

Zion Bible-Presbyterian Church

Special Paper No.4



Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Pastor Quek Swee Hwa

What This Paper is About

The world has been taken by storm, first by the books of Ms J. K. Rowling's and now by the film based on the book. This paper is about the Harry Potter books. The film, just released, sticks closely to the books. The position I take is this:

1. It is best that young children do not read these books or view the film: they are highly impressionable and may not be able to discern between truth and falsehood.
2. If the books are to be read, or the film viewed, it is best that parents know the reasons why, from a biblical standpoint, these books are considered harmful.

Objection

But some may say, "Oh, come on, they are just innocent fun. Don't be a square. Alamak, so serious, uh. Hey, don't be a spoil sport. Children (and adults) are so highly stressed today, you know. Why not just allow them to relax and enjoy themselves? Besides Harry Potter books actually help to promote a reading habit in children".

Our Answer

1. Yes, fun is certainly sorely needed in the society that we live in. But there are other ways of having fun. Why choose this questionable and dangerous way?
2. Harry Potter books, together with the highly-acclaimed and popular film and the merchandising that goes with it, promote witchcraft and make it appear harmless. They trivialize evil. Should children be exposed to books or films that make Satanism and the occult look attractive? We do our children and all who read Harry Potter books a grave disfavor when we minimize the power of evil in these final days of history.

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3. The Bible condemns witchcraft. It is darkness, wickedness and an abomination before God. The Bible soundly rebukes those who practise witchcraft or condone it by consulting witches, as in the example of King Saul (1 Samuel 15:23), Queen Jezebel (2 Kings 9:22) and King Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:6)
4. They give their readers the idea that no one is in control of the world in which we live. Bad things seem to take place without any reason. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that God is in full control of everything. He may allow evil to take place but a time will come when He will put an end to all evil.
5. These books actually encourage children to think that their parents are just irritating nuisances! A comparison can be made with the books by C.S Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien which use the same literary genre. In Harry Potter, the relatives (the Dursleys) who looked after Harry after his parents had passed away are mean, common folk with an intolerance of magic that goes back to the medieval period. By contrast, in Tolkien the common folk (Mr and Mrs Beaver, Sam Gamgee and his dad) are the salt of the earth. Harry Potter books present parents as annoying, having no clue whatsoever concerning what their children need. They encourage children to dislike their parents. How can such books be promoted when we should instead instill respect for parents in their children?

To be fair ...

There are certain saving factors:

1. Prof. Dumbledore, the headmaster of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, catches Harry looking at the magic mirror of Erised. He tells him not to waste time looking at it because “the mirror will give us neither knowledge nor truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen”.
2. Harry finds that he has many of the same abilities as Voldemart, his archvillain, and he is disturbed by it. But he continues to use his magical powers.

Further,

3. We teach our children nursery rhymes and allow them to read C. S. Lewis and Tolkien and see Star Wars films, watch “Charmed” and other things on TV. Don't these also portray magic? Yes, but the treatment of magic in the case of Lewis (Aslan vs the White Witch) and Tolkien (Bilbo Baggins vs Gollum), is very different: the struggle between evil and good is clearly depicted and all the ugliness of evil (as in the character of Ungit in Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*). But I acknowledge there are books by other writers as well as TV programmes and films that should fall under the category of “Not recommended for reading or viewing”.

Warning

I conclude that reading Harry Potter draws children deeper into the occult. There are enough books (e.g., Goosebumps), computer games, and films (Charmed, Dracula, Omen I, and Omen II) that pollute our spiritual environment, all in the name of entertainment.

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Some Christian bookshops and gift shops are even displaying Harry Potter books and gift items.

The world is getting caught up with this web of evil and it is reaching epidemic proportions. Evil is endemic in man since the heart of man is totally depraved. We must shun what God’s Word condemns. Children and adults who indulge in Harry Potter books should be warned about their danger. Parental guidance is a must if children are allowed to read or watch Harry Potter and where there are indications that a child is becoming obsessed with Harry Potter, stern measures ought to be made to prevent the sub-conscious brainwashing of the mind.

Now let’s hear what God’s word says

Wisdom from God’s Word

“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live “ (Exodus 22:18).

“There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things *are* an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

“My son, if sinners entice thee consent thou not ...walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path” (Prov. 1:10, 15)

“ Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil *man*, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness” (Prov. 2:11-13).

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21).

Do we need to know any more from God’s Word?

