

## THE THEOLOGY OF HARRY POTTER

For those unfamiliar with Harry Potter: Harry Potter is the main character in a series of seven books, written by J.K. Rowling, that have been made into eight movies.

The stories are about the adventures of Harry and his friends, who are wizards. They are attending a school for wizards in order to learn magic, and along their journey, they encounter many challenging things, including deception, evil and the primary antagonist- Lord Voldemort. Voldemort wants to kill Harry Potter.

To be sure this fantasy has all kinds of fascinating, strange and mystical characters and creatures.

A cursory parallel to the Exodus passage is that it also presents people facing challenging life or death tests.

I've heard that there are some that are bothered by the nature of the Harry Potter stories. I'm not sure why. The concern couldn't be about the fanciful characters, because the Bible also possess such things as talking snakes, man eating fish that don't chew their food, talking pigs, and the weird creatures in the book of Revelation.

Also, the battle against evil couldn't an issue.

Maybe, the aspect of magic is the problem. Yet, most of us accept and engage in a type of magic all the time. Moreover, the temple cult in the Bible has a magical element to it: thinking sins can be paid for by saying a few words and killing something.

Plus, there are lots of supernatural occurrences in the Bible, but if they come from God, then we call them miracles. The distinction seems to be that magic is not from God. Maybe that is the issue?

*More about the magic we use,.... in a bit.*

Speaking of magic: one cool thing from the Harry Potter stories is the wand - the magic wand.  
I have one here. {show} <

The wizards can do amazing things with their wands, including turning it into a flash light,..... with the command "lumose."

{ turn on wand }

Impressive!

Moses didn't have a wand, but he did amazing things with his staff,... which was like a real long wand. He caused all kinds of ugly spells on the Egyptians, called plagues, with his staff, and he used it to part the water, too.

The Exodus 17 text presents another episode when Moses used his staff.

God's people were on a journey through the desert, on their way to a better place. God was freeing them.

However, deserts tend to be dry places, and the people were thirsty.

It is hard to say how many people were involved. Some scholars suggest 20,000 because Egyptian history reveals that they were not overly concerned about the departure.

Joshua boasted that it was 600,000 men, which would mean over 2 million men, women and children.

Two million missing from a country would have a huge impact.

Whatever the amount, there were enough people that they were strung out over a large area, even separated by groups as the passage states.

Verse 1 notes that they journeyed in "stages." Ancient writers clarified this as various groups / divisions of the Hebrews.

Birds of a feather flock together, and this group were the affluent ones.

Did you notice in verse 3 where it mentions that they had livestock?

The Hebrews were a repressed minority in Egypt, but obviously, some of them were fairing pretty well, and likely had a modestly comfortable life, owning livestock and all....

People accustomed to comfort, expect to be comfortable,... and that includes NOT going thirsty.

This group of travellers were probably the complainers, and they greatly annoyed Moses with all their angry demands.

I imagine that they thought that the natural environment should provide their needs. Likely they believed that creation was something to be exploited, and so they were quite irritated that the land wasn't a source for their well-being, and..... they were infuriated with their leader – Moses,..... because he wasn't meeting their expectations.

So, Moses vented to God about their demands and threats.

God responded by directing Moses to take his staff and hit a certain rock with it.

Moses did just that, and water poured out of the rock – most impressive, and the people were able to quench their thirst.

Just like a magic wand, that staff did amazing things..... well of course it was empowered by God.

Wouldn't it be nice..... to have a staff..... or a wand that could do the supernatural..... just think of the things we could do?

????? [     ]

We could wave the wand and end world hunger,.... end all wars... and so on,... and do a few things for ourselves.

I wonder why Moses didn't do more with his wand / staff. He could have put a Tim Hortons at every stop along the way,.... just like we have, today.

He could have made air conditioned buses to take the people to the promised land.

But,..... those things didn't happen, and that is most interesting. It is interesting because just like in Jesus' time, we tend to focus on the supernatural—the miracles and the magic,.....and we too often miss out on the beauty of life.....AND.... the messages in the story.

The Exodus text is NOT about the miracle of a staff that causes a rock to make water. This story in Exodus presents a message for us “comfortable” people: a message that includes trusting God,... and there's more.

The Harry Potter stories are not really about the magic and fanciful adventures. The stories have good messages.

One example, is the “Philosopher's Stone” [ show ].

The stone was a source of great power; however, it could only be owned by a person who did not want to use the power for selfish reasons. In other words, echoing the Philippians passage, there is power in serving others, and NOT in serving self.

That's a good Gospel message.

Another example:

An evil possessed person who was assaulting Harry became a rock, then disintegrated and disappeared when Harry touched him. It was later explained to Harry that Harry's touch was full of love,..... and that evil crumbles from the touch of love. Love is stronger than evil.

Wow..... what a wonderful message,..... and an encouragement for pacifists, too.

That message was also presented in the manner in which the evil Dementors were repelled. “Dementors” were ghostly creatures that suck the soul out of people, but they could be repulsed with a certain word said while thinking about good and love.

