

Cindy Jacobs: What's Wrong With Harry Potter?

Note: This article ran in the December 2001 issue of Charisma magazine. There are now seven books in the Harry Potter series and they have sold more than 450 million copies. Have things gotten worse in this area in the the last 14 years?

One day I opened the pages of *USA Today* and noted two children's books on one of the *New York Times* Best-Seller lists. Both books, from the Harry Potter series, had occult-sounding titles. I later noticed one of them, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, in a prominent place in a local chain bookstore. Curious, I picked up a copy.

The seduction of the Harry Potter series, written by an English woman named J.K. Rowling, is potent because the story pulls on one's heartstrings. Its hero, Harry, is a 10-year-old orphan who is actually a powerful wizard.

He lives a miserable existence with his cruel uncle and spoiled cousin. His life changes on his 11th birthday, when he finds out who he is and is accepted into the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry for aspiring wizards.

Harry's classes include creating potions, casting spells and performing other occult practices, as well as lessons in riding a magical broomstick. The occult influence is wrapped in a clever plot meant to captivate and thrill.

Innocent? If we do not know what Scripture teaches about magic, it might seem to be. It is hard to criticize poor, downtrodden Harry, who suddenly finds out that he is "a somebody."

Harry discovers that he can use his magical powers to do good or evil. The idea of personal power lies behind much of the

appeal of the Harry Potter story, but it is a personal power apart from God. This is a serious deception, one that 1 Timothy 4:1 warns us about.

We are to avoid all seducing, deceiving spirits. Their appeal to us is the same as that made to Eve by the serpent in the garden. Satan told her she could have knowledge of everything—and thus power. He fooled her into believing such power is attainable apart from God. It is man's desire for power that lures him to magic.

As I have traveled around the country, many people have asked me, "Aren't the Harry Potter fantasies just like the Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis?"

The answer is no. The Potter series is clearly demonic in nature. It presents occult practices as being normative and good. By contrast, the Narnia series has clear boundaries between good and evil, and the ultimate point of the stories is redemption.

Some Christians argue that reading the Potter books gives them an opportunity to point out to their children what is wrong with witches and sorcery. Although some parents may be able to successfully use them as a learning tool, to me this is a bit like going to an X-rated movie to teach someone about the depravity of pornography.

Warner Bros. new *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* movie, which opened in theaters November 16, is introducing even more children to Rowling's craft. But her books are not our only concern. Recently I walked through the adolescent section of a bookstore and estimated that about 70 percent of the reading material displayed there was occultic.

We need to make this situation a matter of prayer in the body of Christ. One thing we can intercede for is that good Christian writers will rise up and top anything the occult world produces. We need biblically based books that are

readable and will capture the interest of adolescents.

Why are books of the Harry Potter type so dangerous? To begin with, they are changing the basis of what we consider normative in our culture.

There was a day when those who read occult material were considered deviant, but this is no longer true. The Harry Potter books and others like them are entry-level occult tools that introduce readers to witchcraft, sorcery, spells and spiritual power apart from God. What begins as fantasy leads to real spells and potions. They are open doors for a person to become a practitioner of magic.

In his book *Pokemon & Harry Potter: A Fatal Attraction* (Hearthstone Publishing), Phil Anns has strong words for what is happening to our children through the Potter series: "Harry Potter is much more aggressive in its seductive appeal to get children involved in witchcraft and the occult. This wildly popular series is the most mind-boggling illustration of the psycho-spiritual assault which children are now experiencing."

I know that a lot of well-meaning people, including some respected Christian leaders, scoff at the idea of the Harry Potter books increasing interest in witchcraft. But I have found that they do.

A 13-year-old Southern California girl is just one example. After reading the series, she sought out books about how to become a witch because she was "curious." Fortunately, the girl has a praying grandmother and did not become a Wiccan, but many do.

Ten-year-old fan Gioia Bishop of Napa, California, told the *San Francisco Chronicle*: "I was eager to get to Hogwarts first because I like what they learned there, and I want to be a witch."

In England, the Pagan Federation has been barraged with so

many inquiries about Wicca, mostly from teen-age girls, that the group has appointed a youth officer whose primary responsibility will be to respond to Harry Potter fans who want to know how to become witches.

"[Increased interest in witchcraft] is quite probably linked to things like Harry Potter, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Pagan Federation media officer Andy Norfolk told *This Is London*, a British news Web site.

Wiccans and other pagans consider Harry a good example for would-be witches, even though they point out that his sorcery does not follow all tenets of true witchcraft.

"Perhaps it's silly to take a fictional boy wizard as a role model," writes Dana Gerhardt, a self-described pagan and columnist for the *Mountain Astrologer* magazine.