Pastor Quek Swee Hwa (21.11.2001)

THREE ARTICLES

** I wish to thank Dr Siew Yau Man, a personal friend, for drawing my attention to the following articles which I produce for your reading and information.*

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ARTICLE #1

HARRY POTTER & THE CHRISTIAN

By Eva Juliuson
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The immensely popular “Harry Potter” books have charmed our country. The problem is that even a lot of Christians don’t realize how spiritually dangerous these children’s books are. The author, J.K. Rowling, is highly credited with getting millions of kids hooked on reading. In fact, her books are widely used in schools for reading and class projects. The truth is that those who read the books may get hooked on a lot more than reading.

It is ironic that 100 years ago in the U.S., reading and writing were taught from primers which had scripture from the Bible printed on them. These days, many teachers feel their jobs are in jeopardy if they even mention the Bible. However, the “Harry Potter” books are filled with magic spells, sorcery and talking to the dead. They are now acclaimed as the latest ultimate teaching tool by most educators and librarians. That’s a far cry from teaching young people out of the Bible which repeatedly warns against sorcery, to teaching them from a book which encourages it.

I know that we have freedom of speech and freedom of religion in our country. I am very grateful for those privileges. However, it poses a crisis of morality for Christians as they face how they will use their freedom to buy and read these books. Perhaps the biggest crisis comes as we decide how we will handle our children studying these books in school.

We cannot expect society and the education profession to know that God has said sorcery and witchcraft are wrong, but Christians are embracing these books, also. Many are buying the series and all the merchandise that goes along with the books as quickly as everyone else. With that in mind, here goes one mom’s little voice pointing out the fact that God detests witchcraft.

Sorcery and witchcraft have been a problem even way back in Old Testament times, and it is becoming more widespread once again. It seems witchcraft and other forms of occult “religions” have always gained a foothold in society every time God’s people turn more towards the world, instead of Him.

We as Christians are going along with the flow in accepting “Harry Potter” along with all the other movies and TV shows which glamorize occult themes. Children (and adults) who read these books are slowly being desensitized into thinking that witchcraft and magic are okay. Before you laugh and shrug me off as just another mom on her soapbox, let’s see what God says about in His word.

What Does God Say About “Harry”

I’ve had relatives, teachers and Christian friends (as well as my own children) ask “What could possibly be wrong with an innocent book about a little boy?”

Perhaps that’s one of the most dangerous things about the “Harry Potter” series. It seems as though it should be harmless since it’s in a book written for kids. If you aren’t familiar with the story, we’ll get to that in a minute. Then perhaps you’ll see the danger.

In Deuteronomy 18:9-13, it says, “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the

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Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God."

It shows a complete lack of trust in God to depend on spells to conjure up the power we desire. It must be a huge insult to the One who made us and desires to guide us through this life, when we turn to others to tell us our future. Here's what the Lord says in Isaiah 8:19, "When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter', should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?"

There's over 50 places I found in the Bible that tell how God feels about witchcraft, sorcery, magic, fortune telling and trying to talk to the dead for advice. There's probably a lot more.

When faced with the dilemma of what to do about "Harry" and other occult-type movies, shows and memorabilia, go to the Bible for input on your decision. Better yet, sit down with your children and look together. Then you will both know that you need to make a choice based on God's clear instructions on the subject.

Who Is "Harry Potter"?

There will be seven books in the series, according to Ms. Rowling. Three books have been released at the time this was written. Apparently, the British single mom has already written the final chapter that will end the series, which is scheduled to be published in 2003. The author has said that the books will grow along with Harry as he discovers the opposite sex and begins to deal with even darker themes.

Warner Bros. has the rights to the movie along with all the merchandise, TV rights, cartoons, home videos and interactive games. It's been said they will spend \$45 million on special effects alone. The craze is bad now, but think of how prevalent it will be then.

In the first book, we find Harry orphaned as a baby. The evil wizard, Lord Voldemort has killed Harry's parents who were a witch and a wizard. Lord Voldemort repeatedly fails at attempts to kill baby Harry, which leaves little Harry with a lightning bolt scar on his forehead. The infamous Lord Voldemort loses some of his power in the process, making Harry legendary in the world of the occult.

Some "good wizard forces" leave Harry on the London doorstep of his Aunt and Uncle who are Muggles (People who are oblivious to witches and wizards). For the next ten years Harry is treated horribly by his uncaring relatives which earns the reader's sympathy.

