

# From Jerusalem to Rome: The Geographical Aspect of Magic

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## **Abstract**

*Just as magic was undermined in the Acts of the Apostles, its spread throughout the whole region of the Greco-Roman Region was also undermined. Although the magic episode occurred six times in the Acts of the Apostles, the demonstration of the geographical aspect of magic in the Acts of the Apostles was undermined. The prominent question regarding the presence of magic in the Greco-Roman reigns is how serious was magic during the Greco-Roman Era for Christianity so that the gospel could be proclaimed to the end of the world? This article will demonstrate the seriousness of magic to impede the spread of the gospel is obvious when analyzing the geographical spread of magic. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the magical context of each Roman city where magic was there. Moreover, this article also demonstrates the significance of the geographical aspect of magic for the spread of the Gospel. This geographical aspect will be argued within the context of the apologetic purpose of the Acts of the Apostles and the spread of the gospel to the end of the world to fulfill Jesus' command to his disciples. This research will employ a literature method. The analysis will analyze the city of Samaria, the island of Cyprus, the strategic city of Ephesus, Philippi, and Malta. Application regarding the proclamation of the gospel for our contemporary world will be provided in the section of discussion and result before the conclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Magic, Geographical, Samaria, Cyprus, Ephesus, Philippi, Malta*

## **Introduction**

Magic is one significant theme in the Acts of the Apostles as it occurs six times throughout the book. Many attempts to address this issue varied from historical-critical examination, exposition of all passages of the magical episode to exegetical analysis and ethical connection,<sup>1</sup> but the geographical aspect of magic is lacking in analysis. The life context during the first century was complex not only in the life itself but also from the lack of moral standards employed by the Roman authority, the belief of so many sects, and the syncretism

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<sup>1</sup> Chandra Han, "Magic in Greco-Roman Era: A Historical Context to Understand Magic in the Acts of the Apostles," *Jurnal Jaffray* 18, no. 1 (2020): 19; Dick van der Merwe, *The Power of the Gospel Victorious Over the Power of Evil in Acts of the Apostles* (Scriptura 103, 2010); Benedict H. M. Kent, "Curses in Acts Hearing the Apostles' Words of Judgment Alongside 'Magical' Spell Texts," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39, no. 4 (2017); Chandra Han, "Magic and Christianity: An Exegesis on Magical Passages in the Acts of the Apostles," *Dunamis: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 6, no. 1 (2021): 128–52; Tony Burke, *Cursing and the Apostle The Fighting for Authority in Early Christianity*, vol. 8, 2019; Chandra Han, "The Amazing Magic versus The Joyful Gospel," *Jurnal Jaffray* 19, no. 1 (2021): 27–52; Joshua W. Jipp, "Hospitable Barbarians Luke's Ethnic Reasoning in Acts 28:1-10," *Journal of Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2017): 35–40.

of religion and magic.<sup>2</sup> The presence of magic was inevitable in the life under the Roman authority since all the Roman emperors practiced magic.<sup>3</sup>

The statistical data of geography and characters in the narrative is impressive in the book of Acts. Within only twenty-eight chapters, Acts “mentions over thirty-three countries, more than fifty towns or cities, numerous islands, and nearly one hundred persons.”<sup>4</sup> It is entirely unclear whether Luke employed a map to collect this considerable data. However, the accuracy of this data is also disputed since Luke did not indicate any map he may have used. Martin Hengel contended that “Luke is basically as free over geographical details as we find him in connection with Palestine”<sup>5</sup> Examining this valuable geographical detail Luke provided, it is plausible to state that the lack of geographical analysis of magic then turned to result that many experts missed to figure out the essence of magic which was the power that impeded the spread of the gospel. Understanding the geographical will induce Christians to spread the Gospel with a better awareness that the enemy of the Gospel is about the power and not about the knowledge of the Gospel. The result which is also the application of this research is assumed to be the novelty of this article.