"But in the realm of the invisible, where imagination is queen, the inspirations of fiction may be the most relevant," she adds. "Peer deep into pagan roots and you'll find plenty of poets of impossible things. Why not take summoning spells more seriously?"

Part of the seduction of books such as the Harry Potter series is the promotion of "good magic" as protection from "evil magic." This is nothing but a neopagan worldview.

The pagan worldview sees the world as internally connected to a multitude of unseen forces or spirits. Some of these entities reside over natural habitats such as mountains, streams and meadows.

Some are mischievous; others are malevolent. A few are spirits of the dead.

In this scheme, there is no strict boundary between good and evil; rather, there is a constant tension between what we perceive as good and what we perceive as evil. In essence,

this allows each person to define good for himself.

Such a worldview is totally at odds with the biblical worldview, which focuses on God, the wise and good Creator, who allows demonic evil in order that the greater good of voluntary worship may occur.

In the pagan world, good and evil are presented as equals. There is no such balance in the Bible. God's good eventually will triumph over all evil.

God's power is limitless and far above the power of any other principality or dominion. However, even Christians can be affected by the pagan worldview. And the Bible very clearly states God's opinion of those who teach paganism (and by logical extension, neopaganism): "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Is. 5:20, NKJV).

What Can Parents Do?

As you know, we cannot rely on society to police our children and keep them away from Harry Potter's world and other occult influences. We have to keep a watchful eye on how and where they spend their free time.

Having raised two children myself, I am aware that things get sticky when children become teenagers. But I contend that no matter what age your children are, you have the right to know what they do in their rooms.

Teenagers who have nothing to hide do not lock their rooms and act secretive. As long as you are paying the bills, and they live in your home, you have every right to question their activities.

Here are some warning signs:

- Exhibiting belligerent behavior
- Making an extreme change in dress (I am not talking

about baggy pants and T-shirts. That is kids being kids. I am referring to the wearing of black clothes, fingernail polish and lipstick. Yes, some guys wear black lipstick, too.)

- Reading occult literature
- Displaying violent posters or flyers
- Listening to occult rock groups such as Marilyn Manson and Metallica.

If you witness any of these in your teen, you may need to employ “tough love” techniques—in other words, take drastic measures to intervene. It won’t be easy, but it will make a difference.

Cassie Bernall was a young Christian who died a martyr’s death at Columbine High School. At one time Cassie had become involved in witchcraft and the occult. Her parents applied tough love and made her tear down the posters in her room, throw away offensive CDs and dispose of videos that encouraged violence. They also made her go to church. As a result, she turned her life over to the Lord and is in heaven today.

I am aware that not all stories turn out as well as Cassie’s, but I encourage you to intervene, nevertheless.

First, clean up your children’s rooms, and get rid of negative influences. Take down violent posters. Dispose of books, CDs, video games and other games that have ungodly or occult overtones.

Do the cleanup with your children present, if they will participate. If they throw a fit and are over 18, give them the option of removing these things or moving out and paying all their own bills.

Second, teach your children to resist deception. Here is the advice Christian author Berit Kjos gives in an article titled “Bewitched by Harry Potter”:

- Help them to know the true God. When children know God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, they will recognize seductive counterfeits.
- Train them to shun other gods. It's tempting to believe the beckoning voices that display enticing counterfeits of all God's wonderful promises. The power is within yourself, they say. Do not listen to the lies.

Instead take this sober warning to heart: “‘When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you ... one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord (-12).

All “these things” are demonstrated in the Harry Potter books. The stories are every bit as spiritual as Christian literature, but the spiritual power they promote comes from other gods.

Third, refuse to be intimidated by the modern-day culture of tolerance. Being intolerant of evil is a good thing, not a bad thing. Also, do not be afraid of a little persecution. We need to learn to be salt and light in the middle of a decaying world. Salt sometimes burns when it is applied to a wound, but it brings healing.

Finally, if you are in a church with other parents of young children, consider forming a prayer group to intercede for one another's families. In 1993, my husband, Mike, and I started a covenant fast with mission leaders Luis and Doris Bush.

We agreed to fast and pray for one another's children every Wednesday. Years later we got together to rejoice over all of the answers to prayer that we have seen for our children because each one has chosen to walk with the Lord. The fast

continues to this day.

The most important thing you can do besides pray is be informed and aware of what your children are reading. Guide them to books that provide wholesome entertainment and promote godly principles. If you resist the devil's attempt to plant in them the first seeds of magic superstition and witchcraft, you will thwart his plan to ultimately destroy their lives through involvement in the occult.