

## “Magic” at the time of Acts

- Mageuō:** “to practice magic”; only Acts 8.9 in the Bible; only 12 other times in extant Greek literature.
- Mageia:** “magic” as a noun; only Acts 8.11 in the Bible; only 11 other times in extant Greek literature.
- Magos:** a “magician”; only in Acts at 13.6, 8 and elsewhere in the NT at Matthew 2.1-16, “the Magi”.  
In the LXX at Dan 2.2, 10, 27; 4.7; 5.7, 11, 15.

### Cultural context: Assyrian/Babylonian imperial court in 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, then in local, colonized cultures after the fall of those empires

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**In the Daniel passages,** “magician(s)” is always part of a set of imperial officials: “the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans” (2.2); “wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners” (2.27); “magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the diviners” (4.7). Sometimes the NRSV misleadingly translates *magos* as “enchanters,” but not always.

**“Just as there were no lines separating 'magic' from 'cult' and 'religion,'** there was no clear distinction between healing practices based on 'rational science' and those based on magico-religious techniques.

**“As far as we know, all nonprivate acts of magic were to be performed by the official magician,** the *dsipu*, who on occasion cooperated with other cultic personnel, such as the chanters (*kalu*) or the singers (*ndru*)....the magical experts also figure prominently as scholarly advisers to Neo-Assyrian kings...eventually being further promoted to 'chief exorcist.'" (Walter Farber, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia.* In *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East Volume III*, edited by Jack Sasson, pp. 1895–1909. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000, pp. 1901, 1903)

**Thus, the peoples taken by the Assyrian king and placed in “the cities of Samaria” (2 Kings 17.24) would have absorbed this tradition** and some would have continued to practice it for the sake of local situations, e.g., “private acts” of healing, response to “omens” and other personal struggles.