In Acts, the mission to spread the gospel is significant<sup>6</sup> in four ways: First, it is the mission of the true God (Jesus and the Holy Spirit are included) through believers, although Peter and Paul are narrated the most. Second, the message of the mission is of utmost importance with continual references to the word of God or the word of the Lord. Third, to whom the mission is addressed is another critical issue with the inclusion of gentiles likely the intention not only of Luke but of God as well. Finally, the outreach of the mission is not neglected since Luke places it prominently in Acts 1:8. As the geographical aspect seemed to be undermined, it is important to ask what the significant of geographical aspect in recognizing the seriousness of magic to impede the spread of the gospel is?

The result of such an important mission presented by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles is the impressive acceptance of the gospel by every geographical area where it is preached.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, geography is significant in its fulfillment of Jesus’ commandment to bear witness “until the end of the earth.”<sup>8</sup> The acceptance of the gospel is also important to the apologetic purposes of Acts so that magic and the opposition of the Jews are overcome by the gospel. In

<sup>2</sup> James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999); John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Twelve Caesars*, ed. James Rives, trans. Robert Graves (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 211.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Hengel, “The Geography of Palestine in Acts,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 76 contends that “Luke is basically as free over geographical details as we find him in connection with Palestine” though he does not indicate any map Luke may have used. See also pp. 77-8 on a more thorough discussion on the geographical aspect in Acts.

<sup>6</sup> Peter G Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 192–214 who seems to miss the significance of the outreach of the mission.

<sup>7</sup> Brian S Rosner, “The Progress of the Word,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 215–33.

<sup>8</sup> Hengel, “The Geography of Palestine in Acts,” 64–65.

almost every crucial place where the gospel is spread, magic is God's adversary that pokes up its herd. This observation affirms the domination of magic throughout the Roman territories. This article will examine the geographical areas where magic is encountered call attention to the spread of the gospel throughout the world fulfil Jesus' commission in Acts 1:8. There are five distinct regions where the confrontation between God's power and magic occurs. The first area is Samaria which is the broader Palestine region. This region is significant since it is explicitly mentioned in Acts 1:8 that the gospel will reach Samaria. The second region is Cyprus, the Mediterranean island in southern Asia Minor whose capital city is Paphos, a city under a senator's administration. The third region is the province of Asia, specifically Ephesus, major strategic city of Asia Minor under Roman governance. The fourth region is Europe as represented by Philippi, part of the province of Macedonia. The fifth region is the island of Malta, which is the closest place to Italy, the center of the Roman Empire. It is likely that Paul's missionary journey crossed all these five boundaries to confront and overcome magic so that the gospel could spread successfully after wards.

### Research Method

This article will employ literature study within the category of qualitative research.<sup>9</sup> The relevant literature to this article such as journal articles, books, and the translation of the Greek Magical Papyri will be selected critically and referred to insofar appropriate.<sup>10</sup> The Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) is the English translation of the collected spell. Since this PGM is a huge collection within the range of the first four centuries, thus only related magical spell in the PGM will be referred to. There are several stages in this literature method. The first stage is the selection of each area where magic and the principles of magic were clearly recorded. The second stage is to analyse only particular life context of each area or city which is relevant to magic since the information about the life context of each city will be abundant and it is irrelevant to examine every information about a certain area or city. The third step is to examine the influence of magic in each territory or city whether the life in the city or certain person in the city. Scholars' commentary on the addressed passage in the Acts of the Apostles are also significant resources to provide the clarity of the examination. The final stage will examine the application of this research for personal and church ministry. The conclusion will be provided as the closing of this research.

### Discussion and Result

In this discussion, the examination of this research will cover not only the territories or cities where magic influenced the people or the society or a very influential person in these areas, but also the term "the end of the world." Only relevant analysis on magic will be provided when it is significant to figure out the negative impact of magic. The examined cities or areas will be discussed orderly as recorded progressively in the Acts of the Apostles. The territories or cities to be addressed are the territory of Samaria, the island of Cyprus, Ephesus as an area and particularly the city of Ephesus, the city of Philippi which was the part of

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<sup>9</sup> John W. Creswell, *Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, vol. 4 (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2002), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Creswell, *Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 80.

