

THE OCCULT

The evidence is unmistakable. Great Britain is currently experiencing a revival of the occult. At present, we have thousands of self-confessed witches (spiritist mediums) who meet regularly to practise pagan rituals and to call openly on the powers of darkness. It has been estimated that there are more witches in England today than there were at any time in the Middle Ages! Practices, which a little time ago were conducted only in secret and which were abhorred by the average person, are now being popularised by means of the theatre, cinema, television, videos, paperback books and computer games.

It is likely that much of the interest being shown in demonism and the black arts is due to man's dissatisfaction with a purely scientific explanation of the universe. Many people today are ready to believe that there is 'something else', a spirit realm which lies beyond the physical world around us. Unwilling, or unable on account of ignorance, to turn to the Christian gospel for the truth about the 'other' world, they look to the occult to provide an explanation and an experience of this spirit realm.

Many do not realize it, but the Bible has a lot to say about the occult, as expressed both in magic and foretelling the future. Magic (sorcery) is the art of bringing about supernatural works of power by recourse to evil spirits. Divination (soothsaying) is the art of predicting future events by recourse to the same agents. These agents (demons) often imitate deceased persons to deceive the men and women who turn to them for information.

Magic is Satan's imitation of God's miracles; divination is his counterfeit of divinely inspired prophecy.

It is true, of course, that some of the activities which pass for magic and divination today amount to no more than straightforward deception and trickery. However, in many cases such activities definitely involve direct contact and communication with evil spirits. At no time does Scripture deny the reality of the occult. Far from it! In recognition of the satanic forces which lurk behind it, the Bible sounds loud and clear warnings against believers having any involvement in it.

In Old Testament days we discover that the people of God were:

- (a) Forbidden to engage in occult practices. 'Neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times (practise magic) Regard not them that have familiar spirits (mediums), neither seek after wizards (those acquainted with the secrets of the unseen world), to be defiled by them', Lev. 19. 26, 31. 'There shall not be found among you anyone . . . that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer (one who claims to consult the dead)', Deut. 18. 10-11.
- (b) Commanded to put to death those who practised such things. 'A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones', Lev 20 27; cf. Exod.22. 18.
- (c) Warned that those who followed such people would be punished by God Himself. 'And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people', Lev. 20. 6.

Examples of this direct divine judgment are to be found in:

- (i) The Canaanites, 'Because of these abominations', Deut. 18. 12.
- (ii) King Saul, 'Saul died . . . for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit', 1 Chron. 10. 13.
- (iii) The men of Judah, 'They shall spread them (their bones) before the sun and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved . . . and whom they have sought (consulted), and whom they have worshipped, Jer. 8. 1, 2.
- (iv) The Babylonians, 'These two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon you in their perfection for the multitude of your sorceries, and for the great abundance of your enchantments . . . let now those save you who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who declare according to the month the things which are to come upon you', Isa. 47. 9, 13 lit.

In the New Testament also we find that all forms of the occult stand opposed to God's truth. The apostle Paul, for example, was troubled by a sorcerer, Acts 13 7-11, and a soothsayer, 16. 16-18, the inspiration of both being traced to the devil and his agents. The Christian needs to grasp firmly the Bible teaching concerning a personal devil; no less than 20 out of the 27 New Testament books make direct reference to him. We are in danger of relegating 'evil spirits' and 'demons' to the realm of folklore and superstition. Make no mistake - such spirit intelligences not only exist, they exert a very real and extensive influence over the world of men.

There is little prospect of a Christian getting caught up in the grosser practices of black magic. People who do so deliberately enlist the aid of the powers of darkness, often entering into a pact with the devil which they sign in their own blood. Nevertheless the believer does need to be warned against publications which delve into the realm of black magic.

'White Magic' uses, in a magical way, the names of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit and many biblical phrases. Don't be fooled. It is Satan parading under a banner of light. Far more dangerous for the believer are the milder, and seemingly harmless, forms of the occult. It is becoming increasingly common for young Christians to be confronted with tumbler moving and Ouija boards in their schools and colleges. But what may appear to be an innocent pastime or a simple game promising a little excitement is in reality a form of 'medium' which evil spirits use to communicate with men.

There have been many cases of young people who have been introduced into more serious and sinister forms of occult practice by means of such 'party games'.

It should be noted from the references quoted above from Isaiah 47 that the consulting of horoscopes is also prohibited for the believer; see also Jer. 10 2. Apart from other considerations, dependence on horoscopes discourages an active faith in God, the desire to know His will and a sense of personal responsibility. The same applies equally to tarot card reading and palmistry. Let us be clear; any Christians who dabble in the occult, even its milder forms, are flirting with demonism and seriously jeopardise their spiritual health and usefulness for the Lord.

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