

# CAN CHARMS BRING PEACE?



## LESSON 9

### MAGIC AND MEDICINE IN ANIMISTIC CONTEXT

#### Lesson 9

**Topic: Magic and Medicine in Animistic Context.**

**Objective:** To expose students to the animistic concepts of magic and medicine and the Bible's position on such.

**Duration:** 1 Hour

**Story:** 15 minutes

**Lessons:** 10 minutes

**Questions for Reflection**

**& Discussion:** 30 minutes

**Memory Verse:** 5 minutes

**Story: Can Charms Bring Peace?**

Today's Bible study had been exceptionally quiet. The few converts had been attentive. Chenglei thought it strange at first. The usual interruptions with questions and side comments had not been coming up. "I must be teaching well" he had smiled to himself. At the same time, he realized that he was missing their questions. "Maybe I am boring them", his mind began to play at him again. Just then, an elder stepped into the meeting and carefully made his way to where the village head was sitting. Of course, what he did not want to happen did happen. He interrupted the meeting for a couple of minutes as he consulted with the Village head.

It was all okay for Chenglei. The brief moment was all he needed to gain back his self-confidence. The village head had become his testimony, almost a trophy. All sorts of native doctors and herbalists always attended to the Village head. There were all sorts of fetish materials around his house. However, things were beginning to change. "God is working" Chenglei had concluded to himself.

Chenglei, a missionary, had come to Aderupoko village a couple of months ago and the people's dependence on charms, amulets, native doctors and such like had amazed him. Yes during his survey, he had noticed that, but it was nothing compared to what he was experiencing now living among them. Today's Bible study was special because it was a time for Chenglei to introduce the village head formally to the pre-church Bible study group and Chenglei also felt it would be encouraging to have the village head identify with the little group. In addition, Chenglei had encouraged him for the past week to put away the fetish materials. The Village head had shown willingness but also had some questions. Besides, "some of the fetishes are under the custody of the Chief priest," he had said. "I do not have sole authority over them." Nonetheless, today amidst what looked like fear or at least anxiety, the Village head had encouraged the little group to "give more thought to what the Pastor was saying. I believe he is telling us what will help us," he had admonished. He sounded like a diplomat but that was just okay for Chenglei.

Chenglei did miss the impromptu questions and chatter characteristic of the class, but he also felt very elated. It was now about an hour after the class and on his way from seeing off the village head and visiting a woman whose baby had jaundice, he saw some members from the small group discussing. They were already discussing when he passed with the village head.

Chenglei thought it wise not to disturb the discussion. Therefore, he decided to sit by the steps of an old abandoned building nearby. It did not matter to him though as he felt good about taking the time to reflect over the events of the past week.

“I still feel he should keep them.” That was one of the Bible study group members. Chenglei heard enough and of course, his attention was drawn. “I do not feel accepting the God of the white man really means throwing away common sense.” “What common sense? Didn’t you hear Pastor? I believe the village head will do just fine if he heeds what the Pastor said.” “No; it’s just that you have spent most of your life in the city,” another church member corrected. “You do not know what can happen to a man if he does not hold to some ‘protection.’ Besides, we all know that the village head does not harm anyone. He uses his magic and medicine for good purposes only. Besides, it would be unthinkable for the King not to have some protection. Those security boys cannot do anything without good medicine and magic,” he continued. Chenglei listened from the shadows that concealed his presence.

When Chenglei invited the Village head to attend the Christian open-air meeting, he declined. “What will the ancestors, the villagers and the chiefs say?” he had excused. “Will they not say that I have abandoned our gods for the foreigner’s religion?” Despite his excuses, the Village head also thought of a problem he had been passing through for years, that had defiled all solution from the traditional magic and medicine. The Village head had been suffering from a disease that none of his diviners, witch doctors or medicine men could diagnose. The sickness made him dizzy and sometimes he fainted. It was believed that the king must have been attacked by a contagious or imitative magic. “Sir, I know God heals and He is able to heal you,” Chenglei had told the village head. The Village head decided to take Chenglei’s advice and attended the open-air meeting. He even encouraged some of the chiefs to do the same.



The village head stood through the entire open air meeting, and at the end, he invited Chenglei to visit him the next day. During the meeting, he inquired how he could become a Christian. Chenglei was elated. From that time, the Village head's mind rested on his charms that he had trusted for years. "What do I do with all these charms?" he soliloquised. "With them, I never knew peace, but everything is different now." He sought counsel from Chenglei. Chenglei, showed him from the Bible where the new believers brought out all their magical objects to be burnt and trusted in God completely. The Village head looked up at Chenglei and nodded. "It is not as easy as that," he said. "You know I am responsible for everyone in this village. It is dangerous. In fact, consulting with you on this is dangerous," he added. "However, I guess if it worked for me, it would work for my people too," the Village head concluded.