When Harry turns eleven, he learns his true identity and enrolls in Hogwarts, the most famous boarding school for witchcraft and wizardry. Harry learns how to use his power and battles Lord Voldemort and seeks revenge upon his mean relatives.

These books have caused a "Potter-mania" as people line up to get the latest release. Rowling's book signings have gotten out of control across the country as children and parents line up dressed in wizard outfits. Schools, libraries and bookstores host "Harry Potter" parties complete with broomsticks and all the witch paraphernalia mentioned in the books.

What Should The Christian Do?

These books don't just mention witchcraft, that's the whole premise of the series. One of the perilous things about "Harry Potter" is that as he is drawn further and further into the world of the occult, and unwittingly - so is the reader. The Bible clearly and repeatedly states God's detest of witchcraft and sorcery.

My heart has been broken as I have seen some sweet Christian children carry "Harry Potter" books to church. I was shocked once to walk into a Christian Hospital gift shop and see a major display of "Harry Potter" books, along with spell bags and broomsticks.

The first thing we need to do is educate ourselves, our children, and other Christians on what God says about witchcraft. In Hosea 4:6, the Lord tells us "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

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That’s why I am compelled to write this article. God’s people need to know we are taking part of things God has repeatedly warned us against. We are encouraging our children in the very things we should be warning them against.

Our family decided together, after researching the Bible on witchcraft, to stay away from all forms of entertainment which glamorizes the occult. There’s a lot right now that’s specifically aimed at youth- “Sabrina, the Teenage Witch”, “Charmed”, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer ”as well as many cartoons and countless video games. Since then, we’ve faced with our hardest battle - how to handle “Harry Potter” at school.

It’s easier to control what is seen and read in the privacy of your own home. Last year, one of our kids came home saying their whole English class would read “Harry Potter” together for a whole semester. There would also be class activities which would tie in with the book. Now our decision and our child’s decision had to become public.

My husband and I (and our children) are relatively quiet people. We don’t like to cause waves. Having read all that God had said about witchcraft, and having already made our decision to not take part in any of it, we couldn’t change our minds now.

As we sat around the dinner table, we discussed how to handle “Harry Potter” at school. One of our kids rolled their eyes up thinking, “Oh great, here goes my old-fashioned parents again!” We quickly pointed out that God had given us the responsibility as parents to instruct our children in the way of the Lord. That was our job. We had to answer to our Lord. Some day it would be up to them to make their own decision if they would follow His ways or not. Then they would have to answer to Him for their own choices.

As we struggled with this issue, there was some ridicule and lack of understanding from family and friends, as well as some teachers. In the meantime, people have seen our child (and us) take a stand against witchcraft and perhaps it’s been a witness for God. We’ve actually had to face this issue two years in a row with the same child. I’m sure we will again. I’m also certain many of you will, for “Harry Potter” is being taught in schools across the world. There are even interactive websites for students and teachers to use in classrooms.

We wrote a letter to our child’s English teacher thanking them for teaching our child. Then we proceeded to explain why our child made the decision not to read “Harry Potter.” We told the teacher that we didn’t expect everyone to agree with us and that we realized how difficult it must be to teach such a wide variety of students in a public school. Then we offered to help our students with their own report at home or suggested they could go to the school library during that class. We sent the letter in a polite respectful manner explaining our beliefs, not condemning anyone for theirs.

Last year, the teachers let our child, along with several others who felt the same way, wear headphones while reading another novel in the same classroom. There were a few problems. One time, one of our child’s headphones wasn’t working. Upon hearing the “Harry Potter” reading above the music, our child adjusted the volume to cover the reading. The teacher reprimanded our child and the volume had to be turned down. Our student was exposed to things they didn’t wish to hear.

We prayed as parents and as a family for knowledge on how to handle the situation. After discussion, our child decided to stay in the classroom unless there were problems with the headphones again. Then they would ask to go to the library. We made it through last year, and our child seemed to grow in strength from the Lord from standing up for God’s ways. When another student tauntingly asked, “Are you a Jesus Freak?” Our child, without hesitation, proudly said “Yes!” There seemed to be an air of respect from that point on.

Set Apart

This year, we are faced with the same exact dilemma (with another teacher), except the whole room is completely filled with “Harry Potter” memorabilia. Once again, we are faced with how to handle this issue as Christians. This time our child will be completely surrounded by witchcraft trappings.

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Sometimes it is tempting to take our kids out of public schools. We would put them in Christian schools if we could afford to put all our kids there. We even talked about home schooling. In many ways, it would be wonderful to have them in a sheltered Christian environment, but they need to learn to be the light of the world. You have to be in the world, not hiding, to light it up!

