly shown that it is not the touching of Jesus' clothes that effects the miracle, but the faith that precedes it.<sup>64</sup> Twelftree, like Grundmann, appears uncomfortable with the magical overtones particular to the Markan and Lukan versions of this miracle, which suggest an automatic and therefore magical healing.

The story of the healing of the deaf-mute (Mark 7:32-37) is sometimes used to demonstrate the magical nature of Jesus' healings, but Twelftree argues against this interpretation. He contends that *Ephphatha* was not a "secret word" (as suggested by Hull),<sup>65</sup> but a known Semitic word, which Mark then translates for the reader.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, Twelftree does not go on to discuss Jesus' other peculiar healing techniques in this story, such as putting his fingers in the man's ears, spitting, or touching the man's tongue. A further explanation of these seemingly magical (or at least quasi-medical) methods would help counter the claims that Jesus employed magical techniques.

Clearly, the debate as to whether there is a true distinction between magic and miracle, or whether Jesus was or was not a magician, is not settled. There appears no consensus on the issue and scholars continue to debate at great length the proper understanding of Jesus' miracle-working activity. In order to establish our thesis, that Jesus is correctly identified as a miracle-worker in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, we must first explore more fully the history and background of magic in first-century Palestine. Following this, we will examine the gospel records of Jesus' miracles

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<sup>64</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical & Theological Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 75, 119, 171-2.

<sup>65</sup> Hull, 82-86.

<sup>66</sup> Twelftree, 81.

and demonstrate how they fit the pattern of religious miracle-worker rather than magician.

## CHAPTER 2

### MAGIC IN LATE ANTIQUITY

In order to determine if there is a substantive difference between magic and miracle and whether or not Jesus fits the type of a first-century magician, we must examine carefully the characteristics of both phenomena in that setting. As John Hull states,

In view of the fact that it is in the healing stories of the gospels that magical traces are said to appear, it would be worthwhile, in order to understand the miracles of Jesus, to consider the possibility that *the magical tradition of miracle as well as the eschatological tradition of miracle has been influential in creating the form of the synoptic tradition.*<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, we will concern ourselves primarily with the magical and eschatological (religious) miracle traditions leading up to and during the late first century C.E. By examining this background material we can better determine if the gospel narratives were influenced by these traditions.

#### **The Origins of Magic**

It is believed that the word *magic* is derived from the name of one of the six tribes of the Medes, the *magoi* or *magi*. The *magi* (plural for *magus*, the Persian word for

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<sup>67</sup> Hull, 48. (emphasis mine)

*priest*) were known primarily as diviners, exorcists, and astrologers.<sup>68</sup> These magi were most likely priestly members of the Zoroaster cult. Zoroaster was a prophet of ancient Persia and the founder of Zoroastrianism. This dualistic religion viewed the world as divided into spheres controlled by the powers of light and darkness. Through astrology and magic, the magi were able to gain control over the human and celestial worlds.<sup>69</sup> The term *magus* developed a negative connotation among Greco-Roman writers beginning as early as the fifth century B.C.E., as they became associated with the suspicious practices of divination and healing.<sup>70</sup>

### Egypt

Along with Persia, Egypt is prominent in the origins of magic. Egypt was often cited as the source of magic (especially black magic) by other cultures.<sup>71</sup> To some degree this can be attributed to the universal practice of scapegoating foreigners for everything mysterious and evil.<sup>72</sup> However, there is some evidence that Egypt was in actuality an important source for magical knowledge and practice. Many Greek thinkers in antiquity were assumed to have gone to Egypt to learn the secret arts of the Egyptian priests.<sup>73</sup> For

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, ed. G. N. Stanton, Monograph Series; Society for New Testament Studies, vol. 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 99.

<sup>70</sup> Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, ed. Deborah Sawyer and John Sawyer, Religion in the First Christian Centuries (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Wendy Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 80.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Cavendish, *A History of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), 12.

example, Pythagoras is said to have learned the magic of the Magi and Chaldeans during his trips to Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India.<sup>74</sup>

### Magic in the Old Testament

The Old Testament concept closest to what we are referring to as *magic* is related by the Hebrew root כּשַׁף, from which the words translated as *sorcerer* or *sorcery* stem. It comes from the root meaning *to cut*, and probably refers to herbs cut for the making of charms and spells.<sup>75</sup> The first biblical mention of sorcerers or sorcery is in Exodus, and not surprisingly is associated with Egypt: “Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts” (Exod 7:11).<sup>76</sup>

Of all the biblical words related to magic or magical powers, כּשַׁף is the most negatively tinged. Every Old Testament text that refers to כּשַׁף does so in a way that strongly condemns the practice and the practitioner.<sup>77</sup> Characteristic of these condemnations is, “Do not allow a sorceress to live” (Exod 22:18) and, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead” (Deut 18:10-11). Particularly striking is the reference to sorcery in Ezekiel:

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<sup>74</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 101.

<sup>75</sup> K. A. Kitchen, "Magic and Sorcery," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 713.

<sup>76</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the NIV.

<sup>77</sup> Janowitz, 21.

“Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths for their heads in order to ensnare people. Will you ensnare the lives of my people but preserve your own?... Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds. I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD.” (13:18, 20-21)

The method of sorcery here suggests that ritual magic was employed that included symbolically binding the victim (with charms and knots) in order to harm.<sup>78</sup>

Another Hebrew word related to the concept of magic, *חֲרָטָם*, has a slightly more benign connotation and refers specifically to Pharaoh’s wonder-workers in Genesis and Exodus. It is usually translated *magician* or *soothsayer-priest*. The difference between *כַּשְׂף* and *חֲרָטָם* is that the former word relates to the working of witchcraft or sorcery, while the latter word pertains more to one of a priestly order who interprets dreams. However, it is evident that Pharaoh’s “magicians” (*הַחֲרָטָמִים*) also work magical wonders, such as turning the Nile to blood, or making frogs come out of the river (Exod 7:21-22, 8:7-8). There are no specific condemnations of the *הַחֲרָטָמִים*, only the repeated demonstration that their powers were inferior to those of Moses (e.g. Exod 8:17-18).

Two other related Hebrew roots are *נחש* and *ענן*, which both refer to giving omens, interpreting signs, or soothsaying (sometimes incorrectly translated *sorcery* by the NIV). *ענן* here means literally, “One who interprets the clouds.” Among Old Testament characters, we know that Joseph is able to interpret dreams (Gen 40:8-22). The interpretation of dreams is not necessarily prohibited, and the ability to do so is in fact

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<sup>78</sup> David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religion* (Eastbourne: MARC, 1988), 158.

attributed to God in places (Num 12:6; Dan 1:17). In other instances the interpretation of dreams appears to have a negative association (Deut 13:1-5; Jer 23:27, 32, 27:9, 29:8). While Joseph claims to practice *נחש* (divination) when he divines the presence of the “stolen” cup (Gen 44:15), it is clear that his knowledge of the missing item is not related to divination at all (see Gen 44:2). Divination, interpreting omens, and soothsaying are all expressly forbidden in the Old Testament: “You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying” (Lev 19:26, NAS).

### Healing in the Old Testament

In contrast to the prohibitions regarding sorcery, the Old Testament regards God as a healer and healing powers originate from him. During their Egyptian captivity God tells Israel, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am *the LORD, who heals you* (יְהוָה רֹפֵאֲךָ)” (Exod 15:26, emphasis mine). Good health was a result of covenant faithfulness, but illness resulted from sin and rebellion. According to Keil and Delitzsch, it is clear that “Jehovah made himself known to the people of Israel as their Physician.”<sup>79</sup>

Certain prophetic figures in the Old Testament are also portrayed as possessing the ability to heal. The Hebrew words related to healing stem from the root *רפא*, which conveys the idea of making something *whole*, whether a person or object. When referring

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<sup>79</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin, 10 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:59.

to people, it always relates to physical healing. There are numerous examples of physical healing in the Old Testament: Abraham's successful prayer for the healing of Abimelech (Gen 20:17), or instances in which God heals directly (2 Chr 30:20; Isa 6:10), to name a few. We also find examples of individuals who appear to possess healing abilities, as this story of Elisha demonstrates:

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. (2 Kgs 4:32-35)

Notable in this example is that in addition to prayer, Elisha performs an unusual ritual, stretching himself out upon the boy two times. In another case, Elisha directs Naaman, who was afflicted by leprosy, to wash seven times in the Jordan. Upon following these orders, Naaman is cured of his skin disease (2 Kgs 5:1-14). Unlike the previous example, there is no suggestion here of any prayer, ritual, or procedure on Elisha's part.

## **Magic and Miracle in the First Century**

### The Rise of Magic

Two important phenomena were critical in the rise of magic in the first-century Greco-Roman world: the decline of traditional religion and a nihilism spawned by Greek rationalism and agnosticism. Richard Cavendish describes the impact:

The Roman world experienced the same dissatisfaction with both rationalism and orthodox religion which is familiar in the modern West. Greek rationalists and agnostic philosophies created anxiety by turning the gods into abstract and distant

figures, remote from earthly life and its problems. They cast doubt on whether the gods existed at all and indeed whether any proposition of human importance could be established with confidence.<sup>80</sup>

The worldview of earlier peoples, in which the gods interacted directly with human beings, was replaced by a new vision of the earth as a negative and confining place. The heavens in which the gods resided were a place of order and stability, but the earth was a place of chaos and change. The physical human body came to be equated with evil forces. Also, no longer were the gods immediately available and present, but “the atmosphere between the far-off eternal realm and the world of human existence was like a vast no-man’s land in which all sorts of supernatural beings flourished.”<sup>81</sup>

The dynamic and uncertain world of the first centuries heightened the anxiety and uneasiness experienced by many. Progress in science undermined traditional religious assumptions about the universe, and urbanization separated many people from the settled rhythms of life associated with the countryside. Increased mobility and a weakening of family structure contributed to a sense of rootlessness—something like an identity crisis in which people were uncertain of who they were and where they belonged.<sup>82</sup>

In the midst of these uncertainties there arose an increased interest in the occult and other non-traditional spiritualities. People sought a more direct and personal relationship with the divine than the traditional religions could offer. The old gods seemed to be deaf and blind, not caring about humanity any longer and unable to provide stability and order. This hunger for a new spirituality was met with new religions, cults,

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<sup>80</sup> Cavendish, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Janowitz, 31, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Cavendish, 10.

and men of power—sages, prophets, healers, and magicians.<sup>83</sup> In this way there came a shift in power and status from traditional religion (the official state cult) to the charismatic individual who claimed a secret knowledge and divine power.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the old divinities, these godlike humans were present and available to meet the needs of their followers.

### Greco-Roman Magic and Miracle

The Hellenistic period is one in which interest in magic thrived and flourished.<sup>85</sup> Pliny writes, “There is indeed nobody who does not fear to be spell-bound by imprecations” (*defigi quidem diris deprecationibus nemo non metuit*).<sup>86</sup> Greek magic at the time was a congealing of magical and religious elements from a wide variety of sources, including Egyptian, Persian, and Hebrew.<sup>87</sup> For example, the name of the Hebrew god might be used in a spell originating in Egypt.

As well as the clearly magical practices that came to be recorded in the Greek Magical Papyri, there also purportedly existed a tradition of the miracle-working “divine man” (θεῖος ἀνὴρ), who embodied traits characteristic of both religious miracle-workers and magicians.<sup>88</sup> In recent New Testament scholarship, there has been an increasing

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 10, 16.

<sup>84</sup> Janowitz, 31.

<sup>85</sup> Hull, 49.

<sup>86</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28.4 (Jones)

<sup>87</sup> Hull, 27.

<sup>88</sup> There is considerable scholarly doubt as to the existence of these “divine men.” See Twelftree, 93, 334.; Meier, 595-601.

tendency to draw comparisons between Jesus and these figures.<sup>89</sup> According to Twelftree, the θεῖος ἀνὴρ was a “legendary or historical genius, a religio-philosophical hero, a human-become-*superman* (*Übermensch*) through being indwelt by the divine.”<sup>90</sup> We will say more about these *divine men* later.

There is much evidence that magic was employed and practiced by people from disparate backgrounds and socio-economic levels,<sup>91</sup> although there is some evidence that it was more prevalent among the poor and uneducated.<sup>92</sup> As David Aune has noted, “Magic was frequently resorted to as an alternate, though socially deviant, way of dealing with unanticipated needs and crises.”<sup>93</sup> As prevalent as magic was during this period, it was officially prohibited and regarded as antisocial and dangerous.

Magic was regarded as illegal and deviant behavior by the Greco-Roman society at large, being associated with foreigners and other subversives. Today we may associate magicians with illusionists, entertainers, or charlatans. In the ancient world, however, there was no doubt that magic was *real* or that it *worked*. Magic was opposed not because it was considered fraudulent, but because it was thought to produce its results by means of evil powers.<sup>94</sup>

Labeling someone a magician was an effective way to marginalize and discredit them. Associating a person with evil and suspicious practices, one could cast doubt upon

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<sup>89</sup> Aune, 1543-4.

<sup>90</sup> Twelftree, 93.

<sup>91</sup> Cotter, 176.

<sup>92</sup> Aune, 1521.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Janowitz, 3.

their beliefs and moral character.<sup>95</sup> By the time of Apuleius in the second century C.E. (and probably long before), practicing magic was a capital offense in the Roman provinces. These legal prohibitions of magic further illustrate its widespread practice, as well as the negative perceptions concerning it among the ruling classes.<sup>96</sup> It is this illicit characteristic that led David Aune to his structural-functionalist definition of magic: “Magic is defined as that form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution.”<sup>97</sup>

The goals of Greco-Roman magic can be summarized into four major categories: 1) protective/benevolent magic, 2) malevolent/cursing magic, 3) love magic, and 4) magical divination.<sup>98</sup> Our chief sources for Greco-Roman magic are the Greek Magical Papyri, which we will turn to next.

### The Greek Magical Papyri

The Greek Magical Papyri (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* or PGM) are a corpus of papyri that derive from Greco-Roman Egypt dating from the second century B.C.E. to the fifth century C.E. The PGM cite various magical operations that have been compared to

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<sup>95</sup> Susan R. Garrett, "Light on a Dark Subject and Vice Versa: Magic and Magicians in the New Testament," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 151.

<sup>96</sup> Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century*, Patristic Monograph Series, vol. 10 (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 69-70.

<sup>97</sup> Aune, 1515.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 1517-18.

Jesus' miracles.<sup>99</sup> However, nearly all the evidence from the PGM used by form critics is questionable in its suitability for comparison because the existing form of the text dates from the mid- to late second or third century.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, there is the possibility that some of the original sources date back to or before the first century, so it is a worthwhile analysis.<sup>101</sup>

A famous example in the Paris Magical Papyrus is demonstrative: a "tested charm of Pibechis for those possessed by daimons" (PGM IV, lines 3007-85) begins:

Take oil of unripe olives with the herb mastigia and the fruit pulp of the lotus, and boil them with colorless marjoram / while saying, "IŌĒL ŌS SARTHIŌMI EMŌRI THEŌCHIPSOITH SITHEMEŌCH SŌTHĒ IŌĒ MIMIPSŌTHIŌŌPH PHERSŌTHI AEĒIOYŌ IŌĒ EŌ CHARI PHTHA, come out from NN" (add the usual.) The phylactery: On a tin lamella write / "IAĒO ABRAŌTH IŌCH PHTHA MESENPSIN IAŌ PHEŌCH IAĒŌ CHARISOK," and hang it on the patient. It is terrifying to every daimon, a thing he fears. After placing [the patient] opposite [to you], conjure. This is the conjuration: "I conjure you by the god of the Hebrews, / Jesus, IABA IAĒ ABRAŌTH AIA THOTH ELE ELŌ AĒŌ EOY IIIBAECH ABARMAS IABARAOU ABELBEL LŌNA ABRA MAROIA BRAKIŌN, who appears in fire, who is in the midst of land, snow, and fog, TANNĒTIS; let your / angel, the implacable, descend and let him assign the daimon flying around this form, which god formed in his holy paradise, because I pray to the holy god, [calling] upon AMMŌN IPSENTANCHŌ (formula)..."<sup>102</sup>

The magician then goes on to recite garbled Old Testament stories, Jewish traditions, and Egyptian words. While this particular spell is extreme in its mixing together of various religious elements, nearly all of the PGM demonstrate this characteristic of strange recipes, long chains of divine names, and strings of nonsense syllables.<sup>103</sup> A magical formula we see here, which is used extensively in the papyri, is the repetition of foreign

<sup>99</sup> See Smith.

<sup>100</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 65.

<sup>101</sup> Hull, 20.