Macedonia (now in Europe), the island of Malta which is the closest to the Roman empire, the last is the examination of the term “the End of the Earth”.

### Samaria: The broader area of Palestine

The reference to Samaria is consistently described as a region or district and never a city name.<sup>11</sup> How many villages are found in Samaria is not clearly enumerated in Acts, though several cities such as Sebaste, Shechem, Sychar and Gitta, the birthplace of Simon, are certainly part of the region of Samaria. Since the primary concern of Luke is the mission of the gospel, such details of this district such as its population, its significance to Roman authorities or to Christianity, and the physical terrain is totally absent from Luke’s episode. Nevertheless, Samaria is significant not only in contrast to the Jews who refuse to accept the gospel,<sup>12</sup> but also to highlight the inclusion of Samaria as the uniting of a divided Israel.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, our main concern will be with what Luke intended his readers to comprehend.

Just as Luke is familiar with the enmity between Samaritans and the Jews so, it is likely that he sees Samaria as the center of the “northern” kingdom deported from the one kingdom of Israel. Once this “northern” kingdom is established, the center of the religious worship is located on Mount Gerizim instead of Jerusalem and the enmity between Jews and Samaritans intensifies.<sup>14</sup> The people of Samaria are then no longer considered as true Israel, but as outsiders, even gentiles.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the Samaritans claim themselves to be the true Israel. On the other hand, the syncretism in Samaria distinguished the Samaritans from being the true Israel according to the Jews.<sup>16</sup>

One evidence of syncretism is certainly the pervasion of magic. As the Greco-Roman world was dominated by magic, so also was Samaria. The territory of Samaria located in the eastern Roman Empire strongly suggests that Samaria may be pervaded even before the sixth century BC and the Assyrian annexation. The presence of many demotic magical papyri found in the Greco-Roman period is evidence of the pervasion of magic in the territory which included Samaria. Since this is not Luke’s concern, he does not offer the reader any hints about the significance of magic in Samaria. However, the lengthy account of magic in Samaria can lead to the conjecture that magic also vastly dominated Samaria. The phrase “the great power” in Simon’s claim indicates the evidence of magic in Samaria.<sup>17</sup> This phrase may also refer to

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<sup>11</sup> Hengel, “The Geography of Palestine in Acts,” 68.

<sup>12</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 135; C. K Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1: ICC (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1994), 397.

<sup>13</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 111.

<sup>14</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 499.

<sup>15</sup> Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 135–36; John Bowman, *The Samaritan Problem Studies in the Relationships of Samaritanism, Judaism, & Early Christianity*, trans. Alfred M. Johnson, 4th ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008); Flavius Josephus, “The Antiquity of the Jews, 9.14.3,” in *The Complete Works*, ed. Josephus, trans. William Whiston (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1998), 316–317.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 63; Bowman, *The Samaritan Problem Studies in the Relationships of Samaritanism, Judaism, & Early Christianity*.

<sup>17</sup> Ben. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 283–85; Howard Clark Kee, *The New Testament in Context: Sources and*

“Kore” the goddess whose statue was found in the stadium at Samaria.<sup>18</sup> The fact that “all man from the small until the great” proclaim the greatness of Simon confirms the significance of magic throughout Samaria. It is therefore surprising that resistance to the gospel is not found among the people of Samaria since they “paid attention” and were amazed by the magic of Simon and even called him “The great power of god”. The geography of Samaria is significant to the mission of the gospel and illustrates the domination of magic.