Today's Bible study therefore had been remarkable, but perhaps more important to Chenglei now is how to teach this truth to the little Bible class.

#### Lesson 1

Life is about cause and effect and the animist world depends on this a great deal. For the animist, the spirit world is a market place. You pay the price, you get the service and usually very swiftly. **This sense of speed and immediacy in supernatural intervention is very important to the animist.**

#### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion.**

1. Define magic in your cultural context.
2. Was the Village head justified in his fears for his people? Why or why not?

#### **Lesson 2**

In most animistic contexts, when something goes wrong in the family it is believed that someone has used magic or bad medicine to attack the family. Animists believe that there are invisible forces and powers that diviners and witchdoctors use at will. Magic is one of these forces. Magic and medicine are good or bad depending on how they are used. "Good" medicine is for protection, success, healing etc. Individuals can use it privately. It can also be used communally to protect a whole village and their leaders.

#### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. How can a missionary address the animistic belief that when something bad happens, it is an attack from the enemy? What can you say about the Genesis account of Adam and Eve's sin and its consequences as it relates to the above animistic belief?
2. Animists use magic and medicine to meet some needs like protection, healing and prosperity in their lives. What are the Biblical ways of meeting such needs?

3. What should be a Christian's reaction to some herbal medicines, which can be administered without the help of a native doctor?

### **Lesson 3**

There are various kinds of magic. In some, the magician gets something like hair or underwear from a victim and attack the person by manipulating the thing they have taken from the person. In some others, the form or semblance is used.

### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. How can Chenglei teach his converts to overcome the fear of attack through such magic?

2. What provisions has God made that converts from animism can take advantage of instead of relying on mystical powers?

### **Lesson 4**

Medicine is the substance, charm, herb or other object employed by the medicine man to achieve his aim. Some are swallowed or rubbed into cuts in the body while some are worn or kept near the thing or person they are to work upon. Magic and medicine have taboos and requirements, which must be adhered to strictly by the users before it can function effectively. However, Christians are new creatures in Christ, many of the attitudes that make animists resort to magic and medicine should not be found in Christians.

### **Question for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. Since Christians are new creatures in Christ, what are the attitudes in animists that should no longer be found in them?

2. Where does sickness come from?

### **Lesson 5**

The Bible condemns and forbids the use of magic and medicine whether "good" or "bad." Animists who come to Christ do not trust God fully until they are ready to do away with mystical powers. New believers in Ephesus burned their magical objects (Acts 19: 18-20).

### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion.**

1. If you were in Chenglei's shoes, how would you help the Village head overcome the challenges he is facing?

2. Should Chenglei be involved in the burning of the magic and medicine objects if they are surrendered? Why or why not?

3. Discuss ways to keep the good news about Jesus taking the penalty for our sins on Himself **as** a separate message from His ability to heal us from physical problems?

**MEMORY VERSE:** Ezekiel: 13: 20, ACTS 19: 18-20

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds (Ezekiel 13:20).

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly (Acts 19: 18-20).

# TOBI AND TITI'S DILEMMA WITH A CURSE



## LESSON 10

### ANIMISTIC IDEA OF OATHS AND CURSES

## **Lesson 10**

### **Topic: Animistic Idea of Oaths and Curses**

**Objective:** To expose students to the idea of oaths and curses in animism and the Bible's teaching on the subjects.

**Duration:** 1 Hour

**Story:** 15 minutes

**Lessons:** 10 minutes

**Questions for reflection**

**& Group Discussion:** 30 minutes

**Memory Verse:** 5 minutes

### **Story: Tobi and Titi's Dilemma with a Curse**

"Duyi, does the Bible not say that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; that old things are passed away and all things have become new? I am not bound to my parent's animistic beliefs. Can't I marry the man I love?" Duyi, a nurse at the village Mission Clinic listened intently as Titi poured out her heart with tears. Titi who attends a Teachers' Training College in the city came home during one holiday to discover that the village Health Centre now had a resident nurse. Titi was over-joyed. "This is a dream-come-true," she had told Duyi.

Duyi had become close to Titi for two reasons. First, most in the village were illiterates and Duyi was the only one she could discuss with freely. Secondly, Titi had given her life to Christ and Duyi played a big role in that. At the school in the city, friends had talked to her about Christ, but it didn't quite make sense to her until she met Duyi.

"Why are you here really?" she had asked.

"I know God wants me to be here," Duyi had answered. "Besides I think I will be of help here much more than in the city."

"God, - told you?" puzzled Titi had asked.

"Yes. Is that strange?"

"No! It's just that you do not look like the type that consults diviners."

"No I do not. However, Jesus lives in me and speaks to me through His Word-the Bible."

Titi was hooked and after weeks of discussions during one of her holidays, she surrendered to Jesus.