<sup>102</sup> PGM IV.3007-3027 (Betz)

<sup>103</sup> Meier, 545.

or meaningless words. The idea, originating in Egypt, is that these words of power, including the names of foreign gods, have power in themselves.<sup>104</sup>

The *Thaumaturge* or Θεῖος Ἄνθρωπος

*Apollonius of Tyana*

The charismatic teacher and purported miracle-worker Apollonius lived in the first century C.E. He was born in Tyana, in the southern part of what is now Turkey. He is thought to have been an adherent to the philosophy known as neo-Pythagoreanism. Although we have the lengthy *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* written by Philostratus in the early third century C.E., we know little for sure about this figure. Even the *Life* is highly suspect in regards to its historicity.<sup>105</sup> For example, interwoven with the story of Apollonius' travels are accounts of dragons.<sup>106</sup> Notable among Apollonius' miracles is the following account:

Apollonius also wrought this miracle at Rome: A marriageable maiden had died, to all appearances, and her betrothed was following her bier, lamenting their uncompleted nuptials, as is the custom, and all the city was mourning with him, for the girl was of consular family. Apollonius happening upon this mournful sight, said:

“Set down the bier, and I will put an end to your tears for the maiden!”...by merely touching the body, and murmuring a few words over her, he woke the girl from her seeming death, and she found her voice at once, and returned to her father's house...Now whether he had discerned in her a spark of life which had been hidden from her physicians...or whether he actually called back and

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<sup>104</sup> Hull, 28.

<sup>105</sup> Meier, 579-80.

<sup>106</sup> Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 3.6-9

rekindled her departed spirit, is hard to decide, not only for me, but for those who were present at the time.<sup>107</sup>

Many modern scholars point to Apollonius as a model of the ancient miracle-working divine man, comparing him with Jesus. However, it is important to note that even Philostratus portrays him as effecting his cures through natural therapy or special insight, not by an inherent divine power.<sup>108</sup> Even in the example above, it is unclear whether Apollonius has performed a miracle or has simply discerned that the maiden is still alive. Also, according to Philostratus, magic “is a matter of technique or the use of a substance or object endowed with special powers for good or ill.” In contrast, what Apollonius does “is the direct result of his special knowledge of the natural world and of his closeness to the gods. It is this divine wisdom that enables him to expel demons and effect cures.”<sup>109</sup> While Philostratus argues convincingly that Apollonius is no mere magician, his assertions also clearly differentiate his hero from Jesus.

#### *Contemporary Jewish Wonder-Workers*

The Jews of the time believed that their holy men were able to exert control upon natural phenomena.<sup>110</sup> The ability to perform miracles was a characteristic of the true prophet, as we saw in the case of Elisha. Their powers were directly attributed to and dependent upon their relationship with God. Of their miracles, the two most predominant

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<sup>107</sup> Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4.45 (Parmelee)

<sup>108</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 85, 86.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>110</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 69.

kinds are: 1) miracles wrought in response to prayer, and 2) miracles in response to use of the divine name.<sup>111</sup>

From Jewish writings we know about several miracle-working holy men who lived around the time of Jesus. Chief among these are Hanina ben Dosa and Honi “the Circle-Drawer.” Hanina ben Dosa lived in Galilee during the first century C.E., while Honi lived during the first century B.C.E. Characteristic of the stories recounting Hanina’s powers is the following in the Talmud:

Our Rabbis taught: Once the son of R. Gamaliel fell ill. He sent two scholars to R. Hanina b. Dosa to ask him to pray for him. When he saw them he went up to an upper chamber and prayed for him. When he came down he said to them: Go, the fever has left him. They said to him: Are you a prophet? He replied: I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I learnt this from experience. If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that he is accepted: but if not, I know that he is rejected. They sat down and made a note of the exact moment. When they came to R. Gamaliel, he said to them: By the temple service! You have not been a moment too soon or too late, but so it happened: at that very moment the fever left him and he asked for water to drink.<sup>112</sup>

Likewise, another famous story of Hanina has him praying for the son of R. Johanan ben Zakkai, who was ill. His prayer is immediately effective, and the boy lives.<sup>113</sup>

Honi the Circle Drawer (also known as Onias) is most known for the miracle that is his namesake. According to the Mishnah, the Land of Israel was in the midst of a terrible drought:

Once they said to Onias the Circle-maker, ‘Pray that rain may fall’...He prayed, but the rain did not fall. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood within it and said before God, ‘O Lord of the world, thy children have turned their faces to me, for that I am like a son of the house before thee. I swear by thy great name that I will not stir hence until thou have pity on thy children.’ Rain began falling drop

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<sup>111</sup> Hull, 47, 59.

<sup>112</sup> *b. Ber.* 34b (Epstein)

<sup>113</sup> Eric Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series 231 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 287.

by drop. He said, ‘Not for such rain have I prayed, but for rain that will fill the cisterns, pits, and caverns’. It began to rain with violence. He said, ‘Not for such rain have I prayed, but for rain of goodwill, blessing, and graciousness’. Then it rained in moderation...<sup>114</sup>

An important distinguishing feature of Hanina and Honi, in contrast to other wonderworkers we will examine, is that they are not portrayed as directly effecting any miracles. The magician or *thaumaturge*,<sup>115</sup> as John Dominic Crossan puts it, “Describes one who can make divine power present *directly through personal miracle* rather than *indirectly through communal ritual*.”<sup>116</sup> Rather, these Jewish holy men petition God to perform certain acts and God chooses to act in accordance to their piety. In other words, they are *petitioners* of numinous power rather than *mediators* or *bearers* of this power.<sup>117</sup> It is incorrect to assert, as does Geza Vermes, that the rabbinic tradition portrays these men as possessing miraculous healing talents or powers.<sup>118</sup> Rather, they are more correctly understood as men who were especially proficient at prayer.<sup>119</sup> Also, despite reports of successful healings, there is not, among Jewish miracle workers, the magnitude of cures (e.g. healing of lameness or paralysis) that we find in Jesus’ miracles.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *m. Ta’anit* 3.8 (Danby)

<sup>115</sup> A *thaumaturge* is a wonderworker, a performer of miracles or magic feats; from “wonder” (θαῦμα) + “work” (ἔργον).

<sup>116</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 138.

<sup>117</sup> Eve, 279.

<sup>118</sup> Vermes, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Eve, 289.

<sup>120</sup> Morton Smith, *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1951), 81-84.

### The Magical Worldview

Before we inquire as to the features that distinguish religious miracle-working from magic, we will first explore what we might call *the magical worldview*. As Howard Kee has correctly noted, even when the outward characteristics of particular activities are similar (such as miracle and magic) they must be analyzed in terms of the worldview of the actor and the audience.<sup>121</sup> It is incorrect to draw the conclusion that two activities that appear similar in external characteristics must be the same, and have the same meaning or significance. As an example, in the U.S. a thumbs-up gesture is a sign of approval, success, or hope. In Iran the same gesture is considered obscene. Such gestures must be interpreted within their cultural context. Similarly, we can ascribe meaning to miraculous activities only within the context of a particular understanding of the universe—a particular worldview.

While magic presupposes a certain worldview, namely belief in spiritual intermediaries and *mana* powers, magic is not *in itself* a worldview.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, an action is not magical simply because the actor possesses a certain magical understanding of the universe. Magic is chiefly a means of attaining certain ends, it is not a philosophy. However, magic does presuppose and operate within a certain worldview, a set of assumptions about the universe, which we will henceforth refer to as *the magical worldview*.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 101.

<sup>122</sup> David Bidney's response in Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, "The Notion of Magic," *Current Anthropology* 4, no. 5 (1963): 505-6.

<sup>123</sup> Hull, 60.

Before we establish the defining properties of the magical worldview, we should first establish that the first-century audience did not share our post-Enlightenment skepticism toward the miraculous.<sup>124</sup> As John Hull observes,

The Hebrew attitude to nature and history is such that everything is pregnant with magical-miracle...One only has to remember Moses' brazen serpent, the raising of the dead carried out by Elijah and Elisha and the events associated with the capture of the ark in Judges to see that they are thoroughly magical in their approach and method.<sup>125</sup>

While the ancients were aware that tricksters and illusionists existed, who only *seemed* to perform miracles,<sup>126</sup> both the magical and the religious worldviews allowed for the regular occurrence of the supernatural. However, beyond this the similarities between the magical and religious worldviews are few.

Just as two incongruous accounts of the same event must compete with each other, the two worldviews in conflict during the first century were the magical and the religious (or the eschatological, apocalyptic). As Howard Kee notes,

There is a fundamental difference between the apocalyptic worldview, which sees the cosmos as the place of struggle between God and his opponents, but which awaits the triumph of God and the vindication of his faithful people, and the magical view which regards the gods and all the other powers as fair game for exploitation and manipulation by those shrewd enough to achieve thereby their own ends or the defeat of their enemies.<sup>127</sup>

It is this magical view that we will examine.

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<sup>124</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *Medicine, Magic, and Religion: The Fitzpatrick Lectures Delivered before the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1915 and 1916* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1924; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>125</sup> Hull, 45.

<sup>126</sup> Janowitz, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 114-5. Cf. Smith, who says "The magical and the gospel material have the same view of the world." Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 126.

There are two features that distinguish the magical worldview. First, a belief in a multi-layered universe inhabited not only by men and gods, but by spiritual intermediaries. In the magical worldview it is primarily with these intermediaries, rather than directly with the gods, that humans interact. Secondly, this magical universe is linked by invisible bonds and forces, which can be manipulated by the magician for his or her own purposes. These two operating assumptions distinguish the magician from the religious miracle-worker.

### The Multi-Layered Universe

In ancient religions, the cosmos was regarded as a relatively simple three-tiered structure with God in heaven above, man on earth in the middle, and the underworld beneath. It was not unusual in this conception for humans to interact directly with God, as there were no layers separating them. By the third century B.C.E., scientific discoveries, including a new mathematical description of planetary motion, challenged this simple three-tiered worldview. The old view was replaced by a newer conception in which the earth was conceived as being a sphere suspended in a many-layered cosmos.<sup>128</sup> In this new conception, God was in the highest and most distant layer (the highest heaven), demons and angels were in the intermediate regions along with the planets, and humans were below on the earth.<sup>129</sup> Humans were now separated from God by many layers and intermediary beings, to whom they were nearer.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Janowitz, 30-32.

<sup>129</sup> Hull, 38-39.

<sup>130</sup> Grundmann, 2:288.

By the first centuries C.E., religious texts (including Jewish) embodied a very complex angelology and demonology, which presupposed a very different vision of the world than that of the ancient religions (including the Old Testament).<sup>131</sup> A new focus was placed on the activity of the spiritual intermediaries. For example, Jewish texts attributed to angels such things as the weather and changes in animal, plant and human life. The universe was full of angels and their influence was prolific.<sup>132</sup>

This new cosmology instilled a sense of distance between God and humans, and it was no longer thought appropriate or feasible that God would interact and guide humans directly. Instead, many supernatural manifestations that were previously thought to be the work of God came to be attributed to intermediaries such as angels and demons. It was thought that humans were much more likely to encounter the world of the divine through these intermediaries than with God directly. There were few instances in which angelic or demonic influence were not held responsible. Sudden illness, loss of an item, or trouble in love were attributed to demons; all types of blessings were attributed to angels.<sup>133</sup> In the world of Jesus, the demonic was thought to be the source of all sickness as well as sin.<sup>134</sup> The human body came to be regarded as a battleground in which there occurred conflicts between human and supernatural forces.<sup>135</sup>

Miracles, formerly attributed to divine action, were now regularly associated with angelic or demonic activity. Apuleius, on trial for magic in the second century C.E.,

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<sup>131</sup> Janowitz, 29.

<sup>132</sup> Hull, 38.

<sup>133</sup> Janowitz, 27-30.

<sup>134</sup> Vermes, 61.

<sup>135</sup> Janowitz, 46.

asserted that, “There are certain divine powers holding a position and possessing a character mid-way between gods and men, and that all divination and the miracles of magicians are controlled by them.”<sup>136</sup> In fact, the connection between magic and demonology became so close that performing exorcism came to be associated with practicing magic.<sup>137</sup> It is also because of this new cosmology that in the Greco-Roman period there arose miracle stories in which the hero works a miracle without prayer.<sup>138</sup> The realm of the supernatural was now available without an interaction with God.

### Bonds of Sympathy and Antipathy

The view of the universe as being multi-layered and inhabited by supernatural beings is not *in itself* a magical worldview. Indeed, this is a characteristic shared with the religious worldview. For a worldview to be particularly magical it must include the belief, inspired by the Persian magi, that these entities can be controlled through the manipulation of invisible bonds.<sup>139</sup> As John Hull writes,

The basis of the system is a belief in non-human, superhuman, usually invisible powers, including the gods themselves, the angelic beings, demons of various orders and the souls of heroes and men. But the distinctive development is a belief that these superhuman, supernatural entities are linked by invisible bonds of sympathy to visible and material things which are thus “symbols” of the power to which they adhere—plants, minerals, animals, times and seasons, human beings.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Cotter, 80.

<sup>137</sup> Hull, 51.

<sup>138</sup> Cotter, 35.

<sup>139</sup> Hull, 30.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

The magician, through collected knowledge of supernatural powers and these bonds of sympathy that connect them, can influence the universe in his desired direction.<sup>141</sup> As Iamblichus (the fourth century C.E. philosopher) stated, magic is the result of “ineffable works, which are divinely performed in a way surpassing all intelligence, and the power of inexplicable symbols, which are known only to the Gods.”<sup>142</sup> According to this view, successful magic does not depend on the will, intention, thought or intellect of the magician, but depends upon knowledge of the invisible universe and its interconnections.

Magical forces in this sense are very similar to natural forces—they display an invariable cause and effect relationship. Magic, according to Frazer, was basically an error of reasoning, in which causes and effects are wrongly connected. Magic was thought to be a sort of “misplaced science.”<sup>143</sup> Just as a rock must fall to the earth when released, regardless of who drops it, the result of successful magical technique must always be the same, notwithstanding the magician. Therefore magic is simply the participation in the inevitable forces of the cosmos.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Iamblichus, *De myster.* 2.11 (Taylor)

<sup>143</sup> Hull, 54.

<sup>144</sup> Grundmann, 288.

*Mana* and Δύναμις

Integral to the notion of sympathy and antipathy is that of *mana*, a Polynesian term<sup>145</sup> that connotes an invisible ether-like substance that transmits unseen forces, such as sympathy and antipathy.<sup>146</sup> It is similar to what the Iroquois of North America refer to as *orenda*, the Inuit call *sila*, the Chinese call *feng shui*, and those within folk Islam refer to as *baraka*. *Mana* can be built up within a person or object, can be gained and lost, and was transferred through various rituals, all of which involved the act of touching.<sup>147</sup> Belief in *mana* was widely prevalent in ancient world, and within many societies today.<sup>148</sup>

According to Walter Grundmann, the idea of *mana*-like energy originated in the Egyptian mind, and is linked to a naturalistic view of the universe. As mentioned above, the entire universe was viewed by ancient peoples as a manifestation of many forces working in and upon it. These forces are similar to the forces of nature with which modern people are familiar (e.g. gravity, electromagnetism), although they are conceived of in somewhat more personal terms. This concept of *mana*-like energy (or the Greek

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<sup>145</sup> “That invisible power which is believed by the natives to cause all such effects as transcend their conception of the regular course of nature, and to reside in spiritual beings, whether in the spiritual part of living men or in the ghosts of the dead, being imparted by them to their names and to various things that belong to them, such as stones, snakes and indeed objects of all sorts, is that generally known as *mana*.” R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, Behavior Science Reprints ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891; reprint, New Haven: HRAF Press, 1957), 191.

<sup>146</sup> Frazer, 14.

<sup>147</sup> Burnett, 25-28.

<sup>148</sup> Garrett, 150.; Interestingly, it is somewhat analogous to the concept of *luck*, which might be thought of as an unseen force which is possessed in varying degrees by individuals. (Burnett, 26.)

δύναμις) was not unfamiliar to the Hellenistic world: the Stoics conceived of the deity as a universal pantheistic *force*, contrary to the transcendent being of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy.<sup>149</sup>

The earliest use of δύναμις in Greek literature is related to the verb δύναμαι, meaning “to be able.” According to Hippocrates, δύναμις was defined as simply “the existential capacity to affect.” The most important use of δύναμις in Greek philosophy was for characteristics or properties that were active by effecting those things that were nearby. Each perceived δύναμις was thought of as a material substance in itself: an object was hot due to the presence of *Hot*, which was itself an object.<sup>150</sup>

A particular δύναμις is able to reproduce itself, or give its nature to, anything it is near or added to. For example, an object containing the characteristic of *heat* is able to transmit its power through physical contact. Likewise, a power automatically acts upon its opposite by destroying, forcing out, or replacing it, much as *hot* replaces *cold*.<sup>151</sup> In this understanding, power is a neutral substance, which can be transmitted like any other material—it does not depend upon the volition of gods or mortals. We will see below how a neutral, amoral understanding of *mana*-power, independent of will or personality, is integral to the magical worldview.

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<sup>149</sup> Grundmann, 2:287-91.

<sup>150</sup> Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δυναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 21-24.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 32.