### Cyprus: The Mediterranean Island, southern Asia Minor

Cyprus is found in the magical episode of Acts 13:4-13. Cyprus is the third-largest island in the Mediterranean with an area of about 3,571 square miles.<sup>19</sup> Four districts (Paphos, Salamis, Amathus, and Lapethos) are found in the imperial period and two cities are mentioned in Acts 13, Salamis and Paphos. The island of Cyprus is significant since it located along important sea routes.<sup>20</sup> The island of Cyprus was annexed by Rome in 57-58 BC became an imperial province in about 27-30 BC.<sup>21</sup> Not long after being an imperial province, in 22 BC Caesar Augustus handed it over to the senator administration so that it was governed by a proconsul<sup>22</sup> as confirmed by Acts 13:7. Previously the capital city was Salamis, but when an earth quake ruined the city in 15 BC, the capital city was shifted to Paphos (Nea Paphos).<sup>23</sup> These two cities Salamis and Paphos seem to be the most significant due to their location and commercial function.<sup>24</sup> Jewish influence is significant as evidenced by the fact that there was more than one synagogue in Cyprus and also by the Jewish name of the false prophet Bar-Jesus.

The significance of magic in Cyprus is demonstrated by its influence over the highest ruler of the capital city, the proconsul Sergius Paulus. The name Sergius Paulus is evident in three inscriptions, the Soloi inscription, the Kythraia inscription and the Tiber inscription which is the most promising relative to Lucius Sergius Paullus with Proconsul Sergius Paulus in Acts 13.<sup>25</sup> It is also postulated by the children of Lucius Sergius Paullus that the whole

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*Documents* (Bergen County, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc, 1984), 219–22; Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Included Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Texts. Chicago, TX: Chicago University Press, 1992), 1225–29.

<sup>18</sup> Andre Parrot, *Samaria The Capital of the Kingdom of Israel*, trans. S.H. Hooke (London, England: SCM Press, 1958), 113–19.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Wilson, “Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus,” in *The World of The New Testament Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 498.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, “Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus,” 499.

<sup>21</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 294–95.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 295.

<sup>23</sup> Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 395; Wilson, “Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus,” 499.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 295; Wilson, “Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus,” 499.

<sup>25</sup> Alanna Nobbs, “Cyprus,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting The Book of Acts in Its Greco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W.J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 279–89.

family was Christianized.<sup>26</sup> These records reveal several implications: first, the fact that magic influenced the upper level of the society such as the proconsul and even the Roman Caesars.<sup>27</sup> Second, magic also widely spread geographically from Samaria, the broader area of Palestine to Cyprus. The significance of magic is both geographically wide-spread and evident at every level of society is then obvious. Third, the victory of God's word over magic is confirmed by the Christian's faith of the proconsul and his family. It is sensible to conclude that the faith of the whole family of the proconsul in Christianity came after the overcoming of magic by God's power. Fourth, just like in Samaria, in the capital city of Cyprus, magic is also no rival when it confronts to God's power. Jesus' commandment to preach the gospel confronts and overcomes the spread of magic in regions of Asia Minor as well as Palestine.

### Ephesus: A major city of Asia Minor

The province of Asia refers to the western part of Turkey which was a Roman province.<sup>28</sup> Historically, the province of Asia from the time of Alexander the Great to Augustus is treated positively by authors although there are many inflictions that repress this province.<sup>29</sup> The province of Asia is massive including Troas, Miletus, Thyatira, Phrygia, Ephesus, and Iconium to Pisidian Antioch.<sup>30</sup> This provincial sense of Asia is meant in Acts 19:10, 26-7. Ephesus is a major city in Asia Minor and its location is so strategic that it "was a major center of international trade."<sup>31</sup> Particularly the sea traffic "from the Aegean to the west, The Bosphorus and Dardanelles to the north, from Palestine to the east, and from Egypt to the south all called at Ephesus."<sup>32</sup> Therefore it is plausible to propose that such an important city attracted many people including the magicians.

The episode of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-20 happen in Ephesus. Magic so vastly dominated the city of Ephesus that the terms "power" and "principalities" are found the most in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.<sup>33</sup> Some of Paul's astonishing magic such as the healing of the sick, the curing of the illness, and the expulsion of evil spirits only by handkerchiefs or aprons are also presented in the episode about Ephesus. The episode of magic in Ephesus in Acts 19:10-20 is narrated before Paul's journey to Jerusalem which is significant since Paul mentions his expectation to visit Rome with the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. Thus, this incident is tied together with the farthestmost fulfilment of Jesus command to preach the gospel until the end of the earth in Acts 1:8.

