

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

45 What Does the Bible Teach About the Occult?

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Not very long ago I read about a graduate school professor who was asked by a close friend of his to climb down from the lofty heights of advanced degree teaching for the purpose of addressing a high school assembly. The arrangement made based upon the condition that the students would first be surveyed and questioned as to what subjects they were most interested in. The guest lecturer was surprised that one entire category of questions had to do with the world of the occult. Of particular interest was the broad range of theoretical understanding and the degree of experimental activity the inquiries implied. Here is the list just as it was given: "I'm very interested in witchcraft but I'd like to know if while practicing it, one has to contact the devil and do it through him? Can it be done through God? Why or why not? Could you speak on what you know about the occult sciences? Would you know the difference between white and black magic and explain them? Do dreams signify insight? Can they ever foretell the future or are such dreams merely coincidence? How can one tell if he has ESP? Is ESP just a gift to some people or do all people have it, like a sixth sense, but just aren't capable of using it? If so, can you learn to use these powers? Do you have any way of proving that witchcraft works? What are the practices of the present day witches? Are their practices effective? Can Tarot cards actually tell the future? Does one have to have a special talent to read meaning into them? Do you believe that ghosts exist? Is reincarnation compatible with the teachings of the Christian church? Do you believe in reincarnation? From what I've experienced about the occult I don't believe there is a place called Hell, but more like free spirits wandering around. What do you think? Do you believe in witches? How about devil worshippers, witchcraft, psychological weapons such

as voodoos, curses, etc? I have extra-sensory powers. Should I develop them? Can they help me? Do you have any particular advice as to which books on the subject I should read? Do you believe in communication with the dead and the world beyond?"

These questions are from students of a suburban north-shore Chicago high school and the reason I have shared them is because they are representative of the fascination which the world of the occult holds for millions of other Americans today. People from all walks of life have become intrigued with the world that our eyes cannot see and our hands are not able to touch. It is therefore necessary for the Christian to deal in some way with this phenomenon and to understand what the Word of God has to say about the occult, to be able to interpret happenings which the physical sciences are not able to explain. Allow me to make several basic statements and then go on to enlarge upon them.

I. THERE IS A GREAT OBSESSION WITH THE OCCULT TODAY:

The word "occult" is often taken as a blanket kind of word to describe the activities of ghosts, witches, mediums, vampires, and related creatures of mystery and the unknown. However, the word involves much more. It is not generally understood that at least three elements are gathered up in the happenings connected with the occult. The occult has to do with the (1) paranormal or extra-sensory abilities which go beyond the normal five senses. The point is that some people appear to have powers which exceed traditional ways of life. Secondly, the occult has to do with the supernatural. That is to say that if the occult were confined to the paranormal it would be a study in parapsychology or extra-sensory perception. The occult goes beyond and the bridge between increased perception people seem to have and the world of evil, or what is positively transcendent, is a short one. Therefore, we are in the domain of the theologian and the Christian as well as that of the psychologist. The third element is that of secrecy and that is what most people understand the occult to be. The occult depicts certain strange phenomena which have been produced by some hidden or unknown source. We use the word "strange" because activities are not bound by the laws of the physical and mental realms by which we normally understand life. Thus, although it is an oversimplification, the word "occult" means, that which is hidden while we understand that everything which is hidden is not necessarily occult. The occult has reference to spirit powers, magic, witchcraft, astrology, séances, satanism and related interests. The number of people who have turned to these things is unbelievable.

For instance, there are some 40 million Americans who, in varying degrees of concern, feel that the stars chart the course of their lives. There are 10,000 full-time and 175,000 part-time astrologers whose prognostications have made the zodiac a 200 million dollar a year business in the United States. Of the 1750 daily newspapers published in America, over 1200 of them find it worthwhile to include a horoscope. Furthermore, witchcraft is on the increase with more than 400 covens in our land compared to less than half that number five years ago. The millionairess witch, Sybil Leek, estimates from her contacts abroad that there are eight million witches practicing throughout the world.

Satanism has emerged as both a fad and cult. One particular group of faddists has its home offices in San Francisco and boasts a national membership of over 10,000 active parishioners. The work was founded in 1966 when a man by the name of Anton Szandor LaVey shaved his head, put on a Roman collar and announced the "Satanic Age" had dawned. LaVey and his followers hold to a doctrine of total personal freedom and for that reason his brand of the occult seems to be little more than a decorated hedonism. On the other hand, the Satanist cult is a very serious worship of the evil one and goes beyond the trimmings to involve grotesque ceremonies and even the taking of life.

