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Pharmakia

The Bible refers to drug use and drug users more than three dozen times. It refers to the use of drugs in witchcraft and in the worship of pagan gods, in both the Old and New Testaments.

Those of you who are familiar with the Bible may be wondering, “Where does it say that?” The references are there, but they are not evident in English Bibles. To see them one must read the Bible in the Greek language.

The letters that make up the New Testament were originally written in Greek. They were hand-copied as they were passed through the early church, and thousands of fragments of these ancient letters still exist. They are not all exactly the same, but they are very consistent, and this wealth of manuscripts has enabled scholars to preserve the New Testament in its original Greek with tremendous accuracy.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, but in about 250 BC, seventy Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint.* The majority of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are taken from the Septuagint. The New Testament thus confirms that the Greek Old Testament is sacred and reliable.

Bible translators have highly accurate Greek Old and New Testaments to work with, but translating ancient Greek into modern languages is not an exact science, and the process of translation can result in slight changes to the original meaning of the text. One of the

* Latin for “seventy.”

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reasons Bible scholars study Greek is to compare our modern translations to the earlier texts. This enables them to detect any inaccuracies in our translations, and to gain a more precise understanding of what the Bible teaches.

We are going to do this on a *very* simple level. To understand the biblical view of drug use, we only need to know the definitions of three Greek words. After we look at them, we will read the passages where they appear so we can see the contexts in which they are used. This will allow us to discover what the Bible has to say about drug use.

Pharmakia

The Septuagint and a Greek New Testament contain forms of the word *pharmakia*[†] fourteen times in fourteen verses. The following definition of *pharmakia* is found in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, under “sorcery”:

PHARMAKIA (or -EIA)[‡] (Eng., pharmacy etc.) primarily signified the use of medicine, drugs, spells; then, poisoning; then sorcery. . . . In sorcery, the use of drugs, whether simple or potent, was generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers, with the provision of various charms, amulets, etc.[§]

The Greek word *pharmakia* is a noun. Depending on the context, it may refer to (1) the medicinal use of drugs, (2) the medicinal use of drugs along with spells, (3) poisoning someone, or (4) the use of drugs in sorcery, which is a medieval term for occult magic. The only way the word *pharmakia* is used in the Bible is in reference to occult magic that includes the use of drugs.

Vine's Dictionary also states that when drugs are used in occult magic they are used along with incantations, charms, amulets, etc. This is consistent with what we have already learned.

Pharmakos

Another Greek word closely related to *pharmakia* is *pharmakos*.[§] Forms of *pharmakos* are found twelve times in eleven verses in a Greek Bible. *Vine's* gives this definition, under “sorcerer”[¶]:

[†] Pronounced “fär-mä-kē'-ä”

[‡] Some Greek dictionaries, including *Strong's*, give only the spelling *pharmakeia* (fär-mä-kä'-ä). Others, including *Vincent's*, give only the one preferred by *Vine*, which I use.

[§] Pronounced “fär'-mä-kos”

[¶] A “sorcerer” is a person who practices occult magic.

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PHARMAKOS, an adjective signifying ‘devoted to magical arts’, is used as a noun, a sorcerer, especially one who uses drugs, potions, spells, enchantments.²

The word *pharmakos* is an adjective that distinguishes a drug-using magician from other types. In the Bible it is used as a noun. It refers specifically to a magician who uses drugs in his magic.

Simply put: a *pharmakos* practices *pharmakia*. A drug-using magician practices occult magic with drugs.

Epano

Another Greek word used in the Septuagint to denote a drug-using magician is *epano*.^{**} This word has a broader meaning than *pharmakos*. It does not always refer to a magician who uses drugs, but it can. The word *epano* is similar to the English word *magician*, which can refer to a magician who uses drugs, or not, depending on the context. In the Septuagint, *epano* refers to magicians who use drugs eleven times in eleven verses.

The Bible contains thirty-seven references to drug use and drug users. There are thirty-two in the Old Testament and five in the New Testament. They are found in the following twenty-nine verses:

Old Testament:

Exodus 7:11	<i>pharmakos, epano, pharmakia</i>
7:22	<i>epano, pharmakia</i>
8:7	<i>epano, pharmakia</i>
8:18	<i>epano, pharmakia</i>
8:19	<i>epano</i>
9:11	<i>pharmakos, pharmakos</i>
22:18	<i>pharmakos</i>
Deuteronomy 18:10	<i>pharmakos</i>
2 Kings 9:22	<i>pharmakia</i>
2 Chronicles 33:6	<i>pharmakos</i>
Psalms 58:5	<i>pharmakos, pharmakia</i>

^{**} Pronounced “ep-ä’-nō”

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Old Testament:

Isaiah 47:9	<i>pharmakia</i>
47:12	<i>pharmakia</i>
Jeremiah 27:9	<i>pharmakos</i>
Daniel 1:20	<i>epano</i>
2:2	<i>pharmakos</i>
2:10	<i>epano</i>
2:27	<i>epano</i>
4:7	<i>epano</i>
4:9	<i>epano</i>
5:11	<i>epano</i>
Micah 5:12	<i>pharmakia</i>
Nahum 3:4	<i>pharmakia, pharmakia</i>
Malachi 3:5	<i>pharmakos</i>

New Testament

Galatians 5:20	<i>pharmakia</i>
Revelation 9:21	<i>pharmakia</i>
18:23	<i>pharmakia</i>
21:8	<i>pharmakos</i>
22:15	<i>pharmakos</i> ^{††}

^{††} *Vine's Dictionary* gives all five New Testament references to *pharmakia/pharmakos* and six of the Septuagint's. *Hasting's Dictionary of the New Testament* gives an additional eleven Septuagint references (see Sorcery). The four references to *pharmakia/pharmakos* in Exodus 9:11 and Psalm 58:5, and all eleven to *epano* that include *pharmakos*, were discovered through personal research using the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot Interlinear Greek-English Old Testament*.