## Magic Versus Miracle

Now that we have explored the worldview that underlies the practice of magic, we can begin to inquire as to whether Jesus' actions were magical or religious, according to first-century understanding. However, we must first establish some criteria for comparison. Certainly the goals and, to a limited extent, the worldviews of magic and religion do overlap. Harold Kee writes that each are

modes of achieving or sustaining human welfare...Each assumes the existence and operation of some system of order which can be perceived, understood and exploited in order to attain a maximum of benefit for those who have the wisdom to utilize these resources. Yet the assumptions on which each system operates are significantly different.<sup>152</sup>

What distinguishes magic from religious miracles? Our first step is to clearly define what we mean by *magic* and *miracle*. Unfortunately, as Alan F. Segal observes, "Although many different definitions of 'magic' have been offered throughout the history of religions and anthropological research, no one definition has reached general use."<sup>153</sup> While many definitions properly capture the most significant defining characteristics, rarely does any single trait hold true of all magic in all cultures in all times and places.<sup>154</sup> This has led some to suggest that there is no objective difference at all.

We will argue that there are fundamental differences between miracle and magic, both in principle and in praxis, but it is important to acknowledge that in antiquity there

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<sup>152</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 122.

<sup>153</sup> Alan Franklin Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition.," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 349-75.

<sup>154</sup> Meier, 540.

were no firm lines dividing them.<sup>155</sup> Attempts by some conservative scholars to portray magic as fundamentally different or even opposite to religion are unfounded and overly simplistic.<sup>156</sup> We should not suppose that magic and miracle do not have significant similarities and shared characteristics, or that magic was merely a primitive precursor to religion. In fact, it was not until the sixteenth century that magic began to be clearly distinguished from religion.<sup>157</sup>

During the first century and before, magic was considered a form of false or decadent religion and the distinction between it and miracle was purely subjective. In other words, there was no intrinsic difference between the two; the only difference was that God was credited as the source of miracles, whereas false gods or demons were the source of magic.<sup>158</sup> In fact, as John Hull puts it, the crucial distinction is “not whether they had in fact happened but the nature and origin of the power used to perform them.”<sup>159</sup> For instance, there was no doubt that Pharaoh’s magicians could perform the wonders attributed to them in the Old Testament, or that Moses’ miracles were of the same kind. The true powers of the magician were acknowledged, but as Howard Kee notes, “What is asserted is the superiority of Yahweh’s power to that of the

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<sup>155</sup> Cotter, 5.

<sup>156</sup> see Grundmann., Frazer.

<sup>157</sup> Hans H. Penner, "Rationality, Ritual, and Science," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>158</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism: The System and the Difference," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 61, 74.

<sup>159</sup> Hull, 108.

magicians.”<sup>160</sup> In fact, the Talmud ruled that anyone wishing to join the Sanhedrin must be able to do magic, for a real expert of supernatural power must understand his opponent’s techniques. As Naomi Janowitz summarizes, “What distinguished Jewish magic, at least in the minds of many people in the ancient world, was that Jewish magicians were more successful.”<sup>161</sup>

Some scholars have argued that there is no clear, objective way to distinguish magic from miracle at all. David Aune states, “It is difficult if not impossible to establish a phenomenological distinction between magical incantation and religious prayer or magical and religious ritual. In terms of beliefs and practices, there appears to be no thoroughly convincing way of distinguishing magic from religion.”<sup>162</sup> Crossan also disputes any intrinsic difference between the two: “Religion and magic, the religious miracle and the magical effect, are in no way substantively distinct.”<sup>163</sup> In the view of such scholars, there is no objective, descriptive way to distinguish magic from miracle. However, while there are no simple definitions that will neatly segregate *all* religious miracles from *all* magic, they are far from synonymous or indistinguishable.

Rather than claiming that miracle and magic are opposites, or that they are no different, we find it more helpful to think of religion and magic on a spectrum, having close similarities in many regards.<sup>164</sup> Each end of the spectrum would thus represent an *ideal type* that is most characteristic of that phenomenon. All actual examples of miracle

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<sup>160</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 18.

<sup>161</sup> Janowitz, 24-55.

<sup>162</sup> Aune, 1513.

<sup>163</sup> Crossan, 310.

<sup>164</sup> Remus, 63.

or magic would fall somewhere in-between.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, our first inquiry will be into the characteristics that define the ideal type of magic, as opposed to miracle. (We will discuss magic's similarities and differences with medicine later.)

### Distinguishing Features of Magic and Miracle

While there are numerous features that have been cited as distinguishing magic from miracle, I will focus here on what I consider the main points of distinction. The characteristics of magic, as opposed to the religious miracle are: 1) a manipulative or coercive approach toward supernatural forces and 2) an emphasis on specific techniques that if performed properly are directly and automatically successful.<sup>166</sup> In contrast, the religious miracle is rooted in an attitude of supplication and propitiation toward a personal god, the results are attributed to divine action (directly or indirectly), and success is rooted in the miracle-worker's relationship to the divine being.

#### *Manipulation and Coercion*

The chief characteristic of magic is the attempt to coerce and manipulate divine forces for the accomplishment of personal goals.<sup>167</sup> The Egyptians sought to command their gods to work for them and to appear at their whim, and even threatened them with

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<sup>165</sup> Meier, 541.

<sup>166</sup> Remus, 66-7.; Cavendish, 1.

<sup>167</sup> In Crossan., the author asks, "Where is the evidence that religious miracle is always the former [propitiatory] and magical ritual always the latter [coercive]?" However, we have argued that not *all* magic is coercive, nor that *all* religion is propitiatory. As stated before, no single criteria applies to all the extant instances of magic or religion. Nevertheless, these characteristic traits are applicable to the vast majority of cases.

destruction if they were disobedient.<sup>168</sup> This coercive characteristic is carried over into Greco-Roman magic, where traditional cultic liturgies and prayers are *enhanced* with magical techniques that are designed to force the god to succumb to the will of the magician.<sup>169</sup> The PGM, for example, are replete with spells in which “what is sought is not to learn the will of the deity, but to shape the deity’s will to do the bidding of the one making the demand or to defeat the aims of the evil powers.”<sup>170</sup>

The fundamental aim of all magic is to impose the human will on the universe in order to master it. The means by which this is done is an inexplicable network of mysterious forces, sympathy and antipathy, which can be exploited by the magician. The PGM regularly demonstrate a coercive nature,<sup>171</sup> as this example demonstrates:

Come into my mind and my understanding for all the time of my life and accomplish for me all the desires of my soul. / For you are I, and I, you. Whatever I say must happen, for I have your name as a unique phylactery in my heart, and no flesh, although moved, will overpower me; no spirit will stand against me—neither daimon nor visitation nor any other of the evil beings of Hades, / because of your name, which I have in my soul and invoke. Also [be] with me always for good, a good [god dwelling] on a good [man], yourself immune to magic, giving me health no magic can harm, well-being, prosperity, glory, victory, power, sex appeal. Restrain the evil eyes / of each and all of my legal opponents, whether men or women, but give me charm in everything I do.<sup>172</sup>

In contrast to magic’s impulse toward control and coercion for personal benefit, the central theme of the religious attitude is petition and veneration of a personal god and submission to the divine will.<sup>173</sup> Of the Jewish charismatic miracle workers, such as Honi and Hanina, the rabbinic tradition makes the point that their miracles were not the result

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<sup>168</sup> Frazer, 59.

<sup>169</sup> Hull, 43.

<sup>170</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 112.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, 123.

<sup>172</sup> *PGM XIII.790-806* (Betz)

<sup>173</sup> Remus, 62.

of their own powers, but were the result of their prayers.<sup>174</sup> These prayers were not magic manipulations, as has been suggested.<sup>175</sup> It was their superior morality that caused their prayers to be heard by God, and it was God who performed the miracle. Wonders performed in answer to prayer are properly defined as religious miracles, not magic.<sup>176</sup> If the result of a prayer or action is viewed as the voluntary intervention of a deity, the wonder does not meet our criteria for magic.<sup>177</sup>

### *Magical Technique*

Secondly, magic makes use of techniques and formulas which, if performed precisely, are directly and automatically successful, unless countered by stronger magic. This is the definition of magic favored by cultural anthropologists.<sup>178</sup> Fundamental to magic is the idea that if the right procedure is followed the desired result will *automatically* occur: if it does not then the procedure was not correctly followed.<sup>179</sup> Again, wonders that depend on a moral quality of the actor involved, or on an arbitrary deity (not susceptible to manipulation or coercion) do not fit this definition. We agree with the second half of Aune's definition of magic; "Goals sought within the context of

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<sup>174</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 38.

<sup>175</sup> Remus, 59, 82.

<sup>176</sup> Even Honi's famous prayer for rain, although it can be described as manipulative, suggests that it is God who causes it to rain, and not Honi's technique. There is no suggestion that any person following Honi's technique would be equally successful at bringing rain.

<sup>177</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Howard Clark Kee, "Magic and Messiah," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 122-3.

<sup>179</sup> Cavendish, 2.

religious deviance are magical when attained through the management of supernatural powers in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed.”<sup>180</sup>

Magic is primarily concerned with what procedures work and its results do not depend on qualities of the performer or a relationship with the divine. Neither does the effectiveness of magic depend on whether the performer understands the forces or beings involved.<sup>181</sup> Any being, power, or force that might produce the desired result is fair game. As S. Eitrem has observed, the magician represents “in one person, according to occasion or requirements, every conceivable divine or demoniac power.”<sup>182</sup> For a technique or incantation to be *truly* magical, it must be effective *in and of itself*. Among the magical texts are often found editorial comments such as, “This really works,” or, “If it does not work, try this other spell.”<sup>183</sup> Magical technique includes incantations, recipes for potions and other *materia magica*, and instructions on bodily movements and gestures.<sup>184</sup> Magic requires a literal and precise observance of all the prescribed rules and regulations, that the correct substances be used (possessing the correct supernatural properties), and that the appropriate conjurations be spoken.<sup>185</sup>

In magic, the effective power is thought to lie within the spell or apparatus, not in the magician.<sup>186</sup> When miracle-working power is thought to reside in the person of the *thaumaturge*, either intrinsically or indirectly by way of their relationship with the divine,

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<sup>180</sup> Aune, 1515.

<sup>181</sup> Kee, "Magic and Messiah," 123.

<sup>182</sup> S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, 2nd, rev. and enl. ed., Symbolae Osloenses. Fasc. Supplet. 20 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1966), 30-31.

<sup>183</sup> Meier, 546.

<sup>184</sup> Remus, 57.

<sup>185</sup> Vermes, 64.

<sup>186</sup> Hull, 57-58.

we are in the realm of religion or non-magical miracle. Fundamental to the idea of true magic is the inherent effectiveness of the technique itself.

It is interesting that some features of the miraculous in the Bible share this magical feature of automatic effectiveness. In 2 Kings there is a story of some men who are burying a dead man. Then, in a moment of panic, the men throw the body into Elisha's tomb. "When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet" (2 Kgs 13:21). There is no mention here of divine action, the wonder is performed automatically, and the power is clearly to be interpreted as residing in Elisha's bones—all features characteristic of magic.<sup>187</sup> The closest to the automatic or coercive nature of magic that we find in the Gospels is the story of the hemorrhaging woman who touches Jesus' garment (Luke 8:43-48), in which δύναμις automatically flows out of him and heals her.<sup>188</sup> We will examine this passage below.

### *Objections*

Numerous objections have been raised to this and other purportedly objective definitions of magic. First, many scholars have noted that there is an area of significant overlap between magic and religion (or miracle) in the subject of supplication and manipulation. David Aune has established that "magic not infrequently supplicates while religion not infrequently manipulates supernatural powers."<sup>189</sup> Indeed, one can observe

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<sup>187</sup> Augustine relates the healing of a well-known blind man upon his touching the saintly remains of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius (*Conf.* 9.7.16).

<sup>188</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 19, 115.

<sup>189</sup> Aune, 1513.

the supplicative nature of some of the magical papyri.<sup>190</sup> However, as our last example from the PGM demonstrates, even in these cases the effectiveness of the magic resides not in a relationship between the magician and the divine entity, or in the moral qualities of the actor, but in coercion based upon the power inherent in the spoken name of the deity.

John Hull notes, regarding the necessity of technique in magic, “The power residing in a great magician can, as we have seen, work without technique, and, on the other hand, mastery of technique does not mean that you will be able necessarily to make the magic because you may not have the power.”<sup>191</sup> However, his examples demonstrate the small minority of cases, which do not illustrate the rule. Howard Kee notes, “If the technique is effective of itself in overcoming a hostile force, then the action is magical. If it is viewed as the intervention of the god or goddess, then it is miraculous.”<sup>192</sup> We agree with Kee regarding the automatic effectiveness of technique in magic, but do not agree with the second half of his statement. Magic *can* involve the intervention of gods or goddesses without being religious.<sup>193</sup> The determining magical qualities are that the attitude be *coercive* or *manipulative* and that the results depend not on a relationship with the divine, but on correct magical procedures.

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<sup>190</sup> Remus, 63.

<sup>191</sup> Hull, 57.

<sup>192</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 4.

<sup>193</sup> Grundmann, 2:289.

### Magic versus Medicine

While we have heretofore focused on the distinctions between miracle and magic, we should also mention ancient medicine, as many of the miracles we will be addressing concern physical healing. While most of Jesus' wonders are clearly portrayed as being miraculous, some of his healing feats purportedly imply medicinal techniques. It is important to note that in the ancient world the distinction between magic and medicine was unclear. For example, in his compendium of treatments for human disease, Celsus clearly borders on the realm of magic.<sup>194</sup>

Jesus' use of materials (e.g. oil, mud, spittle), is suggested as being medicinal by some scholars. For example, we know that anointing sick people with olive oil or herbal mixtures was a widespread practice in the ancient world.<sup>195</sup> The use of oil in Luke 10:34 (the story of the good Samaritan) is *clearly* medicinal, not cultic or magical. However, most Old Testament instances of "anointing" (משח) are cultic, usually involving bestowal of power, authority, or blessing, and are not medicinal. Also, there are examples where "anointing" (ἀλείφω) is referenced in the New Testament in which the use is clearly not medicinal (e.g. Matt 6:17; Luke 7:46).

Spittle was also widely believed to have medicinal properties in the ancient world.<sup>196</sup> Pliny notes, "The best of all safeguards against serpents is the saliva of a fasting human being."<sup>197</sup> Also, "Saliva is recommended for treating incipient boils, for leprous

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<sup>194</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 38.

<sup>195</sup> Janowitz, 42.

<sup>196</sup> Hull, 76.

<sup>197</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28.7.35 (Jones)

sores, for eye diseases, and for pains in the neck.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, it is suggested that Jesus’ use of spittle in the healing of the deaf-mute (Mark 7:33) and the blind man (Mark 8:23) was medicinal. Nevertheless, there are also instances of spitting which are clearly not medicinal, both in the Old Testament (e.g. Num 12:14; Deut 25:9; Job 17:6) and the New Testament (e.g. Mark 14:65; 15:19; Matt Luke 18:32).

We cannot confidently assert that Jesus’ use of oil or spittle was intended as medicinal. We should note, as Howard Kee has pointed out, “There is in the gospels not a single instance of the technical language or methods of the medical tradition from the time of Hippocrates to Galen.”<sup>199</sup> If Jesus’ use of these materials was understood as medicinal by his audience, we should expect some acknowledgment of this in the Gospels. Neither do we find any medical language describing the use of saliva or oil in the New Testament. Instead, we propose that Jesus’ use of materials was neither medicinal nor magical, but were vehicles by which he healed miraculously. One explanation is that the use of touch, saliva, or mud was related to the principle of the *extended personality*, by which possession of or contact with a part of a person, even his name, allows for the sharing in his power (as in the case with the hemorrhaging woman) or the exercising of power over him (as in magic).<sup>200</sup> We will explore these ideas further in the next chapter.

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<sup>198</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 104.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>200</sup> John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire, Aspects of Greek and Roman Life* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), 158.

## CHAPTER 3

### JESUS THE MIRACLE WORKER

#### **The Context of the Miracles**

As Graham Twelftree has pointed out, “Jesus considered performing miracles the main focus of his ministry and that exorcism was the epitome of his ministry.”<sup>201</sup> Jesus’ acts of healing, exorcism, and feeding demonstrate a primary motivation of *love*.<sup>202</sup> The verb *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (to have compassion, pity, sympathy) is ascribed to Jesus as motivation for performing miracles on several occasions (Mark 1:41; 8:2; Matt 14:14; 20:34; Luke 7:13). In contrast to other *divine men*, Jesus understood God’s salvation to be focused on answering human suffering and need rather than in drawing attention to the miraculous power at his disposal.<sup>203</sup>

Jesus understood his miraculous activity as obedience to his father and the mission he had been given.<sup>204</sup> Unlike the magicians, there is no suggestion of coercion in Jesus’ relationship with his Father.<sup>205</sup> Rather, Jesus prays, “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39), and warns his church, “Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you,

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<sup>201</sup> Twelftree, 275.

<sup>202</sup> Marshall, 69.

<sup>203</sup> Twelftree, 264.