We are also aware that spiritism is on the rise. Mediums are abroad in the land. A medium is a person who serves as a relay point between the seen the unseen world. This person will lapse into a trance and serve as the mediator between the living and the dead. The most popular incident in recent times was in connection with the late Bishop James A Pike who reported that he had established contact with his dead son Jim. Spiritism or spiritualism is the belief that departed spirits commune with the living usually through a medium, but occasionally through other psychic phenomena. I suppose it would be possible to go on with a more complete glossary of occult activity and to speak of fortune tellers, clairvoyance (ability to discern things not yet known by the senses), necromancy (the calling of spirits for the purpose of revealing the future or influencing the future), palmistry (the reading of a person's character or future by the lines on his palms), phrenology (readings from the conformation of the skull), zodiac (an imaginary belt of planets and constellations in twelve houses which affect human experience and which are represented by astrological signs), warlock (one who works black magic, a male witch), witchcraft (communion with the devil for the purposes of working evil), telepathy (communication from one mind to another without use of the ordinary physical channels of hearing,

seeing, touching, etc.), sorcery (the use of power obtained from control of, or the help of evil spirits, especially for necromancy) and psychics (people who are sensitive to nonphysical forces and their significance in the material world). Yes, there is an obsession with the occult.

II. THE OCCULT IS A REASONABLE OUTCOME OF THINKING WITHOUT GOD:

I believe that to look upon the resurgence in occult interest as a random matter without causative factors being involved is inaccurate and misleading. The occult in contemporary culture is likely to claim the attention of many more people for it is the logical outcome of thinking which no longer includes God or takes Him seriously. How has this come to pass?

First, at one point in the long history of mankind God was recognized as the one who produced, peopled, and provided for His creation. The moral principles which governed creation found their reference point in God. The idea of “good” was rooted in a “good” God. Evil and wrong were the antithesis of what God was. With the passing of time the people of this world, at least those who influenced most of the people, rejected the idea of goodness being grounded in a fixed reference point such as God. During the Age of Reason and the Renaissance, philosophers taught that there is no supernatural and only what can be understood by the mind of man is real, what is rational to the human mind (rationalism) will hold in suspension any emphasis upon belief in the supernatural. Hume, the philosopher, felt he had forever done away with belief in what cannot be measured by the senses and the mind. Next came the age of science with its glorious provisions. Neither of these have brought utopia and we have today a generation of people across the world who are disenchanted with both the mind of man and his science. In philosophy it is being expressed as existentialism. With the death of rationalism and hungering for reality in their lives, people are groping in the darkness of the occult, instead of turning to the Word of God.

Secondly, professing Christendom has left people hopelessly confused. Millions ask, “what must I do to be saved?” The answer which comes from the church has left them more perplexed than ever. When the Church has no authority from which to speak, authority which is vested in Scripture alone, the message which comes leaves people only one alternative, to follow their experience and to fall prey to the way which seems right in their own eyes.

Another reason the occult holds a fascination for many is the popularity of other religions which center in man's own authority and philosophical insights. Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and the Krishna sect are winning many converts. These have a tendency toward the occult because of their emphasis upon nature and the spirit beings who control the various processes of nature.

Inasmuch as the occult deals with hidden things and the future is hidden it seems only natural to appeal to the occult when confidence in God and His Word has been forsaken. As long as there is a voice that speaks with a measure of authority about the future there is sure to be a hearing and a following because of man's desire to know what is going to happen. The uncertainty of the times in which we live has set the stage for the occult and it is little wonder that it is becoming an accepted part of contemporary life for that reason. We simply want to know what the future holds.

I have suggested but four reasons for people thinking the occult a valid option as they seek an understanding of life. Even those words suggest another reason which is simply the desire' to formulate a personal faith. People are born believers. It is only a question of what to believe. If God is no longer included in our thoughts, it is only natural that we will turn to some other view of life in our quest for meaning and hope. Many are choosing the occult. As faith in a personal God who has revealed Himself in Scripture is forsaken, the occult will surely become more and more influential in the lives of people around the world.

III. MUCH OF THE OCCULT IS MERE WISHFUL THINKING:

I once saw a sign being held aloft at a political demonstration which read, "I am a human being. Do not fold, spindle or mutilate." I imagine the message was that our problems do not have mechanical answers and that ours is a complex age with a future that does not appear very bright. We desire a way out, and: the mystery of the occult goes much beyond the computer answer or the familiar response of the church. We are human beings, not file cards. We laugh, cry, fear, boast, and watch the moon rise each night only to wonder what is beyond those tears, this body and that moon. Astrologers respond as do mediums and witches. Much of the response is pure fraud and outright swindle. What amount is hoax? Who can tell? I would suppose that a proper evaluation of today's so-called supernatural happenings would find that 95% is superstition and counterfeit. What I am saying here applies to ouija boards, tarot cards (a set of 22 picture

playing cards used in fortune telling), palmistry, séances, and astrology. However, as long as there is the possibility that we may be plugging into something that will make the lights go on in the dark corners of our lives, the interest and effort has been well spent. Even a little wishful thinking might bring some relief.