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<sup>26</sup> The monument of Lucius Sergius Paullus in Pisidia Antioch is erected by his son whose name was also L. Sergius Paullus and his daughter Sergia Paulia Nobbs, 287; G. L. Cheeseman, "The Family of the Caristanii," *Journal of Roman Studies* 3 (1913): 252-66.

<sup>27</sup> Han, "Magic in Greco-Roman Era: A Historical Context to Understand Magic in the Acts of the Apostles," 19.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Trebilco, "Asia," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting The Book of Acts in Its Greco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W.J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 300-301.

<sup>29</sup> Trebilco, "Asia," 292-302.

<sup>30</sup> Trebilco, 301-2; Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 137-52.

<sup>31</sup> Trebilco, "Asia," 308.

<sup>32</sup> Trebilco, "Asia," 308.

<sup>33</sup> Clinton E Arnold, *Ephesians Power and Magic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf Stock Publishers, 1989) who examines the relationship of power and magic particularly in Ephesus. See also for instance Ephesians 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12 in the Revised Standard Version.

### *The City of Ephesus*

Although there were several periods of infliction before the reign of Augustus, during his reign Ephesus “experienced tremendous growth and participated fully in the general prosperity which resulted from the Pax Romana.”<sup>34</sup> The wealth and the tremendous growth of this strategic city of Ephesus since the era of Augustus can be identified by the buildings within the city and the witness of several ancient figures concerning the city’s growth. Moreover, its influence as a religious center also emerges as exhibited in several religious temples dedicated to the gods of Ephesians. Several indications of the wealth and the growth of the city Ephesus that express her greatness are such as “the temple of Artemis the main God in Ephesus, the Magnesian gate, the Heroon, the Upper Agora, the temple of Dea Roman and Divus Iulius, the temple of Isis and Augustus, the monument of Pollio, the Octagon, the Tetragonos Agora, the Theatre, the Temple of Apollo, the Stadium and the Koressian Gate.”<sup>35</sup> With the city located on many significant land and sea traffics, the greatness of Ephesus is even more enormous.<sup>36</sup> The realm of magical powers also dominates and influences not only the pagan cult but also the church in Ephesus as evident in the Epistle to the Ephesians.<sup>37</sup>

The population of Ephesus is estimated at about 200,000-250,000 inhabitants included the Jews.<sup>38</sup> With such number Ephesus is probably “the third-largest city in the Empire after Rome and Alexandria”<sup>39</sup> As a city of important land and sea traffics, Ephesus is actually the center of where people from all over this Roman province may have met. Therefore, the spread of the gospel could happen very fast. Once the gospel had reached Ephesus, the whole province of Asia might have quickly heard the good news. This explicates the spread of what had happened to the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:17-19.

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

Beyond the record in Acts, the domination of magic is evident in the *Ephesia Grammata*, the “Ephesian Letters,” which “constitute written magical spells and are well attested in the literature.”<sup>40</sup> These letters “seem to be laden with apotropaic power, that is, in the warding off of evil demons.”<sup>41</sup> Still, the number of evidence<sup>42</sup> may increase if the overlap of magic and religion is highlighted. Therefore, it is legitimate to conclude that in Acts, the geographical aspect is extremely important for magic and as also for the mission of Christianity. Again, wherever the gospel is preached there was already magic to impress the people and at the

<sup>34</sup> Trebilco, “Asia,” 305.

<sup>35</sup> Guy Maclean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (London, England: Routledge, 1991), 86–107, 128–35; Trebilco, “Asia,” 307.

<sup>36</sup> Trebilco, “Asia,” 308.

<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 1:19-22; 2:2, 12; 3:7-10; 4:11-15, 17-19, 31; 5:5-6, 11-13; 6:11-12.