<sup>204</sup> Meier, 548.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Jesus’ miracles were unique in that, opposed to Jewish or Greco-Roman miracle stories, they did not exalt the person of the performer and were not done as ends in themselves, but rather were subordinated to the proclamation of God’s kingdom.<sup>206</sup>

### The Kingdom of God

The fundamental paradigm for understanding the miracles of Jesus in the Synoptics is the inbreaking kingdom of God. It is an idea unparalleled in the world of pagan magic.<sup>207</sup> Not only are the miracles glorious signs of the future kingdom, they demonstrate the present eschatological reign of God through the ministry of Jesus. Jesus viewed his ministry as directly in opposition to the “strong man” (Satan) of the present age: “No one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.” (Mark 3:27, TNIV). As Jesus healed, exorcised demons, and preached the good news to the poor, the kingdom of Satan was incrementally pushed back by the kingdom of God.<sup>208</sup>

Understanding the kingdom paradigm sheds light on the way the gospel miracles are perceived. The future consummation of the kingdom is portrayed in terms of δύναμις: “At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great *power* (δυνάμειως) and glory” (Mark 13:26, emphasis mine). Therefore the experience of δύναμις and

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<sup>206</sup> Aune, 1526.

<sup>207</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 132.

<sup>208</sup> Twelftree, 195, 263, 276.

δυνάμεις (Jesus' works of power) represents kingdom influence being exerted over the dominion of evil (e.g. sickness, death, demonic oppression).

Through the miracle-working ministry of Jesus, God is encountered. For those who can see with the eye of faith, God “can be seen to be expressing his powerful eschatological presence” through the deeds of Jesus.<sup>209</sup> Following the encounter with the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus tells the healed man, “Return home and tell how much *God* has done for you” (Luke 8:39a, emphasis mine). Then, to drive the point home that God had healed through Jesus: “So the man went away and told all over town how much *Jesus* had done for him” (Luke 8:39b, emphasis mine). Luke makes it plain that in Jesus' miracles, God is at work.<sup>210</sup>

Likewise in the Gospel of John, the miracles are the “signs” (σημεία) that Jesus is acting as God, or for and in God's place. After Jesus heals the cripple at Bethesda, he replies to his critics saying, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (John 5:17, TNIV). John wants his readers to understand that it was God in Jesus who performed the healing. The miracles are signs that Jesus is the all-powerful King.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 157, 343.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 204, 235.

### Jesus the Messiah

For Israel, the miracles of Jesus are presented as signs of the power of God acting not only for individuals, but for Israel as a whole.<sup>212</sup> It was understood that the Messiah, when he came, would perform miracles.<sup>213</sup> Isaiah encouraged Israel, “‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.’ Then will *the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped*” (Isa 35:4-5, emphasis mine). According to Jewish thought, if any defect would merit divine intervention it was blindness and muteness.<sup>214</sup> The witnesses to Jesus’ miracles had an expectation of messianic miracles. As the crowd in the temple courts asked rhetorically, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?” (John 7:31, TNIV). John writes about Jesus’ miracles in order that his readers “may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (John 20:31, TNIV).

As the Messiah, a primary goal of Jesus’ healing miracles is to bring people into a saving relationship with him. As Graham Twelftree points out, “Healing can be salvation when the cure results in recognizing healing to be the work of God and in following Jesus.”<sup>215</sup> This involves moving beyond the external occurrence to grasp the deeper significance of the in-breaking kingdom, as well as its demands for a personal response.<sup>216</sup> In Luke 17:19, Jesus says to the Samaritan leper whom he cleansed, and who returned to give thanks to God, “Your faith *has saved you*” (ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε).

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<sup>212</sup> Meier, 545.

<sup>213</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), 70.

<sup>214</sup> Eitrem, 61-62.

<sup>215</sup> Twelftree, 164.

<sup>216</sup> Marshall, 64-65.

While the other nine lepers were “cleansed” (ἐκαθαρίσθησαν), this leper, in returning to Jesus, also received *salvation*. Likewise, in the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Mark is most likely making the point that the correct response to being healed is to become a follower of Jesus.<sup>217</sup>

Those who receive healing from Jesus are brought into a relationship with him. In many cases, when Jesus heals the body he also meets the person’s spiritual needs at the same time.<sup>218</sup> A classic example is the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12 // Matt 9:2-8 // Luke 5:17-26), where Jesus first confers forgiveness on the crippled man before restoring his body. The context of the gospel miracles is always one of faith, trust, or discipleship.<sup>219</sup> Therefore, when the Pharisees demand a “sign” (σημεῖον), Jesus views it as “an evasion of the demand for repentance and faith addressed to them in Jesus’ past words and deeds.”<sup>220</sup> They are separating Jesus’ miraculous deeds from his message of God’s reign and the necessary response to it.

### **Healing and Faith**

As mentioned above, the context for Jesus’ miracles is one in which “faith” (πίστις) is demonstrated by the petitioner. Πίστις, at its most basic level, is a confidence that Jesus has the ability to heal and cast out demons. At a higher level, it involves trust in God’s power and “an openness and receptivity to the power of God to perform a mighty

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<sup>217</sup> Twelftree, 72.

<sup>218</sup> Marshall, 89.

<sup>219</sup> Meier, 542.

<sup>220</sup> Marshall, 67.

work.”<sup>221</sup> This feature distinguishes Jesus’ religious miracles from the activities of contemporary magicians, in which faith is not a required element.<sup>222</sup> It is this emphasis on winning people to faith that truly sets Jesus’ miracles apart from Jewish and Hellenistic parallels.<sup>223</sup> As we noted before, in the ancient world faith was primarily a *response to* a miraculous event, whereas in the New Testament it is generally an attitude on the part of those involved that is *internal* to the event itself.<sup>224</sup> In fact, there is no healing story that does not include an expression of trust in Jesus, whether before, during, or after the miraculous act. This leads some to the conclusion that faith is not only what persuades Jesus to heal, but that it effects his *ability* to heal.<sup>225</sup>

### Is Faith Required for Healing?

According to some scholars, Jesus’ healing ability was dependent upon the recipient’s faith. James Dunn writes, “Faith in the recipient as it were completed the circuit so that the power could flow.”<sup>226</sup> He goes on to say that Jesus’ power was “not something he could use or display at will, nor did he want to.”<sup>227</sup> The foundational passage for this view is Mark 6:1-6, in which Jesus “was not able” (οὐκ ἐδύνατο) to perform any miracles in his hometown of Nazareth because of the people’s “lack of faith”

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<sup>221</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 74.

<sup>222</sup> Aune, 1536.

<sup>223</sup> Dunn, 74-75.

<sup>224</sup> Theissen, 140.

<sup>225</sup> Twelftree, 336.

<sup>226</sup> Dunn, 74-75.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

(ἀπιστία). Likewise in the Synoptics we repeatedly find the enigmatic pronouncement, “Your *faith* has saved you” (Mark 5:34; 10:52; Matt 9:22, 29; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). For Matthew in particular, miracles are never used to bring unbelievers to faith, and in most Synoptic accounts faith was clearly the *preparation* for a miracle.<sup>228</sup> As Matthew records Jesus telling the two blind men, “According to your faith (κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν) let it be done to you” (Matt 9:29, TNIV).

In spite of this evidence, apart from the single story in Mark 6 there is no clear evidence that Jesus’ healing powers were in any way limited by others’ faith. As Anton Fridrichsen asserts, “It would be an error to believe we could find in a single passage the idea that in the exercise of his supernatural power Jesus was bound to the faith of men.”<sup>229</sup> Fridrichsen and other scholars suggests that the lack of healing in Mark 6:5 (= Matt 13:58) was due to the people’s reticence to come to Jesus for healing, not any diminution of Jesus’ powers. Jesus could not do many miracles because only a few solicited his help.<sup>230</sup> While the interpretation of this passage is hotly debated, there is other evidence that an initial faith on the part of the recipient is not a prerequisite for healing.

Particularly in the Gospel of John, faith is portrayed not so much as a *prerequisite* for miracles, but as a *result* of them (John 2:23; 4:39, 53; 10:42; 20:8, 29). By way of example, in the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (5:2-15), there is no mention of the healed man’s faith either before or after the event. As the author of John

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<sup>228</sup> Twelftree, 136, 185.

<sup>229</sup> Anton Fridrichsen, *The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and John S. Hanson (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1972), 79-80.

<sup>230</sup> Barrett, 91.

has Jesus saying, “The Son gives life *to whom he is pleased to give it*” (5:21), regardless of any initial condition of faith. For John, a person without initial faith is still able to receive or experience a miracle.<sup>231</sup> There is also some evidence that Luke tends more than Mark to see faith as a result of miracles.<sup>232</sup> A particularly Lukan motif is the reaction of “amazement” (θαύβος), especially in response to the miracles (4:36; 5:26; 9:43; 11:14), whereas in Mark the amazement is more often at the *words* of Jesus (1:22; 6:2; 10:24, 26; 11:18; 12:17; 15:5).

### Faith in Jesus and Thanks to God

In many miracle stories, gratitude for miracles is directed toward God. This might suggest that the necessary faith for miracles is faith in God. In one instance, Jesus calls his disciples to “have faith in God,” although the context is not a healing miracle, but the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:22). Particularly in Luke, it appears that faith is not in the miraculous powers of Jesus but in God.<sup>233</sup> In Luke, when praise is evoked from those who witness or receive a miracle it is nearly always offered to God.<sup>234</sup> This suggests that Luke strove to emphasize that it is *God* who works in Jesus and that praise and thanks belong to him alone. However, the evidence suggests that it is faith specifically in Jesus, not just generally in God, that is effective.

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<sup>231</sup> Twelftree, 202, 231.

<sup>232</sup> Meier, 543.

<sup>233</sup> Twelftree, 185.

<sup>234</sup> Luke 5:25-26; 7:16; 8:39; 9:43; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 19:37

In every instance, the object of confidence or faith is not God in general but in Jesus specifically.<sup>235</sup> Upon leaving Jericho, a blind beggar calls out to Jesus to receive his sight (Mark 10:46-52 // Matt 20:30-34 // Luke 18:35-42). While Jesus pronounces, “Your faith has saved you,” there is no suggestion that the man’s faith was in anyone besides Jesus. This theme is more specifically demonstrated in John, where Jesus clearly calls for belief in himself: “The work of God is this: to believe in (πιστεύετε εἰς) the one he has sent” (John 6:29). Saving faith is more than just confidence in Jesus as a miracle worker, it is trust in him as the one sent by God to mediate divine life and power, granting entry to the future kingdom.<sup>236</sup>

### **Miracle-Working Power**

In his miracle-working ability, the gospel authors and the witnesses to his miracles saw Jesus as the *plenipotentiary* of God. Jesus had the full power and authority of God to heal the sick, cast out demons, and even to make the wind and waves obey him. As we have said before, the kingdom of God was coming through Jesus’ words and deeds. The gospel authors saw this reign, as I. Howard Marshall puts it, as “a kind of ‘salvation energy’ that impinges on maladjustment, in all areas of life – the spiritual and the physical, as well as the ethical, the social and the political.”<sup>237</sup> In the outpouring of this divine power, Jesus could pronounce that the kingdom had in fact already come.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Twelftree, 122.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>237</sup> Marshall, 63.

<sup>238</sup> Dunn, 88.

In the gospel accounts, δύναμις and “authority” (ἐξουσία) are often spoken of as interrelated concepts connected to miracles (especially exorcism), and there is a certain overlap in their definitions. Δύναμις refers to “potential for functioning in some way, power, might, strength, force, capability.”<sup>239</sup> It can also refer specifically to power that works wonders, which is the usage we will be most concerned with. Ἐξουσία refers to a “state of control over something, freedom of choice, right,” or also takes on the meaning of power: “potential or resource to command, control, or govern, capability, might, power.”<sup>240</sup>

In the sense of permission or possibility, ἐξουσία is much like that which might be granted by a higher court in a legal context. In this sense, the word is important in understanding the person and work of Jesus; it denotes his “divinely given power and authority to act,” bestowed by God.<sup>241</sup> The clearest example of this meaning is given in the story of the centurion (Matt 8:5-13 // Luke 7:2-10), where faith in Jesus’ ability to heal is attributed to his ἐξουσία. Here, the centurion “understood the transmission of power in an authority structure and considered that Jesus in virtue of his unique relationship to God would be able to act as his plenipotentiary.”<sup>242</sup> C. K. Barrett suggests a plausible relationship between ἐξουσία and δύναμις: “Ἐξουσία corresponds to potential

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<sup>239</sup> Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 262-3.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 352-3.

<sup>241</sup> Werner Foerster, "Ἐξεστίν, Ἐξουσία, Ἐξουσιαζω, Κατεξουσιαζω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:562-8.

<sup>242</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 319.

energy; it is the divine authority which may at any moment become manifest as power, δύναμις, through the impulse of God's will."<sup>243</sup> Therefore δύναμις is the manifestation of ἐξουσία. Or, as John Hull has put it, "Authority is strategic, power is tactical."<sup>244</sup>

### The Power of God

In several accounts of the miraculous in Mark and especially Luke, there are references to δύναμις as being power for healing (Mark 5:28-30 // Luke 8:46; Luke 4:36; 5:17; 6:19; 9:1). Similarly, Jesus' mighty works, including healings, are often referred to as "works of power" (δυνάμεις) by all three Synoptists, but especially Matthew (Matt 11:20-23; 13:54, 58; 14:2; Mark 6:2, 14; Luke 10:13). In two incidents, this δύναμις is described as being transferred specifically by touch (Mark 5:28-30 // Luke 8:46; Luke 6:19). How are we to understand this power? The power resident in Jesus is portrayed variously as originating from God, residing in Jesus, and conveyed through the Holy Spirit.

The concept of power in the Gospels is indissolubly linked with God. In Mark 12:24 and Matthew 22:29, Jesus speaks of "the power of God" (τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ), and echoing Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, God is referred to in Mark 14:62 as "the Power" (τῆς δυνάμεως). Likewise in Luke 4:14, Jesus operates in "the power of the Spirit" (τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος) or in 5:17 "the power of the Lord" (δύναμις κυρίου). The association of "power" (כֹּחַ) with God is common in the Old Testament (e.g. Exod 9:16; 15:6; 32:11; Num 14:13; Deut 9:29). While readers of the Gospels would have

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<sup>243</sup> Barrett, 78.

<sup>244</sup> Hull, 115.

understood the universe as being infused by many *powers* (cf. Mark 13:25), they would have understood Jesus' power as being that from the God of the Old Testament.<sup>245</sup> Unlike the primitive conception of *mana*, which was characteristically an *amoral* power,<sup>246</sup> biblical power is related to the person of God.

Jesus' power is recognized as having its origins with God, working through God's spirit. When Jesus proclaims, "I drive out demons by the finger (δάκτυλος) of God" (Luke 11:20), he is declaring that his exorcisms were done not through some sort of expertise or technique, but because an *otherly* power, God's power, was acting in and through him.<sup>247</sup> The phrase "the finger of God" is used occasionally in Jewish literature, where it describes the active power of God.<sup>248</sup> The most clear biblical example of this is the reaction of Pharaoh's magicians to the plagues that befell them: "This is the finger of God (אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים)" (Exod 8:19). Therefore, Jesus is not to be understood merely as a human performer of wonders, but as someone in whom the power of God is uniquely appropriated.<sup>249</sup> Having obtained authority from God, Jesus possesses the power of God as the Father's plenipotentiary.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Twelftree, 75.

<sup>246</sup> Burnett, 27.

<sup>247</sup> Dunn, 47.

<sup>248</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 457.

<sup>249</sup> Twelftree, 350.

<sup>250</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, ed. F. F. Bruce, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 192.

### Jesus' Power

In addition to the evidence that the power Jesus exercised originated from God, there is also evidence that this power *belonged* to Jesus in a sense. To use the more technical language of Werner Kahl, Jesus was not merely a *mediator* of numinous power (MNP), he was a *bearer* of numinous power (BNP).<sup>251</sup> According to this view, it was not merely that Jesus was a transmitter of God's power, like an electrical conduit, but was a *source* of power (like a reservoir or battery). As Loos describes it, Jesus "has received this power from the Father and may use it as He wishes."<sup>252</sup> Kahl describes the implications: "Jesus differs from all other prophetic figures known about in Judaism (with the possible exception of Artapanus's Moses) in performing his miracles as a BNP."<sup>253</sup>

The nature of Jesus' healing miracles supports the conclusion that he did indeed possess power in himself. Unlike the Jewish miracle workers we examined earlier, Jesus did not include prayer in his miracles, but spoke simple commands to effect them, as if he were operating out of his own power. While Jesus surely saw God as involved in what he was doing, he believed that he was functioning out of his own resources when he healed and exorcised.<sup>254</sup> Also, unlike the Apostles, Jesus never refused to receive credit or praise for his miracles. Never do we hear from Jesus, "Why do you gaze at me, as if by my own

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<sup>251</sup> See Werner Kahl, *New Testament Miracle Stories in Their Religious-Historical Setting: A Religionsgeschichtliche Comparison from a Structural Perspective*, *Forschungen Zur Religion Und Literatur Des Alten Und Neuen Testaments*, vol. 163 H. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

<sup>252</sup> Loos, 188.

