

# ***Harry Potter* and Christianity: Treacherous Duo or Surprising Partners?**

*Kelsey Lindsey*

## **Introduction**

I remember the first time I felt unwelcome in church. I was thirteen years old, starting a new Bible study for middle school girls. In an effort to get to know each other, all the girls in my group shared the usual little tidbits of information: our name, grade, school, favorite color, and (game changer!) favorite book. It was my turn and, trying to control the shake in my voice I would always get from public speaking, I shared what I knew. Name: Kelsey Lindsey. Grade: Eighth. School: Moore Middle. Favorite Color: Yellow. And, last but not least, Favorite Book: *Harry Potter*. I looked up after I shared these vital pieces of information, only to find pursed lips and raised eyebrows greeting me. Obviously I said something wrong. Panicking, I reviewed the past monologue in my head, searching for the devious slip that caused such a ripple of shock in the circle. After five seconds of very awkward brain racking, I narrowed the culprit down to two suspects: either the group disagreed with my fondness for *Harry Potter*, or all ten girls had a strange dislike towards the color yellow. As I was drawing to my conclusion, the small blonde girl next to me leaned over and validated my hypothesis. In a hushed whisper that seemed to reverberate around the circle, Sarah exclaimed, “You like *Harry Potter*? But isn’t that like, all about witches and stuff?”

Since the first book's release in 1999, the *Harry Potter* series written by Scottish author J. K. Rowling has been disturbing the calm waters of Christianity, mainly because of the central practice of magic found throughout the seven books. The series tells a tale of a bespectacled orphan Harry Potter who, at the age of eleven, radically discovers that he is no ordinary boy, but a wizard. Whisked away from his dreary life with his only living relatives, the Dursleys, Harry is enrolled in the famous Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he meets his best friends Ron and Hermione. With them, Harry progresses through school and life's challenges, always with the ominous threat of his parents' murderer, Lord Voldemort, gaining power and rising again. While the inclusion of sorcery is troubling to some Christians, the humungous popularity of the books is the main catalyst for the religious uprising against young Harry and his friends. With more than 350 million copies worldwide (Hoover par 3), *Harry Potter* has been published in more than fifty-four languages (Nexon and Neumann 3), making it internationally known and loved. This success is unsettling to Christians, mainly Christian parents, who think that the popularity of the book will provoke the curiosity of their kids, luring them into reading the magical series.

But what is the driving force behind this alarm? As a Christian myself, I strive to understand the fear that is involved in the banning of any source of literature, much less a wonderful series that opens many doors in children's learning and the development of the imagination. Through an examination of the Bible, I do believe that I found the reason behind the action of condemning *Harry Potter*, but through the same source, I have also found evidence to support the reading of these novels. The main goal of this paper is not to recruit you as Christian parents into the large fandom of *Harry Potter*, but to help you

explore the many different lessons found within the series. All I ask for is an open mind, and maybe a little faith that these books could be used for good rather than bad, perhaps even as a teaching tool to help your children understand the word of God.

### **Witchcraft, the Bible, and Today's Modern Interpretation**

#### *What's in a Word?*

Let us first look at one of the most fundamental and inadvertently overlooked discussion points in this argument: that is, the use of and negative connotation found within the word “witch.” Throughout history and popular literature, witches have been associated with evil, wrongdoing, and ill intentions. There are the witches of Macbeth, countless evil witches of Disney fame, and of course, the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692. While all of these popular and well-known influences have subconsciously implanted negative stereotypes within many people's minds, the latter may be the most important, as the blind hysteria found in these trials may be connected to Christians' banning of *Harry Potter*. From June to September 1692, the town of Salem, Massachusetts condemned thirteen women and six men to hanging on the charges of witchcraft and fraternizing with the Devil, and imprisoned hundreds of others, which created a town-wide hysteria (“The Dead” par. 1 and Linder par. 1). It is important to notice that the majority found guilty in these trials were women, thus diminishing the negative effects of the male equivalent to the witch in today's society. Wizards are looked at as wise and powerful, in the example of Merlin or Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*. Because of this acceptance of magic in the word “wizard” and not “witch,” it may be safe to say that some of the fear towards *Harry Potter* is subconsciously provoked by the inclusion of the words “witch” and “witchcraft” within the novels. As this may be, I

will cease to use these marked words in this paper, as fighting the negative connotations associated with both would be pointless, as they have already been embedded within all of our minds from early childhood on through many sources. The tragedy at Salem is a prime example of how this underlying discrimination towards the word “witch” has been causing problems since long before *Harry Potter*.