<sup>38</sup> Otto F. A Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus* (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas Brothers, 1979), 54; R. E Oster, “Ephesus and Ephesians,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (Chicago, IL: St James Press, 1990), 301; Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 398–99. mentions a great number of Jews and their privileges granted by Caesar’s lieutenant, Dolabella.

<sup>39</sup> Trebilco, “Asia,” 307.

<sup>40</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians Power and Magic*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Arnold, 15 for a more discussion on this “Ephesian Letters” see also pp. 16-7.

<sup>42</sup> Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Included Demotic Spells*.

same time perverting the people from coming to the word of God. Just like in the previous geographical area, magic has to be overcome through confrontation so that the gospel may then spread unimpededly.

### Philippi: Part of Macedonia (Europe)

Philippi is a city within the province of Macedonia. There are four districts in Macedonia,<sup>43</sup> and Philippi is located in “the eastern (first) district of the province.”<sup>44</sup> Until 360 B.C. the original name of Philippi was Crenides but was re-founded by Phillip II of Macedon in 356 B.C, who named the city after himself.<sup>45</sup> The province of Macedonia is significant due to its location where the Via Egnatia (the link between the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire with the Rome itself) ran and Philippi is strategic because its location is on this very important artery.<sup>46</sup> As a Roman colony the privileges of Philippi included the rights of the *ius italicum*, so that it was legally and could be characterized as making Philippi “Rome in microcosm.”<sup>47</sup> With such a privilege, one can easily see the connections between Philippi and Rome in almost every aspect of life.

The city of Philippi is significant to the influence of magic, as it is significant to the Roman Empire. A range of cults is present in Macedonia with the primary cult being the worship of the emperor.<sup>48</sup> The most intriguing in relation to magic is the presence of the oriental cults, particularly the Egyptian cults such as Serapis and Isis.<sup>49</sup> As both Serapis and Isis are found significantly in the magical incantations, the presence of magic is indisputable. Just like the oriental cults are present in Philippi, thus it is sensible to understand the presence of the magical practitioners as evident in the slave girl who bears the spirit of Python in Acts 16:12-19. The evidence of the cults and consequently the magic reveal the geographical spread of magic also throughout Europe. The presence of magic in Philippi ensures the domination of magic geographically throughout the Roman Empire. Therefore, it is no surprise that everywhere where the gospel is proclaimed, magic is also there to pervert the spread of the word of God. Therefore, magic must be eradicated prior to the unimpeded spread of the gospel.

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<sup>43</sup> The four districts originally are divided by Aemilius Paullus, those are Amphipolis, Thessalonike, Pella, and Pelagonia David W. J. Gill, “Macedonia,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting The Book of Acts in Its Greco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W.J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 404–6 The capital city of the province of Macedonia is Thessalonike.

<sup>44</sup> The four districts originally are divided by Aemilius Paullus, those are Amphipolis, Thessalonike, Pella, and Pelagonia Gill, “Macedonia.” The capital city of the province of Macedonia is Thessalonike.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 357; Gill, “Macedonia,” 411.

<sup>46</sup> Gill, “Macedonia,” 397.

<sup>47</sup> Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 488; Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 357; Gill, “Macedonia,” 411–12.

<sup>48</sup> Gill, “Macedonia,” 408.

<sup>49</sup> Gill, 408–9, 412 who mentioned that more than 140 reliefs connected to the Egyptian gods such as Serapis and Isis are found.