Duyi looked at Titi who was about five years younger and whose problems started two weeks ago. At the city, Titi had started attending a church for the past seven months shortly after she had given her life to Christ. Within the period, a young man Tobi, one of the emerging leaders of the church proposed to her and they got engaged two months ago.





Trouble began however, when Titi's parents without her consent went to seek a diviner's instruction concerning the wedding. The result was disastrous. The diviner told them that if Titi married Tobi, they would be barren because Tobi was under a curse by his father's uncle. His father had a dispute with one of his uncles over a plot of land. Both Tobi's father and the uncle swore an oath concerning the land and it was discovered later that Tobi's father was not faithful to his part of the oath. The man had been very bitter and had cursed the first son of his nephew with barrenness. The only solution was for Tobi to offer sacrifice of a white male goat to the family god. This would remove the curse. It is only then that they would be able to bear children after the marriage.

When Tobi was approached on the issue, he insisted that he was not under a curse because he was a new creation in Christ Jesus. "I will never do such a thing" insisted Tobi. Titi's parents were furious. They had threatened that they would not give their daughter in marriage to him if he does not respond to the instruction given.

"You must not cry, Titi" Duyi tried to calm her. Now she wished she could resolve all of Titi's problems with a word. "You know your parents are angry with me. Your mother does not want me to dress her wounds again. She says I want to put a curse on her; that I have brainwashed you. – Maybe I have." She smiled at Titi who returned the gesture.

"Yea – I think you did." Both women laughed.

Titi and Duyi talked over a few other issues. It helped lighten Titi up a bit. Then they came back to the question of the oath.

“What Tobi’s father did was bad, but what they expect him to do is just not possible,” Duyi started.

“But do you – do you think the curse will work, now that we are Christians?”

“Well the Bible talks about curses that are called for and those that are not,”

Duyi responded as she pulled a copy of the Bible from one of her table drawers. “I must say that I love your determination to go into marriage with your parents consent,” she continued. “I know God will sort out this situation.”

Duyi and Titi continued on the same issue for some time, reflecting together and looking at what the Bible had to say on various aspects. A young boy approaching the Health Centre courtyard with a torch light was the only signal for the young ladies to call it a day. On her way home – not minding the darkness, Titi felt so much better, yet aware it was the entire village against the three of them; “...and God” she quickly reminded herself out aloud. “...And would you please touch my people?” she prayed quietly.

### **Lesson 1**

Most animists believe that there is power in the spoken word. To predict an evil future for a person is considered as good as setting it in motion to happen. It is a curse. The curses of elders are considered very powerful. If an elder dies before revoking a curse, there are sometimes rituals that can be done to remove the curse; otherwise the evil will come to pass, according to animistic belief.

### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. Do we have an example in the Bible of a curse? If so, briefly describe it.
2. What does the Bible say about power in the spoken word? Search the Scriptures.
3. How is a curse defined in your own context?
4. What could Titi have done to dissuade her parents from going to the diviner?
5. Should a Christian be afraid of curses? Explain

### **Lesson 2**

There are ways in which evil predictions can be increased in power so that they will come to pass. The curse can be combined with medicines and rituals to make it binding. There are also ways to cancel the curses of others spoken against someone, with medicines or more powerful words.

### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. Can a curse produce evil consequences on one of God’s children? Why or why not? Are the curses binding upon a Christian?
2. In what ways could evil predictions be cancelled by a Christian?
3. How should Tobi counsel the parents of Titi?

### **Lesson 3**

Oaths are often used to confirm promises. People who swear on oath expect to be severely punished by the spiritual powers by which they swear if they do not keep their promises. This helps animists to tell the truth and be faithful. It is however surprising that in many societies of today people are no longer afraid of the gods, they are no longer afraid to tell lies. Once the power of the gods is broken and fear of the gods is gone, people do as they like.

#### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. How should a Christian react to the issue of oath taking?
2. Can the spiritual powers truly punish those who lie on oath?
3. According to the Bible, who is the enforcer of truth telling?
4. What are the Biblical views concerning oath taking?

### **Lesson 4**

Oaths are also used to settle disputes. The person giving testimony about the truth of a case swears that he or she is telling nothing but the truth. If it turns out, however, that he or she is lying, it is believed that the power by which the oath is made will punish the culprit. Animists therefore see to it that promises or testimony are backed up by the power of the gods that will punish those who do not tell the truth or are not faithful.

#### **Questions for Reflection, Review and Group Discussion**

1. How should disputes be settled in the church?
2. How should we teach the issue of truth – telling, personal integrity, honesty etc.?
3. How would you define a “contract”? Does it involve any spiritual powers or is it only an agreement between humans?

#### **Memory Verse:** Proverbs 26:2, Matthew 5:33-37 Luke 6:28

Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest (Proverbs 26:2).

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes be Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’.” anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew: 33-37).

Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:28).