There also comes a time when it's right to take an even stronger stand. It didn't seem right for our child to sit day in and day out in a room that was a menagerie of witchcraft. This time, we talked to the administration, counselors and teachers. We decided the only solution was to take our child out of that class, but felt it was important that the school know why.

Again, I thank God that we live in a country where we have the right to take our child out of a class we don't agree with.

This "Harry Potter-in-the-classroom" struggle is a prime opportunity to teach our children how we are in this world, yet we must be set apart from it. People need to see holiness in us. Yes, it's hard to stand up and be different from the world. But that's what Jesus calls us to do. Christians are to be the salt of the earth. Jesus warned us if we lose our saltiness, we are no longer valuable. This year, when I realized we would have to face this battle again, I wearily said to our child, "This is one of those times it's hard to be a Christian."

My middle school child looked at me with confident determination, smiled and said, "Yes, it is," knowing full well that we would face it together with the Lord.

This quiet, easy-going child of ours is growing into a strong Christian, knowing they can face anything with God's help as long as they obey His will. Perhaps we will all learn something from "Harry Potter" at school after all!

*Note: I have left out a few paragraphs (QSH)

ARTICLE #2

HARRY POTTER BOOKS ALARM

By some UK Christian Educators

LONDON, England ([CNS](#)) -- A primary school in England has banned its younger pupils from reading the Harry Potter stories, award-winning books about a schoolboy wizard that have made best-seller lists around the world.

Carol Rookwood, head teacher (principal) of the St. Mary's Island School in Kent, said she made the decision because the Bible condemns witches and wizards as evil, while the books portray them as fun and harmless.

"Our ethos on teaching comes from the Bible. The Bible is clear about issues such as witchcraft, demons, devils and the occult. It says clearly and consistently from Genesis to Revelation that they are real, powerful and dangerous. Throughout it insists that God's people should have nothing to do with them."

Some parents in the United States also have tried to remove Harry Potter books from schools for similar reasons. In a letter sent to parents, Rookwood said, "I believe it is confusing to children when something wicked is being made to look fun." Older pupils would be allowed to read the books once the issues had been discussed in religious education classes. She said parents have been supportive of the decision. The school receives some of its financing from the Church of England.

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The Harry Potter books, by Edinburgh author Joanne Rowling, have been immensely popular in Britain, the U.S. and elsewhere.

Harry is an orphan who lives with a cruel uncle and aunt before discovering that he has magical powers. He enrolls at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and uses the powers he learns there to combat the forces of evil.

Three books have been written thus far. The first, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, netted a \$100,000 advance for the American edition, a rare sum for a first novel. By the time the third book appeared, 220,000 copies were sold in Britain in advance orders alone. The average initial print run for a children's book in the UK is around 20,000. More than 19 million copies of the third book were sold in the U.S.

A fourth book, Harry Potter and the Doomsday Tournament, is due out in July, but early orders have already propelled it to the top of Amazon.com's bestseller list, and to number 15 on the Barnes and Noble list. On March 22, all three Harry Potter books made USA Today's weekly list of top-50 bestsellers, at numbers 2, 7 and 12. Barnes and Noble's top 100 selling list this week has the Potter books at numbers 1, 2, 4 and 15, and Amazon.com features them at 2, 5, 6 and 15.

The books are said to be very popular with adults too, as much for their style and humor as for the actual plots. Time Warner has bought the film rights to two of them.

A representative of Bloomsbury, which publishes the books in Britain, told CNSNews.com Wednesday: "We don't have a great deal to say about it [the ban], just to say we feel the books have a strong moral message and clearly portray good and evil," she said.

CNSNews.com spoke to head teachers at several other Christian schools Wednesday about the Potter books. Babs Olibimu, head teacher of the Springfield Christian School in South London, said the school's policy was neither to stock nor encourage children to read "any books that go against Christian doctrine," not just Harry Potter books. He said parents of pupils were supportive of the policy. Emlyn Humphries, head teacher at the Takeley Christian School in southeast England, took a different approach.

"I think it's a bit hysterical, to be blunt," he said of the decision to ban the books. Acknowledging that there had been "a lot of questions going around" about the Potter books, he said children are more perceptive than they're given credit for. Far worse than books about magic were those promoting "gratuitous violence and gratuitous materialism."