<sup>253</sup> Eve, 385-6.

<sup>254</sup> Twelftree, 266, 347.

power or piety I had made him walk?” (cf. Acts 3:12). Jesus certainly exhibited dependence on the Father, as John especially makes clear; “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing” (John 5:19). However, in the very next breath Jesus also asserts a certain independence of action; “Even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (John 5:21, emphasis mine).

### Power and the Holy Spirit

In addition to being from God, and residing in his own person, Jesus and his followers understood the power as being enabled by the *spirit* of God. In Luke 4:18, as Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah, he proclaims, “The *Spirit of the Lord* (πνεῦμα κυρίου) is upon me...” (Luke 4:17-18). This of course is in fulfillment of Isaiah’s messianic prophecy that the “Spirit of Yahweh” (רוּחַ יְהוָה) would rest on God’s anointed (Isa 11:2). Jesus understood his empowering for ministry as being through the spirit of God (or spirit of *the LORD*).

Jesus’ ministry is launched with the descent of God’s spirit upon him in bodily form “like a dove” (Mark 1:10 // Matt 3:16 // Luke 3:22 // John 1:32), and the Spirit then drives him into the wilderness. Jesus at various times is described as being “full of the Holy Spirit” (πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου), as in Luke 4:1, or as acting “in the power of the Spirit” (ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος), as in Luke 4:14. In Matthew 12:28 Jesus claims to drive out demons “by the Spirit of God” (ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ). It is also likely that Luke’s

use of “finger of God” in 11:20 would have been understood as the “Spirit of God,” since that was how the hand or finger of God was understood.<sup>255</sup>

Jesus recognized that the power available to him for miracles was directly associated not just with God generally, but with the presence of God’s *spirit*.<sup>256</sup> The idea of God empowering individuals through his spirit is found repeatedly in the Old Testament. Although the Spirit is most frequently associated with prophecy, there is also evidence that non-prophetic miraculous power is also connected with it. There is attestation in first-century Judaic writings that the Spirit was occasionally seen to be the source of the miraculous as well as prophecy. For Luke especially, the miracles of Jesus are directly attributable to the Spirit or the *power* of the Spirit.<sup>257</sup>

There is evidence that in its earlier stages of history, God’s “spirit” (רוּחַ) was seen as a kind of *power*, which could come over a person for a short period, enabling them for a particular task.<sup>258</sup> In Judges 14:6 the “Spirit of Yahweh” (רוּחַ יְהוָה) “comes upon” (צָלַח) Samson at various times, giving him extraordinary physical strength. Not only is רוּחַ also used for “wind” and “breath,” but verbs connoting “pour” are associated at times with it: שָׁפַךְ (Ezek 39:29; Joel 3,1.2), יָצַק (Isa 44:3), and עָרַה (nifal: Isa 32:5). This perhaps suggests a conception of the spirit as a type of fluid, or other palpable substance.<sup>259</sup>

When Luke speaks of Jesus operating in the δούλαμος of the Lord (5:17), it is most likely that he is referring to the empowering of the Holy Spirit for prophecy and

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 170.; Eitrem, 42.

<sup>256</sup> Barrett, 76.

<sup>257</sup> Twelftree, 168, 171.

<sup>258</sup> Petrus J. Gräbe, “Δούλαμος (in the Sense of Power) as a Pneumatological Concept in the Main Pauline Letters,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 36, no. 2 (1992): 227-8.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.: 228.

miracles.<sup>260</sup> This is clear because elsewhere Luke speaks specifically of the “power of the Spirit” (δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος, 4:14). These expressions tie the miracles of Jesus to his being filled with the power of the Spirit, and the Spirit of the Lord being upon him (4:18).<sup>261</sup> Similarly, Jesus tells his disciples that they will proclaim the gospel with power, saying, “You will receive *power* (δύναμις) when the Holy Spirit comes (ἐπέρχομαι) on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, TNIV, emphasis mine). Like Jesus’, their experience of God was not only as Father, but also as Spirit, and the Spirit as *power*.<sup>262</sup>

The usage of δύναμις in the sense of power for miracles is distinctly Lukan. While the third evangelist has regarded δύναμις as the *energy* of the Spirit, the usage in Mark and Matthew is instead eschatological, referring to the revelation of God’s power in the last days (Mark 9:1; 13:26; Matt 24:30).<sup>263</sup> For Luke, the Spirit is the source of God’s power in Jesus, which manifests itself occasionally in healings. The juxtaposition of δύναμις and πνεῦμα is uniquely Lukan (1:17; Acts 1:8; 10:38).<sup>264</sup> Likewise, we can deduce that for Luke, the phrase “power of the Lord” (δύναμις κυρίου) is synonymous with “Spirit of the Lord” (πνεῦμα κυρίου).<sup>265</sup> From the moment the Spirit descended upon

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<sup>260</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990), 91.

<sup>261</sup> Twelftree, 150-151.

<sup>262</sup> Dunn, 89.

<sup>263</sup> Barrett, 77.

<sup>264</sup> Nolland, 185.

<sup>265</sup> Green, 240.

Jesus, the power of God was with him (3:22; 4:1, 14, 18-19; and cf. Acts 10:38).<sup>266</sup>

According to Luke, Jesus' awareness of spiritual power flowing through him was the source of his knowledge that God's spirit was ready to act through him, in healing and exorcism. It was likewise the source of his *authority*.<sup>267</sup> Luke clearly saw God's (Holy) spirit as the source of Jesus' ability to perform miracles.<sup>268</sup>

### Some Observations

There is some debate as to whether the power resident in Jesus is an independent entity, sometimes acting apart from Jesus' will. We will examine this idea more thoroughly when we consider the story of the hemorrhaging woman below, but first a few observations should be made. Morton Smith, in his landmark work on Jesus as magician, asserts that the power in Jesus "was thought to work of itself, like an electric charge, without his volition."<sup>269</sup> Likewise, Graham Twelftree acknowledges that the power is "understood as an impersonal force so powerful that it works independently of Jesus, as well as immediately and impersonally in response to the contact of a believer."<sup>270</sup> While these assertions are based upon limited evidence, primarily the hemorrhaging woman story and a few other instances in Luke, those examples strongly suggest that the power could sometimes work independently of Jesus' will.

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<sup>266</sup> Nolland, 238.

<sup>267</sup> Dunn, 47.

<sup>268</sup> Twelftree, 338.

<sup>269</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 127.

<sup>270</sup> Twelftree, 338.

In addition to the apparently independent nature of this power, there is also evidence that Jesus experienced fluctuations in the power, and that the power was not unlimited or immediately effective. Apart from the incident in Mark 6 when Jesus could not do many miracles, there is some indication that Jesus had more power for healing at some times than at others.<sup>271</sup> Luke records in one instance that “the power of the Lord was present (ἦν) for him to heal the sick” (Luke 5:17), which likely suggests that there were other times when the power was not present, or was present in a lesser degree. Also, there is an instance where a healing is not immediately and completely effective: the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26). The first attempt at healing is only partially successful, some sight is restored but the man can only see general shapes, so Jesus “again” (πάλιν) touches the man’s eyes to restore his sight completely.

### **Magical Techniques**

We now examine Jesus’ miracles in terms of his use of magical formulas. The use of techniques that are in themselves automatically effective is one of the hallmarks of magic. The only regularly occurring motifs that may be considered technique or ritual would be Jesus’ use of the *word of command* in exorcism and healing, and his use of touch (esp. Matt 20:34; Mark 7:33; Luke 22:51). Less frequent, but nevertheless significant, is the preservation of Jesus’ Aramaic healing commands (Mark 5:41; 7:34), his “sigh” (στενάζω) in Mark 7:34, and his use of saliva (Mark 7:33; 8:23; John 9:6).<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>272</sup> Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 223.

As Twelftree acknowledges of the third evangelist, “Luke does not question that Jesus used the same techniques and procedures as his contemporaries.”<sup>273</sup>

### Secret Words and Groans

There is suggestion by some scholars that the preservation of two healing commands in Aramaic is evidence that these were considered secret, magical words.<sup>274</sup> However, because Aramaic was in all likelihood the mother tongue of Jesus, it is more likely that these are recorded as the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, rather than *voces magicae*.<sup>275</sup> Also, regarding Jesus’ use of the Aramaic *Ephphatha* in Mark 7:34, it is unlikely that Mark understands this as a secret, magical word, for he translates it for his Gentile readers as the un-mysterious “be opened.” Most likely, these Aramaic words, including *abba*, were retained for emphasis and dramatic effect when the stories were translated into Greek.<sup>276</sup> Likewise, the rest of Jesus’ words of command were simple imperatives, such as, “Be clean!” (καθαρίσθητι) or, “Come out of him!” (ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ).

Perhaps more suspicious is the recording in Mark of Jesus that, “He looked up to heaven and *with a deep sigh* said to him, ‘*Ephphatha!*’” (7:34, TNIV, emphasis mine). Hull suggests, “It seems likely that this is a case of sympathetic magic, the sighing being in imitation not only of the restoration of speech, but as Menzies’ description suggests, of

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<sup>273</sup> Twelftree, 181, 265.

<sup>274</sup> Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 223.

<sup>275</sup> Aune, 1534.

<sup>276</sup> Twelftree, 80-81, 323.

forcing out the in-dwelling demon.”<sup>277</sup> There are indeed parallels in the PGM of “sighing” (στενάζω) as a form of sympathetic magic. However, although there are only a few accounts given of Jesus’ mood in healing stories,<sup>278</sup> it is most likely that Jesus’ sigh here is a simple expression of emotion or a kind of silent prayer. In the other five occurrences of this verb in the New Testament, there is no connotation of magic (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:2, 4; Heb 13:17; James 5:9). There is likewise no indication that the twenty-seven occurrences of στενάζω in the Septuagint have magical associations.<sup>279</sup> As S. Eitrem suggests, a sigh is an expression as natural to cult as to magic.<sup>280</sup>

### Physical Touch

There is evidence that the use of touch was considered a magical means of healing and exorcism. There are many magical parallels to the idea that the *laying-on-of-hands* was a means to protect people from illness or demons.<sup>281</sup> The use of physical touch is likewise present in many pagan miracle stories.<sup>282</sup> In regard to Jesus’ putting his finger in the ears of the deaf-mute (Mark 7:33), Hull remarks, “It is noteworthy that Jesus thrusts his fingers into the man’s ears, and this can be understood in the light of exorcism. The evil spirit must make its exit through a particular part of the body, through an extremity,

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<sup>277</sup> Hull, 84.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Tob 3:1; 1 Macc 1:26; 4 Macc 9:21; Job 9:27; 18:20; 24:12; 30:25; 31:38; Wis 5:3; Sir 30:20; 36:25; Nah 3:7; Isa 19:8; 21:2; 24:7; 30:15; 46:8; 59:10; Jer 38:19; Lam 1:8, 21; Ezek 21:11, 12; 26:15, 16

<sup>280</sup> Eitrem, 55.

<sup>281</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 118.

<sup>282</sup> Barrett, 84.

or an orifice.”<sup>283</sup> The use of touch also might suggest a *manistic* understanding of power, where the more power (*mana*) someone possesses, the more they are able to transfer through touch. Therefore the hand, especially the right hand and fingers, plays a great role in some magical healing.<sup>284</sup>

In the pagan Greco-Roman world, there was a widespread idea that power resides in and emanates from certain individuals or objects, including their clothing, and was communicable by touch.<sup>285</sup> It was said of Asklepios (a Greek god of medicine) and Hygieia (his daughter), “They held out their hands to the sick, and a healing force flowed from these hands,” and that Asklepios “touched the diseased eyes, mouth, ears, etc., of those who sought healing in incubation in the temple at Epidaurus.”<sup>286</sup> Physical touch is considered an essential part of healing, providing for the transfer of numinous power from the miracle-worker to the patient.<sup>287</sup> However, there is no evidence that Jesus considered his hands magical instruments, or that he protected his hands with amulets, as was the frequent practice of magicians.<sup>288</sup> Also, while healing touch is a common motif in Hellenistic traditions associated with the gods, it is only very rarely associated with humans.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Hull, 83.

<sup>284</sup> Loos, 313.

<sup>285</sup> Harold Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, ed. Howard Clark Kee, *Understanding Jesus Today* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21.; Kahl, 106.

<sup>286</sup> Loos, 313-4.

<sup>287</sup> Kahl, 106.

<sup>288</sup> Loos, 315.

<sup>289</sup> Aune, 1533.

### *Laying-on-of-Hands*

There is some Old Testament background to the concept of healing through contact. In two significant examples, there is a transfer of healing power through physical contact by a prophetic figure. In 1 Kings 17:17-24 is the story of the widow's son who dies. Elijah then takes the boy upstairs and "he *stretched himself out on the boy three times* and cried to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!'" (1 Kgs 17:21, emphasis mine). Similarly in 2 Kings 4:18-37, Elisha revives a boy in the following way:

He got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more (2 Kgs 4:34-35).

There is also an account in the Genesis Apocryphon of how Abram laid his hands on the king of Egypt, who was afflicted with a disease, in order that he might live:

Then Harkenosh came to me, beseeching me to go to the king and to pray for him and to lay my hands upon him that he might live...So I prayed [for him]...and I laid my hands on his [head]; and the scourge departed from him and the evil [spirit] was expelled [from him], and he lived.<sup>290</sup>

There is some evidence that Jesus' use of touch was inspired by or connected to the Old Testament practice of laying-on-of-hands. The use of hands in blessing is widespread in the Old Testament. In several instances, verbal blessings are accompanied by touch or the laying-on-of-hands (Gen 24:2-9; 47:29; 48:14-18). The laying-on-of-hands was integral to the sacrificial system, and was considered the way in which iniquity was transferred to the animal before slaughter (Lev 1:4; 3:2-13; 4:4, 24-33). More

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<sup>290</sup> 1Qap Gen<sup>ar</sup> 20:21-30 (Vermes)

significant for our study, it was clear that authority or power could be passed through the laying-on-of-hands, as is understood when Moses lays hands on Joshua.<sup>291</sup> Yahweh said, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him... Give him some of your authority (וַתְּתֵן מִהוֹרָהְ עָלָיו),” which is literally “put your power *on* him” (Num 27:18-20). Likewise, in the New Testament, the laying-on-of-hands was observed in healing the sick (Mark 1:41; 6:5; 16:18; Luke 4:40; Acts 28:8), blessing (Matt 19:13-15; Mark 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 5:22), and the imparting of spiritual gifts (Acts 8:17; 19:6; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).<sup>292</sup>

### *The Hand of God*

The “hand of Yahweh” (יַד־יְהוָה) is a regular expression in the Old Testament, referring to God’s mighty and active power. For example, the hand of Yahweh is attributed to the mighty acts of power that delivered Israel from Egypt (Exod 9:3; 13:3-16; Isa 19:16) and to God’s creative power (Job 12:9). Many occurrences represent the hand of Yahweh being used punitively against his enemies (e.g. 1 Sam 5:6-9; 7:13; 12:15). In contrast, the hand of Yahweh also represents God’s graciousness or saving power (Isa 25:10; 41:20; 59:1; 66:14). In all these instances, God is personified in his hand, and represents Yahweh himself.<sup>293</sup>

In several instances the יַד־יְהוָה is described in terms of “coming upon” (verb נָפַל) or “on” (prep. עַל) someone, in a manner much like that described of the Spirit. Similarly,

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<sup>291</sup> Evans, 81.

<sup>292</sup> Robert F. O'Toole and David P. Wright, "Hands, Laying on Of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:47-49.

<sup>293</sup> Loos, 313.

the ability to prophesy (generally an activity empowered by the Spirit) is also connected with the hand of Yahweh: “The hand of the LORD (יְדֵי־יְהוָה) came upon Elisha and he said, ‘This is what the LORD says’” (2 Kgs 3:15-16). Likewise in Judah, the “Hand of God (יְדֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) was “put on” (נָתַן) the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered” (2 Chr 30:12). Of Ezekiel it says, “There [by the Kebar River] the hand of Yahweh was upon him” (עָלָיו שָׁם יַד־יְהוָה), and he then began to see visions. In three other instances the hand of Yahweh comes upon Ezekiel in prophetic power (8:1; 37:1; 40:1).

### *Jesus' Healing Touch*

Jesus certainly did not introduce any sort of novel gesture when he applied his hand to children for protection or benediction. Touch in this respect is really a gesture of sovereign power.<sup>294</sup> Neither was it a novel gesture when he stretched out his hand to heal the leper, or when laying his hands on sick people. While there is no direct Old Testament precedent for the laying-on-of-hands for healing, this too was a sign of power and authority over sickness, representing God’s own hand. Luke especially, in describing Jesus’ use of healing touch, is “drawing attention to the power of God active in and through him.”<sup>295</sup>

All three Synoptists are in agreement that physical touch was considered to facilitate the transfer of healing power, both by those who petition Jesus and (by inference) Jesus himself. Mark is the most explicit, writing, “They begged him to let

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<sup>294</sup> Eitrem, 43.