## Malta, Italy: The Centre of Roman Empire

Malta is an island approach to Italy in the Mediterranean Sea. The reference of the inhabitants as “barbaroi” (foreigners)<sup>50</sup> in Acts 28: 2 testifies how the mission to the gentiles is emphasized. There are several indications that this land is important to the narrative. First, the term “barbaroi” (foreigners) clearly signifies that the inhabitants are completely gentiles and Luke emphasizes the mission to the gentiles. This is the only place Luke-Acts but here where the Jews are unidentified. Second, ships regularly visit this island as in Acts 28:11 indicate that the sea traffic is significant. Third, Luke mentions the existence of a “prw/toj” (chief official),<sup>51</sup> as a representative of the Roman government on this island. But magical superstitions also had visited this island. As discussed in chapter 2 the interplay of magic and religion is presumed in this passage. Although very few reports are available, we certainly can assume the dominance of magic in their religious beliefs. It is likely that wherever religion is found magic also competes and cooperates with it. If the island of Malta is important for religion, it is also for magic. Finally, Malta’s close proximity to Rome indicates the gospel encountered magic also as it approached Italy and the capital of the immense empire. And so, this encounter as Paul approaches Rome ends the accounts of magic in the Book of Acts.

### “The End of the Earth”

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

The term “the end of the earth” is found in the very outset of Acts 1:8, the commandment Jesus gave to his disciples to be his witnesses from Jerusalem, and Judaea, and Samaria, and until the end of the earth. Many attempts have been done to figure out Luke’s perception of “the end of the earth.” and the dispute continues, Barrett who seems to understand that Rome is likely the reference of the end of the earth though he also contended that “If the Gospel can be preached and the church is established in Rome there is no limit to their possible extension.”<sup>52</sup> Johnson also provides several useful data, the most significant is perhaps Psalm of Solomon 8.15, other than Acts to support his opinion that Rome is likely the reference,<sup>53</sup> while Gaventa also provides several possibilities such as Ethiopia or Rome or Cornelius, the gentile convert who marks the movement to “the end of the earth”, but leaves the readers to ponder the conclusion,<sup>54</sup> and Dunn though inclines to point to Rome as the end of the earth

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<sup>50</sup> F. Wilbur Gingrich William F. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexico Of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker F. Wilbur Gingrich. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 133.

<sup>51</sup> William F. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexico Of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 726.

<sup>52</sup> Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles Sacra Pagina* (Minnesota, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 26–27.

<sup>54</sup> Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 65–66.

he still opens for the extension beyond Rome.<sup>55</sup> Though Rome seems to be the commonest reference by scholars, two considerations support the possibility of outreach beyond Rome. First, the episode of the Ethiopian eunuch may indicate the end of the earth is more than just Rome. Second, if Luke is familiar with the Septuagint, it is plausible that he might be familiar with certain eastern kingdoms all the way to India. It is also probable that the end of the world means more than just Rome so that once Rome is reached there is no more limit to the spread of the gospel.

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

## Result

The result of the discussion demonstrated previously which is also a novelty proposed in this article is closely related to the proclamation of the powerful Gospel that seemed to be undermined so long by Christians. The conviction of Paul in Roman 1:16-17 is the strongest reminder to every Christians. Just as Paul “was not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” so it is for every Christian to believe that the Gospel is indeed the power of God. Thus, magic as the enemy of the Gospel is also about the power as demonstrated obviously when analysing the geographical aspect of magic. Proclaiming the gospel is not an option for every Christian, it is inevitable whether ready or not. As the gospel is eventually good news for humanity to set free from sin to salvation, thus, in every region whether in the Greco-Roman era or contemporary era, when this gospel is proclaimed, facing the resistance and the hindrance from the evil in so many manifestations is also inevitable. This article shows how serious is the spread of evil manifested in magic in the strategic cities and it is plausible to conclude that magic indeed occurred in all other cities as well.

Proclaiming the gospel to the end of the world is certainly not only about the message of the gospel, but also the geographical region throughout this world. The demonstration of the spread of magic must remind us not to undermine the power of evil that influences society in every region. The influence of evil must reach from the common people to the highest level of society. Witnessing the gospel must consider every geographical boundary since each region will reveal a different influence of evil in its manifestation. The presence of evil influence is no longer about the logical senses; it is about the evil power in every region when the gospel is proclaimed. Once the power of the evil in certain region is recognized, Christians must depend on the power of the gospel.