This is good advice on how to resist those that suck the soul out of us: focus on the good.....on love. I bet it works.

To be sure, there was magic in stories, and Harry and his friends were attending a school to learn how to do magic. It would be tempting to focus on that – the magic.

However, it was never the magic that saved Harry,.... just as Moses' staff really didn't save any one.

Harry was attacked and assaulted numerous times, and it wasn't the magic that saved him.

The wonderful message that radiates from the narrative is that Harry was saved with the help of his friends and by love.

His friends / being in a community..... and love saved Harry Potter, and that's the main message in the Harry Potter stories.

Paul presents that very same message in our NT text.

Yet, too often we miss the message and focus on the miracles / the magic. The thought of making something change or appear is seductive.

We have our own type of magic that can consume us, and that is money.

Money is like magic.

The wizards would say a incantation or wave their wand while saying a special word,..... and zap something very different happened.

They exchanged something unrelated to produce a desired result,... and this is how money works.

For example, money has no nutritional value, yet we can present it / use... and voila... food appears..... totally unrelated to the money.

See what I mean?

Money can turn into all sorts of things—things we need... and things we lust after.....

And yes,..... we have needs and wants, and sometimes those “wants” are what we believe will make us happy and content.

The weird aspect is that instead of dealing with the heart of the matter, we tend to focus on the magic..... the money,..... and this doesn't make any sense,..... if you stop and think about it.

A hungry person really doesn't need more money, she needs food and a change of dynamics that caused her hunger.

The absence of personal wealth does not cause hunger.

This distortion / this infatuation with the magic of money is in the church domain, too.

It is troubling to hear church organizations and churches call out that more money is needed. Those pleas sound like desert travellers crying out to Moses to use his staff.

And, by the way, I have tremendous respect for church treasurers because they act as the liaison / the link between churches and the secular world. They must report the reality of the situation / the relationship to the secular domain, ... so that the church can be informed.

Yet, the problem is not solved by more money, just as the Hebrews were NOT saved by Moses' staff, and Jesus didn't save anyone with miracles, and Harry Potter was not saved by magic.

As churches, we must not respond to the deficits as the secular world tends to.

To focus on the magic / the miracles / the money... is missing the point – missing the message of salvation.

Paul is trying to get this very point across in the Philippians' passage, **and** the theology of Harry Potter presents the very same message,... which is hold tight to love, trust in love.....while we live serving the best interests of others.

And, for us astute theologians,.... we know what / who love is.

Verses 1-5 states that our joy and the purpose of Christ is to love and share in God's Spirit.... meaning being in a relationship with God and each other. Paul reminds us to focus on this: to be unified in this pursuit, which includes keeping the best interests of others in our choices and how we live.

We do not serve ourselves. We are not the master.

The evil characters in Harry Potter stories lived to gain personal power, and they believed that their magic would prevail.

They were wrong,..... and.... very unhappy, too.

Verses 6-11 of Philippians 2 presents Christ as the example, and how Jesus emptied himself, was humble, served others and God.

The passage concludes with the challenge to "work out our salvation"... knowing that God is at work with in us.

We must make good choices, choices for others,... realizing we are in this life together. We are not saving ourselves, and this includes the notion that selfishly we can conjure up Jesus or God to save our hide, while ignoring the plight of others. We can not.

Just as the power of the philosopher's stone could not be possessed for selfish reasons.

God's love is moving us to trust each other and God, in other words: to love.

Our salvation is worked out with God and each other, yet it seems we are influenced / being affected by the dark magic spell that controls much of society.

That persuasion / ideology is selfish individualism that craves to have more magical money in order to be more self sufficient / to have more personal control. The current trend is to cut taxes, cut assistance to those in need... and to build more prisons for those who protest, and that is shameful.

We tend to live as individuals—individuals in need of more power.

We need more power because personal peace and salvation is beyond our reach,...always out of reach.

This individualism, which sharply contrasts to the way of Christ / the way of love, is revealed in our attitudes.

Most of us feel a sense of embarrassment, even failure, if we have to ask for help.

There seems to be a level of shame if we depend on the help from others.

Why is that? Where / how did we acquire that notion?

According to the Gospel message, we are failing when we do NOT ask and offer help / when we are not living for others and trusting others are living for us.

Our needs and the world's needs are fulfilled by trusting God's love and that love in each of us.

This is not only God's way / the way of salvation, but not surprisingly, it really works.

No one in the world would go hungry if we all shared what we have / lived for each other.

Churches would not have to cut ministries and programs if the people could cast off the spell that is controlling most of us.

And, how is that done?        ????  
How did Harry Potter overcome evil?

The answer is..... by helping others, being helped by others, and holding tight to love.

Another item from the Harry Potter stories is the "Erised" mirror.  
The "Erised" mirror reflected the "Deepest and most desperate desire of one's heart."

I wonder what we would see if we were to look at such a mirror?  
What is the deepest and most desperate desire of the heart?  
????  
I think if Jesus looked at the Erised mirror he'd see others and the love of God.  
What would our reflection be?

Today's stories prompt us to see a bit more clearly.