IV. SOME OCCULT PHENOMENA IS GENUINE AND TO BE RECKONED WITH:

The Word of God clearly confronts us with the sphere of the hidden, secret, and invisible which we call the occult. There is an unseen world. It is a world of spirits without physical bodies and which cannot be identified by the natural sciences. The fact that some people may consider this an insult to their intelligence has no bearing on the matter. These beings are sometimes identified in Scripture as "*sons of God*" by virtue of their direct creation at the hands of God and because they do not reproduce after their kind as lower orders of animals do. (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Matthew 22:30) Some unseen beings are called evil spirits or demons. These were originally part of the angelic host drawn into rebellion against their Creator by the anointed cherub, Satan. Revelation 12:3-4; 9; Ezekiel 20:14; 16:5). They were cast from heaven and their present domicile is evidently the earth's atmosphere. Ephesians 2:2)

The Bible teaches that before man and the world were made, God brought into being an "*innumerable company of angels.*" (Hebrews 12:22) These spiritual beings were of superior intelligence and strength and were led by "*cherubim*" who attended the very throne of God. Satan was a cherub "*full of wisdom and beauty*" (Ezekiel 28:14) Being lifted up with pride Satan was cast from the presence of God along with his followers now to continue with earth as his base of operations and men his unsuspecting followers. Satan and his demons are now engaged in a mortal struggle against the Creator in deceiving the people of the world. (1 John 5:19; Ephesians 6:12) As a general rule the evil ones work by deception as apposed to confrontation. The religions of the world are an example of this as all, with the exception of the Christian message of a Savior's love and death, are based upon good works and fear. (Revelation 12:9) Jesus believed in the existence of Satan, demons, and spiritual powers. In Luke 10:18 the words of Christ are recorded in this way, "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.*" In Matthew 4:1 we read that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to be tempted by Satan. Jesus said that He had bound Satan and had cast out demons in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:22-29) For further study the following references will offer information enough in

support of confirming the existence of a personal devil, demons, and spiritual powers. (Isaiah 14:12-15; Revelation 12:9; 20:10; II Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; Mark 9:17-27; Luke 11:18; Acts 19:13-20; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Mark 5:1-19; Ephesians 6:12; I Timothy 4:1) A very familiar verse to Christians is I Peter 5:8, *“Therefore, brethren, be alert, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.”* Christians are warned to understand that occult power is for real and to be reckoned with. Not all is fake. Perhaps the sudden interest in astrology, witchcraft, spiritualism and the wide assortment of occult practices dealing with hypnotism and sensitivity training are an evidence of concerted demon activity before Jesus comes.

V. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO STAY AWAY FROM THE OCCULT:

People who experiment with the occult expose themselves to an evil power much greater than they imagine. There are many passages in Scripture which warn the believer against having anything to do with spiritualistic practices. See Leviticus 20:6-8; Deuteronomy 17:2-7; 18:9-22; Leviticus 19:31; Isaiah 8:19. We are not to attempt to make contact with any spirits through mediums, ouija boards, magic, or any other way. If we do, we are doing what God has plainly placed a ban against. The Old Testament restriction on the reaching for spirits has not been withdrawn in the New Testament. The effect of these efforts is to discourage a belief in God and in His Word. The reason spiritualistic mediums and fortune tellers and astrologers flourish is because there continues to be a market for their services. Christians are not to encourage this superstition nor to be a part of this absence of spiritual understanding in any way.

VI. THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST ARE MORE WONDERFUL THAN ANY OCCULTIST KNOWS:

Christians are people who have been brought into union with the one true and living God. It is therefore not for them to seek nor submit to other spiritual beings, of high or low degree. Beside, what is there to gain? The Christian has stepped into the ring of truth with Christ and his life is in line with things eternally true. Christ delivers people who are in bondage to the occult. In Acts 19:18 such deliverance is through disclosure and confession. In Matthew 12:43-45 Jesus refers to a house that was cleansed of an evil spirit, but when the spirit came back, the house was empty so the evil spirit moved back in with seven others. The teaching is that our lives must not be empty, but filled with the

Word of God and the Holy Spirit at God, and with the fellowship of God's people so that there is no room for the evil presence.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
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