<sup>295</sup> Green, 226.

them touch even the edge of his cloak (κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ), and all (ὅσος) who touched (ἄπτω) him were healed” (Mark 6:56 // Matt 14:36). In several other instances (Mark 3:10; 5:28; 8:22; Luke 6:19), it is clear that the petitioners believe physical touch to be important for healing, and the evangelists do nothing to dissuade the reader from believing that both they and Jesus shared this view.

In light of this evidence, the most proper context for Jesus’ use of physical touch in healing is the Old Testament *hand of Yahweh*, which conveys a beneficent power that can rest on people. Also significant for our study is the transfer of healing power through physical contact that we find in the stories of Elijah and Elisha.<sup>296</sup> While we find in the Gospels the suggestion that healing power is transmittable through contact, we do not need to attribute Jesus’ use of touch to Hellenistic ideas of magical *mana*. It seems clear that “what is said symbolically in the Old Testament about the hand of God manifests itself concretely in the New Testament in the hand of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>297</sup>

### Saliva

More problematic than Jesus’ use of touch is the use of “saliva” or “spitting” (πτύσμα, πτύω) in healing (Mark 7:33; 8:23; John 9:6), for both spittle and the act of spitting were commonly believed to have magical powers. Therefore Morton Smith concludes that, “We find Jesus, like other magicians, smearing spittle on his patients or using a salve made with spittle.”<sup>298</sup> Similarly, John Hull concludes, “The use of spittle

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<sup>296</sup> Loos, 316.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>298</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 128.

was not recommended because of its rational therapeutic value but because of its efficacy as healing magic.”<sup>299</sup> However, is it necessary to interpret Jesus’ use of saliva as magical?

There is nothing to suggest that the use of spittle in healing was any more or less magical than the act of touching. In fact, the evidence would suggest that the use of saliva was an enhanced form of touch. As Eitrem notes, “Spittle, like every secretion of the body and, indeed the πνεῦμα itself, is by itself a vehicle of δύναμις.”<sup>300</sup> We do not find any evidence that Jesus considered the use of spittle a *technique*, as it is only used in three healing stories. Jesus healed the blind and the deaf both with *and without* saliva, and there is no suggestion in the New Testament that the apostles or the early church made use of saliva in healing.

Jesus’ use of spittle is not magical, but neither is it *medicinal*. By way of comparison, there is no evidence that saliva was used in the ancient world to heal deafness, as Jesus does (Mark 7:32-37). Neither do we find Jesus using other popular medical methods such as *blowing* a sickness *away* from the patient.”<sup>301</sup> Although Jesus at times compares himself to a “physician” (ἰσχύοντες; Matt 9:12 // Mark 2:17 // Luke 5:31; Luke 4:23), he does so only in citing popular proverbs.<sup>302</sup> Finally, unlike doctors, Jesus never gave directions or instructions about natural remedies to those he healed or to his followers.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Hull, 78.

<sup>300</sup> Eitrem, 56.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 59-60.

<sup>302</sup> Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 67.

<sup>303</sup> Hull, 75.

### Conclusion: Jesus and Magical Techniques

There is evidence that Jesus used certain techniques in his healings, notably physical touch and the use of saliva, which were common to other Palestinian holy men and Old Testament prophets.<sup>304</sup> However, the nature of the stories suggest that he was not dependent upon them, or at the very least, they constitute a minority of cases. Jesus healed both with and without physical touch, and the majority of healings were without any use of saliva. Most healings were performed by a simple command and some were accomplished from a distance (e.g. Matt 8:5-13 // Luke 7:2-10). Also, unlike Hellenistic magicians who would perform in secret and with whispers, Jesus performed his cures openly, allowing people to hear his words and clearly observe his actions.<sup>305</sup>

There is no suggestion in the Bible that Jesus made use of any magical media or formulas, such as we find in the PGM.<sup>306</sup> Indeed, the Gospels are distinguished by their lack of details concerning Jesus' healing practices. Most indicate only a short healing command and perhaps a brief touch. On the other hand, a typical feature of pagan miracle stories is interest in the specific details of how a miracle-worker brought about his wonder.<sup>307</sup> Yet in the stories of Jesus we find "no lengthy incantations, endless lists of esoteric names and unintelligible words, amulets, charms, or recipes of foodstuffs to be boiled."<sup>308</sup> Rather, we see the healings performed with authority accorded to Jesus by his

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<sup>304</sup> Twelftree, 266.

<sup>305</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, "The Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 557.

<sup>306</sup> Meier, 545.

<sup>307</sup> Kahl, 104.

<sup>308</sup> Meier, 548.

*relationship* with the Father, and in conjunction with a *relationship* between Jesus and the petitioners.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Grundmann, 2:302.

**Pericope Study: The Woman With the Hemorrhage**

Matthew 9:20-22	Mark 5:24b-34	Luke 8:42b-48
<p><sup>20</sup>Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ αἰμορροοῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη</p> <p>προσελθοῦσα ὀπισθεν ἤψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ. <sup>21</sup>ἔλεγεν γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ· ἂν μόνον ἄψωμαι τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι.</p> <p><sup>22</sup>ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς στραφεὶς καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὴν εἶπεν· θάρσει, θύγατερ· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. καὶ ἐσώθη ἡ γυνὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης.</p>	<p><sup>24b</sup>καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ὄχλος πολὺς καὶ συνέθλιβον αὐτόν.</p> <p><sup>25</sup>Καὶ γυνὴ οὖσα ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος δώδεκα ἔτη <sup>26</sup>καὶ πολλὰ παθοῦσα ὑπὸ πολλῶν ἰατρῶν καὶ δαπανήσασα τὰ παρ' αὐτῆς πάντα καὶ μηδὲν ὠφεληθεῖσα ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον εἰς τὸ χεῖρον ἐλθοῦσα, <sup>27</sup>ἀκούσασα περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλθοῦσα ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ ὀπισθεν ἤψατο τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ. <sup>28</sup>ἔλεγεν γὰρ ὅτι ἂν ἄψωμαι κἂν τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι.</p> <p><sup>29</sup>καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξηράνθη ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς καὶ ἔγνω τῷ σώματι ὅτι ἴαται ἀπὸ τῆς μάστιγος. <sup>30</sup>καὶ εὐθὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐπιγνοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξεληθοῦσαν ἐπιστραφεὶς ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ ἔλεγεν· τίς μου ἤψατο τῶν ἱματίων; <sup>31</sup>καὶ ἔλεγον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· βλέπεις τὸν ὄχλον συνθλίβοντά σε καὶ λέγεις· τίς μου ἤψατο; <sup>32</sup>καὶ περιεβλέπετο ἰδεῖν τὴν τοῦτο ποιήσασαν. <sup>33</sup>ἡ δὲ γυνὴ φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα, εἰδυῖα ὃ γέγονεν αὐτῇ, ἦλθεν καὶ προσέπεσεν αὐτῷ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν. <sup>34</sup>ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· θυγάτηρ, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε· ὑπάγε εἰς εἰρήνην καὶ ἴσθι ὑγιῆς ἀπὸ τῆς μάστιγός σου.</p>	<p><sup>42b</sup>Ἐν δὲ τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτόν οἱ ὄχλοι συνέπνιγον αὐτόν. <sup>43</sup>Καὶ γυνὴ οὖσα ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος ἀπὸ ἑτῶν δώδεκα, ἣτις [ἰατροῖς προσαναλώσασα ὅλον τὸν βίον] οὐκ ἴσχυσεν ἀπ' οὐδενὸς θεραπευθῆναι,</p> <p><sup>44</sup>προσελθοῦσα ὀπισθεν ἤψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ καὶ παραχρῆμα ἔστη ἡ ῥύσις τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς.</p> <p>cf. v. 46</p> <p><sup>45</sup>καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς· τίς ὁ ἀψάμενός μου; ἀρνούμενων δὲ πάντων εἶπεν ὁ Πέτρος· ἐπιστάτα, οἱ ὄχλοι συνέχουσίν σε καὶ ἀποθλίβουσιν. <sup>46</sup>ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἤψατό μού τις, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔγνω δύναμιν ἐξεληλυθυῖαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ.</p> <p><sup>47</sup>ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γυνὴ ὅτι οὐκ ἔλαθεν, τρέμουσα ἦλθεν καὶ προσπεσοῦσα αὐτῷ δι' ἣν αἰτίαν ἤψατο αὐτοῦ ἀπήγγειλεν ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ὡς ἰάθη παραχρῆμα. <sup>48</sup>ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· θυγάτηρ, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε· πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην.</p>

In the story of the hemorrhaging woman we find a healing that arguably has the most magical overtones of them all. As John Meier notes, “Those who wish to classify Jesus as a magician find this story a star witness. Conservative scholars, caught in exegetical straits, must maintain the story’s historicity while trying to downplay or explain away the magical element.”<sup>310</sup> The portrayal here of δύναις is seemingly as an independent, automatic, *manistic* power, which is transferred through clothing. However, in order to determine whether this story truly portrays a magical healing, we must examine the background and gospel tradition carefully.

#### According to Mark

The petitioner in Mark and Luke is a “woman having a flow of blood” (γυνή οὔσα ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος) for twelve years. Matthew has a “woman experiencing a loss of blood” (γυνή αἰμορροοῦσα). The woman’s flow of blood (most likely uterine hemorrhaging), besides causing physical suffering, would also have resulted in isolation from social interaction and worship.<sup>311</sup> According to the laws of Leviticus, she would have been perpetually unclean (Lev 12:2-5; 15:19-33; 18:19; 20:18) and anyone or anything she touched would also be unclean. Therefore in this story we have a *crossing of borders*; a woman who resolves to cross the borders of legitimate behavior to access Jesus’ divine power.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Meier, 709.

<sup>311</sup> Marshall, 104.

<sup>312</sup> Green, 347.

The abundance of aorist participles in the opening sentence of Mark’s version (παθοῦσα, δαπανήσασα, ὠφεληθεῖσα, ἐλθοῦσα, ἀκούσασα), which is not matched elsewhere in his Gospel, conveys to the audience the “relentless compounding of the woman’s need over a twelve-year span...as the necessary background for perceiving the motivation of faith behind her secret approach.”<sup>313</sup> The woman described seems beyond all hope of help, as Mark records her unsuccessful results with “doctors” (ἰατρούς). She clearly believed that she must touch Jesus in order to be healed, for Mark records her thoughts as, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be saved” (5:28). However, her dilemma is that to touch Jesus would be to contaminate him with her uncleanness. Therefore, her solution is to sneak up behind Jesus unnoticed, amidst the crowd, and secretly touch him.<sup>314</sup>

Mark describes the healing as occurring “immediately” (εὐθύς) in response to the woman’s touch, and Jesus is only aware afterward, as he senses that “power had gone out from him” (τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξελοῦσαν). However, he does not know who has touched him, and asks his disciples, “Who touched my clothes?” In this way, Mark describes Jesus’ healing ability as involving a sort of substance-like energy that can flow from him *independently* through touch, in response to faith.<sup>315</sup> This conception of healing power, as though it were like an electric charge or current, is considered by many scholars to indicate a magical understanding on the part of Mark. According to John Hull, this earliest Gospel had “become saturated with the outlook of Hellenistic magic. The

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<sup>313</sup> Marshall, 104.

<sup>314</sup> Meier, 709.

<sup>315</sup> Twelftree, 75.

Jewish Son of Man was already radiant with the mysterious magical power of the Hellenistic wonder-working Saviour.”<sup>316</sup>

Despite the conception of δύναμις as a power that is transmitted through physical contact and which works independently of Jesus’ volition, Mark corrects any magical understanding when he emphasizes the role of faith.<sup>317</sup> Jesus does not continue on his way, but seeks out the person who literally reached out to him. Upon discovering who touched him and why, he declares, “Your faith has healed you” (ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέυ σε). In this way he *reinterprets* the actual means of her healing from one of magic to one of faith.<sup>318</sup> Jesus in no way repudiates her act of touching, but suggests that her *faith* was instrumental (if not the source) of her healing. This was no accidental brush with a stranger; it was a risky endeavor to make physical contact with the person of Jesus, if even his garment.

#### According to Luke

In the Gospel of Luke, the miracles take on an important role in validating Jesus’ ministry. For Luke especially, the miracles demonstrate that God is the source of Jesus’ powers.<sup>319</sup> Distinctly Lukan is the attribution by the crowds of Jesus’ miraculous healings to God (5:25-26; 7:16; 9:43; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43).<sup>320</sup> These miracles provide evidence

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<sup>316</sup> Hull, 142-3.

<sup>317</sup> Meier, 709.

<sup>318</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 299.

<sup>319</sup> Green, 198.

<sup>320</sup> Achtemeier: 549-54.

that God, or God's spirit, is at work in Jesus.<sup>321</sup> Also, more than in Mark or Matthew, Jesus' teachings are balanced by his miracles, and miracles are portrayed as leading to legitimate, saving faith. To perceive miracles and mighty acts is clearly a basis for trust and discipleship in Luke.<sup>322</sup> In Luke, as in Mark and Matthew, it is the woman's "faith" (πίστις), demonstrated by her touching Jesus' clothes, that saves her. It is in light of these Lukan emphases that we must interpret the story of the hemorrhaging woman.

As is typical for Luke, he adapts the story so that the focus is shifted away from the recipient of the miracle and toward Jesus.<sup>323</sup> Luke shortens Mark's detailed description of the woman's worsening condition and unsuccessful attempts to obtain healing, and merely mentions that nobody could cure her. Neither do we have Mark's description of the woman's inner thoughts, only that she approached Jesus from behind to touch him. It is likely that this omission is due to Luke's belief that the woman's hope contained an element of superstition. As Vernon K. Robbins observes, "The logic in the story is logic about Jesus and his powers, not about a logical progression from the woman's reasoning about healing to an occurrence of the healing."<sup>324</sup>

As in Mark, Jesus is aware that "power has gone out" (aorist participle in Mark, perfect in Luke) of him, but Jesus' inner awareness of the transfer is no longer recorded. Instead we immediately have Jesus' question, "Who touched me?" and later his verbalization that "power has gone out from me" (8:45, 46). Luke includes the fact that

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<sup>321</sup> Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, 58.

<sup>322</sup> Achtemeier: 554-6.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*: 549.

<sup>324</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "The Woman Who Touched Jesus' Garment: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Synoptic Accounts.," *New Testament Studies* 33, no. 4 (1987): 513.

everybody “denied” (ἀρνέομαι) touching him (8:45), and further suggests the woman’s desire to remain anonymous by adding that the woman saw that she could not “go unnoticed” (λανθάνω). Also, Luke changes Jesus’ initial question from “Who touched *my clothes?*” to “Who touched *me?*”, shifting attention from the garment to Jesus and perhaps emphasizing that it is contact with the person of Jesus that is significant, not merely his cloak.<sup>325</sup>

Luke, with Mark, records the immediate cure of the woman’s bleeding upon her touching of Jesus’ clothes, before Jesus is aware of her identity. There is also the enigmatic mention of δύναμις as an objective force or substance, which simultaneously “goes out” (ἐξέρχομαι) of Jesus as he is touched, effecting the healing. The idea that healing power goes out of Jesus when he is touched is a major premise in Luke (6:19; 8:46).<sup>326</sup> Hull suggests that the concept of power is more prominent and precise in Luke than elsewhere in the New Testament because for Luke, “Power occupies a place in his theory of the relationships between representatives of the spiritual world and mankind.”<sup>327</sup>

While Luke’s use of δύναμις is thought by some to suggest a magical worldview,<sup>328</sup> there are also indications that Luke views Jesus’ miracles in less magical ways than his sources.<sup>329</sup> John Hull describes δύναμις and ἐξουσία in Luke as weapons in

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<sup>325</sup> Nolland, 420.

<sup>326</sup> Robbins: 512.

<sup>327</sup> Hull, 107.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 87, 144.

<sup>329</sup> Achtemeier: 557.

a cosmic conflict, which he argues “is the framework of a magical universe.”<sup>330</sup> Luke indeed has a particular emphasis on Jesus’ battling of diabolical forces in both exorcism *and* healing.<sup>331</sup> Notable is how Jesus “rebuked” (ἐπιτιμάω) Peter’s mother-in-law’s fever (4:39), a verb that elsewhere is related to exorcism, and nowhere else is used for healings.

In spite of Luke’s use of δύναμις, there is no evidence that his worldview is any more magical than that of the other evangelists. While Luke suggests that objects (in this case clothes) coming from or connected to Jesus are an effective means of cure, he is reflecting a belief that pervades all four Gospels (see Mark 5:25-34; 8:22-26; Matt 9:20-22; John 9:1-7).<sup>332</sup> Also, Luke omits Mark’s healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), with its use of spittle and its two-stage healing, omits the healing of the deaf-mute (7:31-37), with its use of spittle, groaning, and the Aramaic *Ephphatha*, and omits the Aramaic *Talitha koum* from the healing of Jairus’ daughter (5:41). These stories are most frequently cited as reflecting magical practices, including the foreign “word of power.”

