

## **Are Magic and Miracle Different? Paul's Ephesian Ministry in Acts from a Cognitive Perspective**

Exegetes often emphasize the difference between miracle and magic. For example, magic is claimed to be “coercive” while miracle is thought to involve the voluntary intervention of the deity. Or more simply, miracle is believed to be Christian and magic to be pagan. In this paper I will take a closer look at ancient evidence and suggest that miracle and magic are two sides of the same coin. In particular, I will discuss the cognitive mechanisms that underlie magical thinking and behavior as well as the creation and transmission of miracle stories and look for a meaningful differentiation of the two categories. In the second part of my paper I will analyze Paul's Ephesian activity in Acts 19 as a test case. I will interpret the report of Paul's miracles and the practice of the sons of Sceva in the framework of magical competitions known from biblical literature and suggest that the figure of the “helper” (parhedros) provides a key for understanding this chapter.