"Banning books is not the way to go about things," Humphries said, adding that children would "go and read them anyway." And if they had questions about something in the books, they would not feel comfortable approaching anyone, so adults would have no input. "We're not very keen on them," said Sally Stokes, head teacher of the Emmanuel Christian School in Oxford, "Individual children have their own copies, and that's up to parents, but they wouldn't be on our school bookshelves."

Stokes, who conferred with other teachers and some parents before responding, said the school sought to develop a "critical, open attitude" in children, especially as they become "older and more discerning." "But we are very careful about age-appropriate material. For young children, we would want a clear distinction between good and evil, right and wrong. A lot of material we find confuses those." As children get older, "they learn to deal with the gray areas and the compromises ... but while they're still young we feel our emphasis should be on making this clear." We'd be unhappy with anything that trivializes evil. We take wrongdoing very seriously," Stokes said. "Our lives are governed by biblical principles and Bible teaching would be to avoid evil and occult and contact with spirits and wizardry."

Rowlings' agent was not available for comment, and a spokesman said the author herself was away. She was quoted last year as responding to criticism by saying her books were "very moral" and represented the struggle between good and evil.

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(© 2000, Conservative News Service)
(Post date: March 29, 2000)

ARTICLE #3

MORE CLAY THAN POTTER

By **Anne McCain**

Director of children's education at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Charlottesville, Va.

Placing 1, 2, and 3 on the bestseller charts, children's literature sensation Harry Potter increasingly descends into darkness, raising concerns of parents and school boards around the country. Moral ambiguity and alienation of youth are strong themes in the series, which are wrongly marketed as modern successors to The Chronicles of Narnia. Unlike biblical stories, in Potter's world bad things seem to happen for no reason.

For the past two months, a skinny, dark-haired orphan with a lightning-bolt scar on his forehead has taken over the New York Times bestseller list. The boy, Harry Potter, is the invention of British writer J.K. Rowling, who has made publishing history this fall by grabbing the top three spots on the bestseller list with her children's books, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, and Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. More than 8 million copies of the books have been sold in the United States alone.

Harry is a young wizard who attends the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; his parents were murdered. Each of the books in the series-Joanne Rowling plans seven-chronicles one of Harry's school years at Hogwarts. Harry interacts with many fascinating characters in a series of magical adventures. The books, often compared to those of Roald Dahl, are suspenseful and humorous, but the second and third ones are increasingly dark, and maybe the comparison should be to the tangled terrain and psychology of Batman movies.

The big debate in literary circles last month was whether children's books should be eligible for the prestigious Times list; a win, place, and show by one author brings out the envy in many. The newly emerging question, though, is whether Harry's world is a good one for the intended 8- to 12-year-old audience. The American Library Association is now reporting four serious challenges-in South Carolina, Michigan, Minnesota, and New York-to use of the books in schools.

On Oct. 12, the South Carolina Board of Education agreed to review the suitability of all three Harry Potter books for classroom use. Elizabeth Mounce, a parent who addressed the board, said, "The books have a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect, and sheer evil." A member of the board, Clarence Dickert, agreed, saying that "censorship is an ugly word, but it is not as ugly as what I've heard this morning."

To many readers the books' fictitious world of witchcraft seems harmless. Ms. Rowling has simply taken some traditional stereotypes of witchcraft, such as flying broomsticks, and incorporated them into her created fantasy world. This safety, this apparent harmlessness, may create a problem by putting a smiling mask on evil. A reader drawn in would find that the real world of witchcraft is not Harry Potter's world. Neither attractive nor harmless, it is powerful and evil.

That's the most obvious concern about the books, but others may go deeper. The parallel society Ms. Rowling creates-within England but invisible to its ordinary inhabitants-is both fantastic and mundane. Students have to study and take tests in their magic classes, and Harry has to practice long hours flying on his broomstick in order to be good at the school sport Quidditch. These mundane elements make the stories seem more real.

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The magical elements, though, throw a relativistic curve ball. The rules of the wizard world are rarely solid and steadfast, and nothing is as it appears. In book two, Harry and Ron are able to transform themselves so they look like friends of their enemy, who thus gives them secret information. In book three a favorite teacher becomes a werewolf, a pet rat is actually an evil villain, and a convicted murderer is really a self-sacrificing godfather. The implicit message is that your friend may be your enemy, the person you are talking to might be someone else, and even your pet cannot be trusted. It's a message that rings true to many children of divorce, who learn early on that wedding vows are made to be broken and love almost arbitrarily turns to hatred.