With Mark and Matthew, Luke makes it clear that the hemorrhaging woman’s faith was requisite for her healing, “Daughter, your faith has healed you” (8:48). Paul Achtemeier rightly observes, “That Luke is writing for people who understood, and perhaps even credited, magical practices could hardly be denied; but he does more, I would argue, to combat such belief than he does, if only inadvertently, to foster it”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Hull, 87.

<sup>331</sup> Green, 198.

<sup>332</sup> Achtemeier: 556.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*: 558.

## According to Matthew

As does Mark, Matthew records the thoughts of the bleeding woman approaching Jesus, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed” (9:21). However, in this much-shortened version of the story there is no mention of the transfer of δύνამις, or Jesus’ awareness of it, and the healing is only effected after Jesus’ pronouncement, “Your faith has healed you” (9:22). Upon these words, Matthew states that she was healed “from that moment” (ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης). As Hull describes:

Matthew changes the order of the healing so that the woman is not healed by the touching of the cloak and there is no power, no miracle-working aura surrounding Jesus which the superstitious can tap. The impersonal atmosphere of compulsion in Mark’s account, where the woman manages to control the power for herself, is transformed into a personal faith relationship.<sup>334</sup>

Matthew’s alteration of this narrative has suggested to many that Matthew has purged what he considered magical elements from the story.<sup>335</sup> At the very least, he was “conscious of some embarrassment about the story.”<sup>336</sup> He brings the woman’s healing into direct relationship with Jesus’ healing command, and removes any feature of the story that might have suggested a magical miracle. This was due, it is thought, to a reaction by Matthew against magic, and his awareness that certain techniques of Jesus might be construed as such. Like Luke, Matthew omits Mark’s technique-laden stories of the deaf-mute and the blind man of Bethsaida. And in the Beelzebul controversy, where Luke has Jesus driving out spirits “by the finger of God” (ἐν δακτύλῳ θεοῦ), Matthew has

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<sup>334</sup> Hull, 136.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>336</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, 1st American ed., *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 346.

him driving them out “by the Spirit of God” (ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ). There is suggestion that this change is explained by the association *finger of God* had with magical technique.<sup>337</sup>

Matthew tends to prune away graphic details and focus on the request for healing and Jesus’ healing command.<sup>338</sup> Luke (like Mark) will summarize Jesus’ healings vividly; “And laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.” (4:40-41, TNIV). The same scene is described by Matthew with more subdued language that is free of details; “He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick” (8:16). Matthew describes the ease and simplicity with which Jesus the Messiah performed his miracles, unlike the magician who must rely on magical words and techniques.<sup>339</sup>

### The Woman’s Faith

Commentators on this passage agree that faith is the predominant theme for all three Synoptists. Augustine commented, “Few are they who by faith touch him; multitudes are they who throng about him.”<sup>340</sup> We know that many are pressing in upon Jesus, but only with the woman’s touch is there a transfer of power and a healing. We can only speculate as to whether there are other sick persons among the multitude who come into contact with Jesus, but if there are (and it seems likely), we can deduce that healing

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<sup>337</sup> Hull, 129, 144.

<sup>338</sup> Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, 45-46.

<sup>339</sup> Hull, 135.

<sup>340</sup> Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 75.

power does not go out to all of them.<sup>341</sup> Indeed, there can be no doubt that it is not merely the touch that conveys healing, but that both conscious intention and faith are required as well.<sup>342</sup> As I. Howard Marshall describes, “The woman’s faith has saved her because it has permitted the ‘going forth power’ of Jesus to do its intended work in her life... Faith saves because it allows God’s saving power in Jesus to save.”<sup>343</sup>

While all three evangelists clearly indicate the role of faith in the woman’s healing, we do not know for certain the nature of her faith. While it was likely not in Jesus’ divinity, it was at least in his ability.<sup>344</sup> She knows of Jesus as a powerful miracle-worker, one who emanates healing power from his person, but likely does not have any awareness of his messiahship. As Friedrich Preisigke observed, in his important work *Die Gotteskraft Der Fruehchristlichen Zeit*:

Diese πίστις ist lediglich der hausbackene Glaube an die Heilwirkung der δύναμις, an das selbständige Dasein und Wirken dieser in Christus stärker als anderswo wohnhaften Gotteskraft, die man, ohne Christus persönlich zu behelligen, aus seinem Mantel herauslocken kann. Nur mit dieser Kraft will das Weib zu tun haben, *nicht mit Christus*. Wie man zum Wasserholen an den Brunnen geht, der das Wasser spendet, so geht das kranke Weib zum Mantel Christi, um die Heilkraft abzufangen.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Loos, 516.

<sup>342</sup>“To ask whether it is faith or δύναμις that heals the woman is the same as asking whether it is water or the act of drinking that quenches thirst, or whether it is our legs or the power of motion that carries us forward. Each needs the other to achieve the desired end.” Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 108-9.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Eric E. May, "...For Power Went Forth from Him..." (Luke 6:19)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1952): 98.

<sup>345</sup>Friedrich Preisigke, "Die Gotteskraft Der Frühchristlichen Zeit," in *Wunderbegriff Im Neuen Testament* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 213. “This πίστις is just a very basic faith in the healing power of δύναμις, faith in the independent existence and work of the divine power which lives in Christ and is there stronger than anywhere else, and which one can beckon out of his garment without personal interaction

While we know for sure only that the woman desires healing, Jesus' response to her touch makes it clear that he wishes more for her. For Mark especially, salvation is the activity of God, which suggests perhaps her faith is in God's saving action.<sup>346</sup> Nevertheless, while the woman seeks to be "saved" (σώζω), Mark makes it clear that her touch brings only physical healing (ἰάομαι) of her body (τῷ σώματι). The various uses of σώζω in the New Testament make it clear that the concept of healing and salvation overlap, and are not completely distinguishable. As in this story, "Healing of the body is never purely physical, and the salvation of the soul is never purely spiritual, but both are combined in the total deliverance of the whole man."<sup>347</sup>

While the woman may think that she has obtained what she needs with her physical healing, Jesus sees it differently. The woman needs contact with Jesus himself to be fully saved, and not simply anonymous access to his power. The woman has to realize that "power in religion without personal relationship and public commitment is little better than superstition or magic."<sup>348</sup> It is for this reason that Jesus pauses his journey to search her out, and why he requires her to come forward and acknowledge her action before the whole crowd. Jesus concludes with a familial term of affection, "daughter"

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with Christ. The woman is just interested in the power, not in Christ. As someone goes to a well in order to get water, which gives water, in the same way the sick woman goes to the garment of Christ in order to receive the healing power."

<sup>346</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 108.

<sup>347</sup> John Wilkinson, *Health and Healing: Studies in New Testament Principles and Practice* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980), 33.

<sup>348</sup> Nolland, 423.

(θυγάτηρ), further emphasizing the establishment of a personal bond between him and the woman.<sup>349</sup>

### The Tassels of Jesus' Garment

While it is clear that all three authors have discouraged a magical interpretation of the woman's healing, we are still left with the task of understanding her touch of Jesus' garment. Clearly she believes that a mere touch will heal her, and in both Mark and Luke her belief is justified. Mark has already mentioned Jesus' clothes as instrumental in healings (3:10), and will do so again (6:56). What we must explore is *why* people (including the woman) believe that physical contact was necessary for her healing.

Matthew and Luke have the woman touching the "edge" (κράσπεδον) of Jesus' cloak. This is likely a reference to the "tassels" (צִיִּצִית) that Jewish men of Jesus' time wore at the corners of their garments, according to Old Testament law (Num 15:38-40; Deut 22:12).<sup>350</sup> According to Jewish literature, it was believed that the tassels of a holy man possessed magical powers.<sup>351</sup> There is also evidence of belief in the special power of clothing in the Old Testament, such as in Elijah's mantle (2 Kgs 2:8-14).<sup>352</sup> Similarly, within wider Christian circles (cf. Luke 6:19; Acts 5:15; 19:12), there existed a belief that healing power could be transmitted through a healer's possessions or clothing.<sup>353</sup> The

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<sup>349</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 106-8.

<sup>350</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (1-9): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 746.

<sup>351</sup> Evans, 138.

<sup>352</sup> Twelftree, 133.

<sup>353</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 105-6.

gospel authors seem to share the view that clothing is an extension of and carries with it a person's power and authority.<sup>354</sup> The woman, like many of her contemporaries, believes that a person's power communicated itself through the clothing they wore.<sup>355</sup>

Having the woman believe that she "only" needed to touch his garment, or even just the *tassel* of the garment, also draws attention to her faith in Jesus' ability to heal. The act of touching is an expression of her faith in him as a powerful healer.<sup>356</sup> It is also possible that Matthew and Luke are interpreting the woman's action as a fulfillment of messianic prophecy; "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the *hem of his robe* (ἤμα) and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8:23, emphasis mine).<sup>357</sup>

#### Δύναμις Power

The understanding of δύναμις as an objectively discernable, emanating force, which transmits healing through touch, is most clearly seen in the story of the hemorrhaging woman in Mark and Luke. While we cannot deny that this healing power was transmitted instantly through touch, and prior to Jesus' awareness of who touched him, the story as a whole does not lend itself to a magical, *manistic* interpretation of Jesus' power.

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<sup>354</sup> Twelftree, 133.

<sup>355</sup> Loos, 514.

<sup>356</sup> Twelftree, 118-9.

<sup>357</sup> John T. Cummings, "The Tassel of His Cloak: Mark, Luke, Matthew -- and Zechariah," in *Studia Biblica 1978*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 51-52.

Scholars have long argued that the seemingly automatic healing should be interpreted as demonstrating a *manistic* understanding of Jesus' healing power. David Friedrich Strauss, demonstrating the mythological nature of the Gospels in his seminal *The Life of Jesus*, compares Jesus in this story to “a charged electrical battery, which a mere touch will discharge.”<sup>358</sup> This power radiated some sort of field around Jesus, which included his clothes.<sup>359</sup> The reference to δυνάμεις (pl. of δύναμις) was common in Hellenistic culture, referring to healings by physicians, gods, and heroes.

The use of δύναμις in the Septuagint predominantly refers to military “forces” or “armies” (לְחַיִל or צְבָאָה), or the concept of power as “strength,” “might,” or “ability” (גְּבוּרָה, קֹחַ or עֹז). As John Hull notes, “There is hardly a trace in the LXX of the particular meaning given to the word in Mark and Luke.”<sup>360</sup> Δύναμις is not used in reference to miracles or miracle-working power, which leads Hull to the conclusion that, “The New Testament use we are examining does not spring from the Hebrew conception of nature and history, but from the ancient universal idea of the magical miracle, which in turn rests upon a primitive conception of *mana*.”<sup>361</sup>

While Graham Twelftree is right to note that the majority of usage in the Gospels is in keeping with Septuagintal usage,<sup>362</sup> there is no parallel for the particular use of δύναμις as a materialistic, emanating force, as in Mark and Luke. Nevertheless, Luke uses δύναμις polysemously, so that the two instances that suggest an impersonal, *manistic*

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<sup>358</sup> Strauss, 2:318.

<sup>359</sup> Hull, 106.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> Twelftree, 172.

force (6:19; 8:46) must be interpreted within the context of his broader usage.<sup>363</sup> While Luke recognizes that δύναμις can function and appear as a *mana*-like substance, he recognizes it as much more than that.<sup>364</sup> Luke understands Jesus' miracles as *acts of God*, and that the source of his power is the Holy Spirit.

It is not so much the fact that an emanating power is instrumental in this healing that has so perplexed scholars as the fact that it appears to happen automatically, without Jesus' volition. Strauss is right to observe that this idea is "repugnant to the Christian consciousness, which determines the fullness of power resident in Jesus to have been entirely under the governance of his will."<sup>365</sup> We must also object to the argument made by some scholars that Jesus already knew who had touched him,<sup>366</sup> and consciously and intentionally performed the healing before asking his question, "Who touched me?"<sup>367</sup> This argument that Jesus *feigned* ignorance in order to prompt the woman's acknowledgement of her action,<sup>368</sup> although possible, does not appear to be the most straightforward reading of the text. Neither does it appear that the healing was not complete until Jesus' later pronouncement (despite Matthew's redaction). We agree with James Dunn that the power, while not magical or automatic, was also not solely at Jesus' disposal,<sup>369</sup> and further suggest that it also appears to have its own *volition*.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Max Turner, "The Spirit and the Power of Jesus' Miracles in the Lucan Conception," *Novum Testamentum* 33, no. 2 (1991): 137.

<sup>364</sup> Twelftree, 172.

<sup>365</sup> Strauss, 2:318.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 345.

<sup>367</sup> Cf. May.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Nolland, 420.

<sup>369</sup> Dunn, 74-75.

<sup>370</sup> Cf. Loos, 516.

## Conclusion

The story of the hemorrhaging woman challenges our understanding of Jesus' healing power. The discomfort many scholars have with this story is born out of later Christological conceptions, but should not affect our interpretation of what happened.<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless, the healing does not constitute a magical miracle. According to our definition above, there would have to be evidence of manipulation or coercion and that a technique was used that was automatically effective (if performed correctly). While the hidden touch of the woman at first glance appears to be both coercive (in that it was done secretly) and automatic (in that it was immediate), further examination reveals it to be wholly within the domain of a religious miracle.

While the aim of magic is solely to achieve personal benefit by the manipulation and coercion of unseen forces, the emphasis in this story is rather on *faith* in the person of Jesus. The woman's inner thoughts, and the use of "save" (σώζω), rather than "heal" (θεραπεύω), suggest that her trust resides not simply in some magical source of healing *mana*, but specifically in the presence of God's saving power in Jesus.<sup>372</sup> Also, if Jesus were content with simply being an object of healing power, there would be no need for him to seek out the woman who touched him, yet this is precisely what he does. Jesus brings the healing into the realm of *relationship with* and *faith in* him. He banishes any idea of a magical healing.<sup>373</sup> As James Dunn observes, "It is this *dependence* on winning

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<sup>371</sup> Fitzmyer, 746.

<sup>372</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 105-6.

<sup>373</sup> Loos, 517.

a response, on winning people to faith, which distinguishes Jesus' *dunameis* from the possible parallels in Jewish or Hellenistic circles, where faith plays no part."<sup>374</sup>

That this healing is not magical is evident, but it suggests a mode of healing that is contrary to what we might expect. Jesus *experiences* a transfer of healing power: "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him" (Mark 5:30). This transfer is effected immediately by the touch of his garment: "[She] touched his cloak...Immediately her bleeding stopped" (Mark 5:27, 29). While we would not suggest that this power transfer was contrary to Jesus' will (he never refused to heal), it was not something he *consciously* effected. The most logical explanation is that the woman was healed by the power of the God's Holy Spirit, residing in Jesus, upon her act of faith (the touch). This power is not like magic (or electricity for that matter) in that it is not *automatic*; it does not affect everyone who touches Jesus, but rather acts in response to the woman's faith. We conclude that while Jesus is not aware of who touched him or why, the Holy Spirit is, and acts on his (the Spirit's) own volition. There is no magical technique involved; Luke makes it clear in the story of Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-24) that the power of the Holy Spirit is not a magical technique or *mana*-like substance that may be bought and sold.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Dunn, 74-75.

<sup>375</sup> Cf. Hull, 107.

## CHAPTER 4

### HERMENEUTIC FOR TODAY

The healing stories we have examined, including the account of the hemorrhaging woman, confront the reader with a mode of healing that is mysterious at best and magical at worst. Jesus' use of mud, spittle, touch, and especially his experience of *power* going forth from him are repugnant to our modern, rationalistic sensibilities. We associate this sort of practice with Third World shamans and voodoo. Some scholars distance themselves from these accounts by denying their historicity, or by reinterpreting them in accordance with their theology. The miracle stories may challenge our Christological conception of Jesus as the omniscient, omnipotent, God incarnate. How then are we to make sense of these stories involving touch, saliva, and power?

While the gospel tradition challenges many of our assumptions regarding how the spiritual and material worlds operate, we affirm that they do not foster the practice of magic or a magical understanding of healing. Jesus did not adopt a manipulative, coercive approach to God. Neither did he make use of or teach techniques that he conceived of as being automatically effective. As Christians, we must oppose any conception of prayer, exorcism, or healing that borders on magic. We live in a time that shares many similarities to the first-century Greco-Roman world. The postmodern worldview has properly rejected rationalism and the Enlightenment understanding of a

mechanistic universe. But it has likewise rejected the idea of objective truth and has adopted a syncretistic, individualistic approach to religion and spirituality. In the midst of this, the New Age movement, the occult, and witchcraft have all flourished. Their conception is not of God as an immanent, personal being, who is to be worshipped; but an impersonal, abstract force, which is to be exploited for personal gain.