Obedience to the commandment of Jesus to be a witness to the gospel to the ends of the world is required to conquer the power of magic. The reality that many Christians do not have this awareness to fulfil the commandment in Acts 1:8 to go to all regions throughout this world is a strong indication to the powerlessness of Christians to deliver people from the evil power in all regions. The magical power contextualizes itself differently in the western and eastern geographical boundaries. In the western region, the magic of sports, wealth, and even

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<sup>55</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles., Valley Forge* (Pennsylvania, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 10–11.

sex lead people away from their faith in the Lord. In the eastern region, the magic of witchcraft, sorcery, voodoo, and superstitious legends are evidence of the reality of magic. In every region when the gospel is proclaimed magic is always about powers that lead people away from faith in Christ. Thus, it is the power of evil that every Christian encounter when go to the end of the world to proclaim the gospel

For the church life, the lack of encouragement to proclaim the gospel to all region throughout the world may weaken the power of the Church to stand up against the influence of magic. If the mission to spread the gospel is significant and eagerly proclaimed by believers within all geographical boundaries, the church will thrive in its fight against magical practices. The Acts of the Apostles offers obvious episodes that magic is everywhere to be conquered. As in the ministries of Philip, Peter, Paul, and many other believers in the first century, we know that the church must go to every single area of this world to proclaim the powerful gospel and to conquer the evil influence of the unbelievers.

Magic as a power was not only obvious in the first four centuries but also far afterwards. This article focused on examining magic in the Acts of the Apostles, so the coverage was limited. Realizing this limitation or weakness, it is necessary to propose further research on magic such as the understanding of magic in the writings of the church fathers or the reality of magic after forth century, or analysing magic in the medieval or dark ages, even the presence of magic which is abundant in many contemporary countries.

### **Conclusion:**

The confrontation between magic and God's power is dispensed in the context of the spread of the Gospel not only to six regions but also to the ends of the earth. The many facets of magic and its association with the power to manipulate all level of people in every region is obvious. The influence of magic as the practice of the spirit of divination demonstrated the wicked influence of evil magic that the gospel confronts.

The lengthiest account of magic in the city of Samaria demonstrated the influence of Simon the magicians who had amazed all the people in the region of Samaria. The island of Cyprus provided the influence of magic not only to a very high level of leader, a proconsul, Sergius Paulus alone, but also his whole family. In the region and city of Ephesus the influence of magic is found in the whole society. The record is not only the manipulation by the sons of Sceva, but also the miracles Paul performed, the found of the famous "Ephesians Letters", and the burning of many magical books in the city. This city of Ephesus was like influenced the most by magic due to its strategic location. The region of Philippi presented a different magical issue which is the worship of the emperor. The island Malta recorded explicitly the belief of the chief official with his people in that island on magical principle when they saw Paul. The term "the end of the world" is then obvious in Luke's thought that it is about the geographical aspect to be considered when witnessing the gospel.

The widespread use of magic throughout the Roman territories confirms the conjecture that geography is a significant aspect in Acts when proclaiming the gospel. In all the significant cities where gospel is spread, there also magic is prevalent. In every region and city from Samaria, Cyprus, a great city of Ephesus, Philippi, Malta, and even the end of the world, the influential magic practices are found and must be overcome. No place is out of the reach of the attraction and power of magic. In every region in this world and venture of mission the church confronts magic and in the end is victorious because of the power of the gospel. The geographical aspect shows that magic is prevalent in every new territory which

Christianity confronts, from Samaria in broader Palestine, the Mediterranean islands, Asia Minor, Europe, and Italy.

To close this conclusion several statements related to the academic scholarship can be said: First, the analysing of the geographical aspect of magic is believed to give contribution to the understanding of the power that impeded the spread of the Gospel. Second, the influence of magic was obvious in every level of society. Third, the power of magic can be overcome only by the power of the Gospel and not by the knowledge. Fourth, the geographical aspect of magic must serve as a strong reminder for every Christian to go further than merely academic expertise. The understanding of the Bible must lead to obedience that the power of the Gospel is revealed in all nations.

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