### *Biblical Evidence*

There are a plethora of Biblical quotes condemning sorcery, many of them used as evidence in the case against *Harry Potter*. Notice the inclusion of the word “witchcraft” within all three of these quotations, as it may as well strengthen the impact these phrases have on readers. Deuteronomy 18:10 says, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, [and] engages in witchcraft,” and found in 2 Chronicles 33:6 is “He...practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.” With Galatians 5:20 linking witchcraft with sins such as jealousy, anger, and discord, the Bible clearly states that he who deals with magic is not welcome within the Christian community.

### *Modern Magic and Harry Potter*

What may not be so clear is the exact definition as to what is truly witchcraft, and what the practice of magic looks like. There is no description found within the Bible, but many present day “witches,” or Wiccans, offer up an explanation as to what their religion of Wicca is. On the website *The Pagan Federation*, Wicca (the religious name for the study of witchcraft) is defined as a nature-based religion and craft, the purpose of which is to put the practitioner at peace with the “cosmos” through the craft of psychic healing

(“What Is Wicca?” par 2). The main goal of the followers of this religion is to achieve a “deep communion with the powers of Nature and of the human psyche, leading to a spiritual transformation of the self” (par 1). Because this practice of magic is far from similar to the waving of wands and brewing of potions in *Harry Potter*, it is surprising to me that Christians find fault with the books, as they have no direct correlation to the modern Wicca religion.

But find fault they do, and in the argument against *Harry Potter*, the greatest ally might be found in the form of Laura Mallory, an anti-*Harry Potter* mother who first found conflict with the series when she discovered that the books were being read in her children’s classrooms. From then on, she has been one of the most active crusaders in the fight to ban *Harry Potter* from the classroom, on the main basis that the book cleverly disguises and promotes the use of witchcraft to young children. In an interview with the *Loganville Tribune* posted on her website *His Voice Today*, Mallory provides several examples of children trying to learn the practice of witchcraft as her main evidence against the book belonging in classrooms. She states that the presence of the magical series promotes the practice of the Wicca religion, and that this solicitation of religion is fertile ground for the removal of the books (Swanepoel par. 19 and 22). Mallory correlates the banning of the *Harry Potter* books with the same law that bans the Bible from the classroom, in the effort to separate church from state.

While Mallory, as a Christian parent, might be easy for you to identify with, I feel the need to bring up a vital flaw in her argument: she has never read a *Harry Potter* book. This unfortunate action causes me to pause, because I do believe that if she had taken the time to read the books, the countless number of hours and resources wasted on

her case to remove the series from classrooms would have been saved for better use. In the books, magic is not performed for spiritual acts or evil rituals, instead it is used as we might use technology: accomplishing everyday tasks and generally making life easier for ourselves. As we use the dishwasher to accomplish our chores, spells are used to free the characters of *Harry Potter* from the time spent in washing dishes. In the series, there is no mention of praying or practicing to any sort of deity as Wiccans do, only instead useful spells produced in achieving a simpler life. Even though I cannot relate to you as a Christian parent, I can relate to you as a Christian, and I hope that you might take my word over Mallory's on the sole ground that I have actually read the books, and have found that there is no harm in them.