### **Worldview and Miracles**

In examining the gospel accounts, we must constantly examine how our assumptions and preconceptions (our *worldviews*) affect our interpretation and application of the Bible. This is particularly true of stories that portray miracles, healings, exorcisms, spirit beings, or other supernatural happenings. As modern people living in the West, we have learned to believe only in that which we can see and verify by experiment. If something is not visible, or cannot be tested in a laboratory, it must not exist—it is not part of the Western understanding of *real*.<sup>376</sup> This worldview has greatly impacted the way in which we conceive of spiritual power. As Charles H. Kraft has observed, “Westerners—both non-Christian and Christian—now find it extremely difficult to believe in angels, Satan, demons, and even God. Whether spiritual power can be exercised through prayer is seriously questioned both outside and inside our churches.”<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1989), 24.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

The modern, Western worldview has predisposed us to minimize both Jesus' miracles, including healing, and their practice in the church today. The practice of supernatural healing does not always conform to our desire for rational, orderly conduct. Some, though not objecting to the *theory* of divine healing, object to the actual *practice* of it.<sup>378</sup> As John Wimber noted,

Power encounters are difficult to control. This is a hard word for many Western Christians to accept, because phenomena that do not fit rational thought are uncomfortable: they plunge us into the murky world of the transrational in which we lose control of the situation. Events that do not fit our normal categories of thinking are threatening for us, causing fear, because they are unfamiliar—especially where spiritual power is involved.<sup>379</sup>

Many Euro-American Christians are completely unaware of spiritual realities such as blessings, healings, or other manifestations of spiritual power, which are assumed in the Bible. We can accept that power may be wielded by humans, by nature, and within economic and political structures, but not within the spiritual realm. The idea that real power may be generated through a blessing, a word of healing, or exorcism, is more than many of us can handle.<sup>380</sup>

### **Healing Power**

In the story of the hemorrhaging woman, we cannot avoid conception of spiritual power or energy as something that may be transferred by touch, or physically experienced. We have clearly demonstrated that healing power was immediately

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<sup>378</sup> John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Healing*, 1st U.S. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 49.

<sup>379</sup> John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*, Rev. and updated with study guide ed. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 61.

<sup>380</sup> Kraft, 68-69.

conveyed through the woman's touch of Jesus' garment, and both Jesus and the woman were physically aware of this transfer. We have suggested that this power is in fact the power of the Holy Spirit. Many have experienced a similar sort of power transfer and there is a vast body of anecdotal evidence to support this. While receiving prayer ministry, a man named Conrad, who was addicted to drugs, experienced God's power in the following way:

As he prayed I felt an absolutely wonderful, powerful stream of what I best envisage as light pouring in through the back of my neck. I began to shake...I felt a tightness in my chest. It became a convulsion as the power continued to flow in. I began to cough, hack. As this happened the tightness in my chest began to move up through my body and out of my mouth...I had never experienced such energy in my life...I felt almost drunk, and free and powerful...my body went crazy—very powerful jolts, like electricity—and my whole upper body would nod violently in agreement.<sup>381</sup>

Conrad was thereafter free from his addiction to drugs.

My sister-in-law, Christine Johnson, relates the following account of her roommate Martha, whose retinas had been permanently scarred by a virus she contracted while serving in the Peace Corps in Ghana. She was forced to wear thick glasses and her eyes tired very quickly. While she was attending a worship celebration at the Vineyard Church of Milan, she encountered the power of God:

Then the leader invited those who needed prayer or healing to come forward. [Martha] did so and began to raise her hands as people prayed. Soon, she said, what felt like electricity and a rushing of air and power poured up her back and neck. "All I could do then was lay prostrate on the ground."

Later, while in the waiting room before a doctor's appointment,

She closed her eyes in a quick prayer thinking, "OK God, this is it." Then she felt a heat on her eyes as if a hot lamp were shining directly on them. 'I think you're

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<sup>381</sup> John White, *When the Spirit Comes with Power: Signs & Wonders among God's People* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 203-5.

going to find something different,' Martha told the optometrist when he asked how she was doing. The doctor took an x-ray of Martha's eyes and left the room to examine the results...When the doctor returned, he was baffled. "This can't be right," he muttered. The x-ray showed two perfectly smooth retinas. The pock-marks and craters were gone. The doctor repeated the x-ray and it showed the same results. Martha returned to her art classes. Her eyes never tired again.<sup>382</sup>

We should not suppose that unusual healings and physical experiences of God's power and presence are the domain of charismatics and Pentecostals only. Augustine, in the fifth century C.E., relates the story of a woman who had a cancer on her breast: "On the approach of Easter, she was instructed in a dream to wait for the first woman that came out from the baptistery after being baptized, and to ask her to make the sign of Christ upon her sore. She did so, and was immediately cured."<sup>383</sup> Neither are physical experiences of power unique to the twentieth century. John Wesley describes the following experience of God's power:

Mr. Hall, Hinching, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutching and my brother Charles were present at our love feast in Fetter Lane with about 60 of our brethren. About three in the morning as we were continuing in prayer the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exulting joy and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from the awe and amazement at the presence of his Majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord."<sup>384</sup>

#### Caveats

We should be clear that the Christian concept of power is distinct from that of the New Age movement or the occult. In these belief systems, including some holistic health practices, *universal energy* is considered the basis of all existence. It appears with names

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<sup>382</sup> Letter from Christine Johnson, August 24, 2004.

<sup>383</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 22.8 (Dods)

<sup>384</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., 14 vols., vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984), 1:170.

such as: *universal life energy, vital forces, Ch'i, prana, orgone, bioplasma, para-electricity, and animal magnetism*. These concepts are founded on the following premises, all of which are antithetical to Christianity: 1) pantheism, 2) man as a divine being, 3) the purpose of life as becoming aware of our divine nature, 4) enlightenment as leading to the exercise of 'psychospiritual' power.<sup>385</sup> Because of the occult implications associated with the use of the terms *energy* or *power*, we must be clear about the nature of divine power in Christianity.

In the Christian context, the experience of spiritual power as a physical phenomenon is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence. When this experience is described in terms of *power* or as being like *electricity*, we are referring only to the person's experience of it, not suggesting that it is somehow comparable to electromagnetic energy. God is not an impersonal force, and this power is not to be thought of like electricity or magnetism.<sup>386</sup>

The unique source of supernatural power is God, but this power may be distorted and misused. Satan is a created being, and satanic or demonic power is a corruption of the divine, sharing external characteristics but being opposite in purpose. There is what we might think of as *embezzled* power. Magic, likewise, is *stolen* power, which is used for the user's delight.<sup>387</sup> It is what the sorcerer Simon desired when he requested divine power: "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive

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<sup>385</sup> Paul C. Reisser, Teri K. Reisser, and John Weldon, *The Holistic Healers: A Christian Perspective on New-Age Health Care* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 14-49. as cited in Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 275.

<sup>386</sup> Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 275-6.

<sup>387</sup> White, 141.

the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:19). In contrast, God’s power always demonstrates his love, as does the Christian use of spiritual power.<sup>388</sup> For Jesus, the use of spiritual power was always a means to demonstrate God’s love, never an end in itself.<sup>389</sup>

### Power and Authority From the Holy Spirit

Jesus received his miraculous power from God, through the Holy Spirit. He apparently did no miracles before God poured out on him the Holy Spirit at his baptism.<sup>390</sup> As the American theologian R. A. Torrey put it, “Jesus Christ obtained power for His divine works not by His inherent divinity, but by His anointing through the Holy Spirit. He was subject to the same conditions of power as other men.”<sup>391</sup> His power was delegated power, entrusted to Jesus as it is to Christians today. We are to receive power from the Holy Spirit just as Jesus did (Acts 1:8), to release the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed from the enemy.<sup>392</sup>

We have already observed that in his healing ministry, Jesus did not pray—he did not ask God for help each time he healed. He took the authority and power that God had given him and acted on God’s behalf. In other words, the ministry was one of exercising authority that had *already* been given. This is also precisely what he commanded the apostles to do; “When Jesus had called the Twelve together, *he gave them power and*

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<sup>388</sup> Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 154.

<sup>389</sup> Kraft, 123.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>391</sup> Reuben Archer Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches: A Thorough and Comprehensive Study of All the Bible Has to Say Concerning the Great Doctrines of Which It Treats*, 17th ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), 94.

<sup>392</sup> Kraft, 110.

*authority* to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2, emphasis mine). As followers of Jesus, we are to imitate him and *take authority* in healing as he and the apostles did (Matt 28:20).<sup>393</sup>

### **Physical Touch and Substances**

Jesus’ use of physical touch and saliva is perhaps more problematic for the modern Christian. Nevertheless, we cannot escape the biblical evidence that physical touch and material agents played an important role in healing. There is also considerable anecdotal evidence that God continues to empower these and other physical means for healing. John Wimber tells the following story of how his wife Carol was cured of rheumatoid arthritis in her shoulder through his touch:

One night when we were at a cabin in the mountains, she waited until I fell asleep and placed one of my hands on her shoulder. She then said, “Okay, Lord, now do it.” A surge of heat and energy came into her shoulder, and the pain disappeared. She was healed. I awakened wondering why my hand was hot.<sup>394</sup>

The parallels between this story and the story of the hemorrhaging woman are striking. Both women have faith that they may be healed through touch, perform the act of touching secretly, and are healed immediately.

Besides touch, there is evidence that God empowers physical substances, such as tears and saliva, to convey healing today:

Several years ago I [John Wimber] was in Cape Town, South Africa, at a meeting in which a man who was crying said, “Is there a blind person here?” Another

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 124-5.

<sup>394</sup> Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 32.

pastor heard him ask, and it so happened that a man who was blind in his right eye was nearby. The weeping man then said, “The Lord said that if I take the tears from my eyes and put them in his, he will be made well.” So the pastor took some tears and placed them on the blind man’s eye. He was instantly healed. I was flabbergasted. Later the pastor told me that all he did was perform a function and there was very little faith on his own part. My point is that sometimes God heals through strange means.<sup>395</sup>

Many Christians will find such a story strange, or perhaps unbiblical. However, it is certainly no more unbiblical than Jesus’ use of mud, saliva, or his instructions to the man born blind to wash in the pool of Siloam for healing (John 9:6-7). And what of Jesus, in healing the deaf-mute, when he “put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue” (Mark 7:33)? This certainly qualifies as *strange* to a modern reader. We must also accept that the early church considered the laying-on-of-hands to be effectual in conveying power, and not merely a symbolic gesture (Acts 8:17-19; 9:12; 19:6; 28:8; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). The same is true for the use of anointing oil for healing (James 5:14). As John Wimber has stated, “Sometimes the Father performs healing through unusual means.”<sup>396</sup> We should not suppose that methods that seem strange or irrational to us are not from God. As Jonathan Edwards noted, “A work of God without stumbling blocks is never to be expected.”<sup>397</sup>

The effectiveness of such healing methods is not due to the inherent properties of saliva or touch, but because God has willingly empowered them to convey his grace and power. He has from the beginning empowered human beings, including their cultural

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 144-5.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>397</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:273.

forms—words, material objects, and places.<sup>398</sup> God has empowered many cultural forms that seem foreign to us, like Moses' staff,<sup>399</sup> the ark of the covenant,<sup>400</sup> water baptism, the Eucharist, and the practice of casting lots,<sup>401</sup> to name a few. Most Christians would not suggest that wooden staffs or baptistery water are inherently powerful, but would agree that God has chosen to empower these physical means and cultural forms to convey his power and grace. Similarly, we argue that God empowers such practices as the laying-on-of-hands and the use of anointing oil for healing.<sup>402</sup> For those from an anti-Catholic, anti-liturgical background, such things as shrines, holy water, anointing oil, or the sacredness of the communion elements can evoke those pagan magical practices that corrupted historic Christianity.<sup>403</sup>

#### Caveats

While God has empowered various cultural forms, such as the laying-on-of-hands, it is important that Christians do not adopt a magical understanding of these methods. It is *faith in Jesus* that empowers us for healing, not particular methods or formulas. While most Christians would affirm that we must confess Jesus with our mouths (Rom 10:9-10), would we also argue that it is the physical act of causing particular sounds that effects salvation? Rather, it is faith, demonstrated through words,

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<sup>398</sup> Kraft, 163.

<sup>399</sup> Exod 4:17; 7:9-20; 8:5-17; 9:23; 10:13

<sup>400</sup> Lev 16:2; Num 7:89; Josh 3:3-17; 6:4-13; 1 Sam 5:1-11; 6:1-21; 2 Sam 6:1-17

<sup>401</sup> Lev 16:8; Josh 18:6-10; 1 Chr 24:5, 31; 25:8, 26:13-16; Neh 10:34; 11:1; Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:26

<sup>402</sup> We would also argue that the use of saliva is acceptable, except in those cultural contexts where it is considered distasteful or unhygienic.

<sup>403</sup> Kraft, 161.

which releases God’s saving power. Our words of confession are merely the *vehicle* of salvation. Scripture is clear that we are saved by God’s grace, *through faith* (Rom 5:1-2; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8; Phil 3:9; 2 Tim 3:15). Simply the vehicle by itself (the act of professing belief) without faith is powerless (Mark 7:6 // Matt 15:8).

Similarly, the biblical forms we have discussed, such as the laying-on-of-hands, physical touch, and the use of anointing oil or saliva, are not magical methods that are effective in themselves. These methods and materials are simply the *means* or *vehicle* of conveying God’s power and grace. As we saw above, anointing with oil was understood as a way to convey authority and power. Likewise, praying is not to be seen as a magical activity in which the power is broken if the process is done incorrectly, is interrupted, or if particular methods are not used.<sup>404</sup> As Charles Kraft states, regarding physical touch and the manifestation of spiritual power:

At other times one or both of us have experienced something like electricity flowing through my hands. Such a phenomenon, though psychologically comforting, carries no supernatural power in and of itself. But as we minister, God empowers both words and actions that would otherwise be simply human vehicles.<sup>405</sup>

While we should not attribute magical powers to the vehicles that God has chosen, neither should we denigrate them. We must receive or reinterpret these practices and forms for our world and culture as we have for other biblical conventions. We must neither rigidly adhere to them nor discard them as obsolete. While we, in the Western world, do not “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12), we have reinterpreted this practice according to our cultural norms—we shake

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 161.

hands or hug. Likewise, we do not regard water baptism and the Lord's Supper as antiquated cultural forms, but adopt them as instruments of divine grace and power for today.

### **Faith**

While faith is integral to all of Jesus' healing miracles, it is not an automatically effective magical formula. Faith does not force God to work miracles, nor does it work miracles itself. Unfortunately, some Christians act or speak as though faith, or words of faith, are magical formulas that guarantee results. We must not misinterpret Jesus' words to suggest that whatever we proclaim will come about (Matt 21:21 // Luke 17:6). The biblical witness is clear that some prayers are not answered, regardless of faith (e.g. Paul's thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor 12:7-9). Also, faith is not the source of God's power, nor is God constrained to our faith.<sup>406</sup> Neither is faith a *mana*-like substance that conveys God's power.<sup>407</sup> Jesus on many occasions healed those in whom there was no prior faith.

While Jesus sought a response of faith from those whom he healed, we have shown how faith was not a *prerequisite* for healing. In some cases, people are healed from a distance, without interaction with Jesus (e.g. Matt 8:5-13 // Luke 7:2-10), or because another party had faith for their healing (e.g. Mark 2:2-12 // Matt 9:2-7 // Luke 5:17-25). We can also assume that those raised from the dead were not raised because of their faith! As Charles Kraft observes, "A disturbing number of people with apparently

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<sup>406</sup> Cf. Kenneth Copeland, *Freedom from Fear* (Fort Worth: KCP, 1983), 11-12.

<sup>407</sup> Cf. Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith* (Fort Worth: KCP, 1989), 10.

very little faith seem to get immediately healed, while some with an apparently high faith level have not been healed!”<sup>408</sup> Clearly then, faith is not a magical formula for healing.

### **Conclusion**

The biblical witness contains numerous accounts that challenge our conceptions of God and the universe. Chief among these are the gospel miracles of Jesus we have explored. While we have demonstrated that Jesus was not a magician, and that the Bible condemns sorcery, Jesus’ methods of healing challenge many of our assumptions, especially about power, the necessity of faith, and the role of material agents in healing. It is not surprising that those who deny modern healing miracles claim to have never witnessed them. We tend to assume what we have been taught, and interpret what we observe according to our preexistent beliefs. However, in order to know whether healing is for today it is important to move beyond a theoretical discussion and *try it*. Only then can we allow our worldview to shift accordingly.<sup>409</sup>

We have been commissioned to proclaim the gospel with *power* (Luke 9:1; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:33; Rom 15:18-19; 1 Cor 2:4-5; 4:20; 1 Thess 1:5). As Christians, we must accept the power and authority that has been given us through the Holy Spirit. As David Burnett notes, on the successful evangelization of the Third World:

[It] requires that the primal societies must see the gospel not merely as a set of intellectual truths, but as Jesus Christ, the Lord of *power*. People will respond to the claims of Christ when they see that his power is superior to the magic of the sorcerer, or that of the ancestors. The missionary needs to stand with the convert

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<sup>408</sup> Kraft, 140-141.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

and together they need to appreciate what Jesus meant when he said that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Mt 28:18)<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Burnett, 33.

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