Other dark elements, especially in Potter books two and three, are downright creepy. Book two spotlights a disturbing character named Dobby who bangs his head hard against walls and floors as self-punishment when he disobeys his master. Book three tells of horrible creatures called dementors (dementia, get it?) that suck every happy memory and thought from characters so they are left with only painful memories and negative thoughts. When dementors approach Harry, he can recall the screams of his mother dying to protect him, as his parents are killed by their best friend (or so it seems).

Ms. Rowling has a real knack for description-being around a dementor seems to be a pretty accurate description of depression. She also has a sharp wit-the way to combat a dementor is by eating chocolate! But her writing talents may be under the sway of her own dementors, and in an interview with Time Ms. Rowling said the books will become darker yet as the series progresses. "There will be deaths," she says, for "the only way to show how evil it is to take a life is to kill someone the reader cares about."

The gospels are centered on the evil taking of an innocent life, and Harry Potter books can give Bible-conscious parents an enjoyable opportunity to teach older children how to think critically. Truths sprinkled throughout the books are "trail markers" that can be used to point to God. For example, in the first book Harry comes across the Mirror of Erised. (Eris was the Greek goddess of discord and strife.) When a person gazes into the mirror, he sees his deepest longings fulfilled. When Harry looks, he sees his family; as an orphan, his deepest longing is for his mom and dad. When Professor Dumbledore, the Hogwarts headmaster, discovers Harry looking into the mirror, he offers him the wise counsel of not spending too much time with it since "the mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen."

Dumbledore encourages Harry to be content with what he has, not spend his life wishing for what he hasn't. The Bible teaches that contentment accompanied with godliness is great gain. This mirror episode provides an opportunity for discussing the value of contentment, and of the great gain in pursuing God as our deepest longing. What would each of us see if we were to look in the Mirror of Erised?

Another trail marker comes at the end of book two, when Harry discovers that he has many of the same abilities as the archvillain Voldemort. Harry is disturbed by the thought of being lumped in the same category as his enemy. But Dumbledore offers him wise counsel: "It is our choices, Harry, that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities." Scripture teaches that our actions flow from the heart, our "choice-making center." What we do and choose, not our abilities, shows our godliness or sinfulness.

Voldemort is truly evil, and Dumbledore is wise in a wonderful, grandfatherly way. Most of the other characters are more mixed, which again is a trail marker. Scripture teaches that we as humans are totally depraved but yet, by God's sanctifying or common grace, we sometimes choose to do good. Harry, the hero, has many good qualities. Yet, he is not always a shining example of virtue. He does not love his enemies-often he returns hurt for hurt. Harry is always trying to put one over on the Dursleys, the mean relatives who took him in after his parents died. But the depiction of the Dursleys and other "Muggles"-common folk without imagination-is also one of the warning signs about the Harry Potter books. Scholastic Press, their U.S. publisher, links them to The Chronicles of Narnia and The Lord of the Rings. But C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, creators of the seven Narnia tales and the four

Special Paper No.4 – **Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone**

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volumes set in Middle Earth, depicted common folks (Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, Sam Gamgee and his dad) as the salt of the earth. Ms. Rowling depicts them as clueless irritants, the way an alienated child sees parents. The worst of the Muggles, the Dursleys, are said to have "a medieval attitude toward magic." In book two students learn that their school was built 1,000 years ago "far from prying Muggle eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution." Who disapproved of magic in the middle ages? The church.

Narnia and Middle Earth are also better worlds for a child's imagination than Harry Potter's because in them a great cosmic struggle between good and evil is taking place, and the difference between good and evil is clear: Tolkien's great character Gandalf is a powerful leader called a wizard, but witchcraft plays no part in the saga. In comparison, Harry Potter's topsy-turvy moral universe is confusing. That confusion, however, may make the series a hit in a confused culture. Harry Potter is a perfect modern hero for alienated youth. He is an orphan who hates, and is hated by, his adoptive parents. He has talents his parents don't recognize. He makes his own way, directed by his feelings and his friendships, but not by any written moral code.

The big sales of Harry Potter books are the culmination of a long-growing movement in children's literature and American culture generally to make 'tweens' - 8 to 14-year-olds - grow up faster. This is not to say that children that age should be unacquainted with the consequences of original sin among adults. If families read the Bible night after night, children will hear of brains smashed or eyes being gouged out. In the Bible, though, bad things happen for a purpose, and that's very different from today's sophisticated kids' books that show things happening for no reason, and without much rhyme.