And while I agree with the above Biblical quotes, and also Mallory when she claims that practicing magic in the Wicca religion is ungodly, I believe that there is a difference between the spiritual acts Wiccans perform and the harmless reading about magic being practiced in a fictional reality. The Bible does not condemn the notion of magic, or even the thought of it; instead it warns against the practical use of sorcery and divination. In the argument that Harry will lead children to sorcery, the key evidence that I have against this claim lies within the bookshelves of many Christians, maybe even your own. In mysteries, thrillers, and romance novels, there are many central themes of adultery, deception, and even murder; and while these three genres are read by Christians such as my parents and me, I do not see any uncontrollable urges to kill and cheat rising within any one of us. As none of these genres see any opposition equal to that against *Harry Potter*, I believe that the Christian community does recognize the distinction between fictional sins performed between the pages of books and acting them out in real

life. These differences are pivotal in the argument over Harry Potter's morality, as is the knowledge of the contrast between reading and doing.

### **The Other Dirty Harry?**

While I hope that you understand the fact that it is not a sin to indulge in these tales of magic, some other Christian scholars look past the spells and point out the disturbing behavior that the protagonist Harry exhibits throughout the series. Catholic Ian Rutherford states that because Harry and his friends "lie, cheat, [and] break rules and laws" in the wizarding world (37), children reading the series will think that it is acceptable to mimic his actions in everyday life. This rule-breaking is evident, and in his book, *The Wisdom of Harry Potter*, Edmund M. Kern highlights the exact events that may lead Rutherford to conclude that the boy wizard may be a bad influence on the young susceptible minds of readers. In the third book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry "sneaks off school grounds, wanders about after [school] hours, and lies fairly often to everyone from Stan on the Knight Bus to Lupin in the classroom" (71). Once you learn that Harry even goes as far as attacking a teacher, your intentions might be in the right place when you ban your children from reading the *Harry Potter* books.

Though this argument is reasonable, the validation of it seems to disappear like (dare I say it?) magic when it is understood that the key evidence in this justification is found only when looking at these delinquencies with no outside knowledge as to why they are being done. Sure, your children will see Harry and his friends acting out against authority, but along with these unruly rebellions they will also discover the reasons behind them. Harry sneaks off school grounds after hours to save an innocent animal

from wrongful death. In being dishonest and attacking his teacher, Harry does so for what might be the noblest of reasons: to save the soul of a man who has done no wrong. While the teacher being attacked is about to wrongly condemn this innocent man to the horrific fate of living without a soul for purely selfish and vengeful reasons, Harry's actions to stop him can be atoned. I believe that when reading about these dishonorable actions in context, your children will understand that the breaking of rules was necessary in Harry's selfless missions to help the innocent. For younger children who might blur the lines between good intentions and bad deeds, I recommend you read the books with them, explaining Harry's and his friends' actions and the good behind them. With this clarification, it is safe to say that children should be able to recognize that while Harry Potter may break the rules, it is for just and noble causes, and that makes all the difference.

### **Stepping Stones to the Understanding of Brotherhood and Love**

The last argument I have may be in fact the most controversial, but I believe it is the most important. I have thought for quite some time now that the *Harry Potter* series can be used as a tool to help teach children the fundamental values of the Christian religion, most importantly the values of brotherhood and love. In this statement, I am supported by ordained minister John Killinger, who in his book *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter* defends the series, stating that the books are “a modern interpretation of the gospel” (14). Because the *Harry Potter* series is so popular, I believe that examples from one of their favorite books would help children understand some vital lessons and morals taught in the Bible, furthering their knowledge of this wonderful story.

### *Brotherhood*

The value of brotherhood is important in both *Harry Potter* and the Christian religion. As all of us Christians are looked at as brothers and sisters in Christ, the love we have for each other is a major defining characteristic of both ourselves and our religion. John 13:35 states, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” We Christians are simply asked to love our sisters and brothers of Christ, supporting and encouraging them as Jesus himself would do. Children might be confused as to why so much emphasis is placed upon the gift of being able to love one another, and that is where the *Harry Potter* novels would help. Through examples from the friendship of Harry, Ron, and Hermione, children may come to understand what true, unselfish brotherly love looks like. In all seven books this famous threesome have truly been there for each other by helping in times of need, giving advice on relationships, and even pointing out where one is in the wrong. The love that they show through these actions is important, as it is one of the only things that the evil contained within the novels is deterred by. This is shown in the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, when Voldemort is successfully defeated in trying to possess Harry, all because he lacks the understanding of the true power of love. In the attempt to occupy Harry’s body, Voldemort is thwarted because he cannot bear to be contained within a vessel that holds so much love for others. This extraction of evil is neatly summed up by wise Professor Dumbledore when he says, “it was your heart that saved you” (Rowling 844). Harry’s love for his friends sets him apart from the evil Voldemort, and ultimately saves him from being overtaken by the wickedness trying to overcome him. This example should help children understand that the love that they have for other Christians may be in fact

one of the most powerful things in the world, distinguishing them from others and providing strength in a time of weakness.

### *Love*

Christ's love is the founding force for the Christian religion, centered around a sacrifice so great and awesome it has inspired numerous works of literature, art, and praise. The Bible is full of passages describing the incomparable love God has for all of us, from Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us," to 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." Both of these texts center around the key fact that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, displaying the undying love God has for us: a love that I believe can be found in the *Harry Potter* novels. Throughout the books, it is revealed that Harry's mother gave her life to try to spare her son from the evil Lord Voldemort, and this love possessed the power to save him from the "Killing Curse" and destroy the power of Voldemort. This "great love" is unknown to even the wisest in the novels, unseen but relied upon to vanquish immorality in the wizarding world. This plot sounds eerily familiar to the story of Christ, from the selfless sacrifice to the destruction of evil and protection of the innocent. With this new age representation of Jesus' sacrifice, you can help your children understand the love of God, and perhaps spark some curiosity that propels them to seek out more information about their Creator.

### **Conclusion**

In the banning of the *Harry Potter* novels, I believe that you as Christian parents are missing out on a huge teaching opportunity: an opportunity to use a well-loved and

popular book to excite children about reading, learning, and God. The blind prejudice against the presence of magic found in the novels must be dropped, and I suggest one simple act to help in this process: read the books. In them, if you are able to read further than the casting of spells and brewing of potions, you will find an inspiring protagonist, many allusions to Christ, and if nothing else, a wonderfully well written story. Sharing these novels with your children will spark numerous conversations, ignite their imagination, and perhaps even act as a catalyst into their discovery of God.

### **Works Cited**

“The Dead.” *Famous American Trials: Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692*. Web. 27 Nov. 2009.

<[http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/ASAL\\_DE.HTM](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/ASAL_DE.HTM)>.

Hoover, Bob. "Harry Potter a Classic? Successful? No Doubt. But Classic? Time Will Tell." *Post-Gazette.com. Pittsburgh Post Gazette* 14 July 2007. Web. 29 Oct. 2009.

<<http://www.post-gazette.com/>>.

Kern, Edmund M. *The Wisdom of Harry Potter*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.

Killinger, John. *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter: A Christian Minister's Defense of the Beloved Novels*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002.

Linder, Douglas O. "The Witchcraft Trials in Salem: A Commentary." *Famous American Trials: Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692*. Web. 27 Nov. 2009.

<<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/salem.htm>>.

*New International Version*. Grand Rapids: Biblica. *Biblegateway.com*. The Zondervan Corporation L.L.C. Web. 27 Nov. 2009. <[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)>.

Nexon, Daniel Ha, and Iver B. Neumann. *Harry Potter and International Relations*.

Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006. Print.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.

Rutherford, Ian. "Harry Potter: Situation Ethics Candy-coated for Kids." *New Oxford Review* 69.4 (2002): 36-39. Academic Search Premier, Norlin Library, University of Colorado, 28 Sept. 2009 <<http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu>>.

Swanepoel, Sharon. "Harry's Harshes Critic Speaks Out." *Loganville Tribune* 29 June 2007. Rpt. in *His Voice Today*. Web. 19 Jan. 2010. <[www.hisvoicetoday.org](http://www.hisvoicetoday.org)>.

"What Is Wicca?" *The Pagan Federation*. The Pagan Federation. Web. 27 Nov. 2009. <<http://www.paganfed.org/pagan-wicca.shtml>>.

[Contents](#)

[Occasions Home](#)

[PWR Home](#)