

Bible Teaching

on

Witchcraft

***(including divination, sorcery
and consulting the dead)***

CONTENTS

Introduction

Divination

Seeking Answers

Balaam the Diviner

Reading the Signs (Omens)

Conclusion on seeking answers by divination

Sorcery

Examples of Sorcerers in the Bible

False Teaching by Sorcerers

God's supremacy

Conclusion of Review of Sorcery

Consulting the Dead

The State of the Dead

The Witch of Endor

Confusing passages about dead giants

Summary of Bible teaching on consulting the dead

Overall Conclusion on Witchcraft

Bible Teaching

on

Witchcraft

Introduction

'Witchcraft' refers to claims made by people to have magical or supernatural powers. They allege that they can perform supernatural acts and have access to supernatural knowledge.

The Bible has much to say about those who practice witchcraft and claim to have these special powers. It does not matter whether these powers are used for good or evil purposes - the Bible's position on them is the same.

Deuteronomy 18 describes these various activities and God's view of them:

*"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is **detestable** to the Lord, and because of these **detestable practices** the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you" (Deut 18:9-12).*

It is simple. God hates witchcraft and its associated activities. They are "**detestable**" to God. Other nations practiced these things, but God did not want His people to get involved with them in any way whatsoever.

In this study, we will consider what God has to say about these activities in the Bible.

First, we will look at the scope of what God finds detestable from this passage which has been put into a table on the next page:

No	Activity described in Deut 18:9-12	Literal Meaning of original Hebrew word in the Bible	What it describes
1	Sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire	Do not cause your son or daughter to pass through the fire	Sacrificing children to idols by burning them to death
2	Practice divination	Divine divination	Seeking knowledge by divination (eg to predict the future)
3	Sorcery	From clouds	Interpreting the times and future events from clouds (or other means)
4	Interprets omens	Divine	Use of omens to answer questions
5	Witchcraft	Sorcery	Practicing sorcery or magic
6	Casts spells	Joins in spells	Coming together to cast spells
7	Medium	Ask a medium or necromancer	Consulting someone who claims to be able to contact the dead
8	Spiritist	Familiar spirit	Someone who claims to know about the unseen world (ie the dead)
9	Consults the dead	Seek to the dead	Trying to contact the dead

From the above table, we can group the activities into four parts:

- Burning one's children (No1)
- Divination (Nos 2, 3 & 4) - the practice of learning answers to questions (such as the future) by divination
- Sorcery (Nos 5 & 6) - the practice of claiming to have special powers
- Consulting the dead (Nos 7, 8 & 9)

The first practice on the list is burning one's children as a sacrifice to idols or other things. This is obviously wrong because it is committing murder and also because it is usually associated with idolatry (Ezek 20:31, 2 Kings 17:31, 21:6, 23:10).

God complains that this was: "*something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind*" (Jer 7:31, 19:5). He never even thought of the sacrifice of humans as part of worship. Therefore, He would punish the murderers with death (Jer 7:32-33, 19:7). This punishment is fair. If they kill their children, then God will kill them.

We do not feel it necessary to discuss this practice any further as it is so clearly wrong and evil.

This study will cover the remaining three activities and examine what the Bible says about them. All these activities are detestable to God. Just as burning of children is detestable to God, so too are divination, sorcery and consulting the dead. We now understand how evil these practices are to God.

Divination

Divination is the practice of trying to ascertain the will of God and even trying to influence it. Many people have practiced this from the earliest times and God's position on divination is spelt out very clearly.

When speaking about the people in the land of Canaan, God said; "*The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. **But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so***" (Deut 18:14).

God's people were not to engage in any of these practices. If they did so they were deliberately breaking God's command.

Three different words are used to describe aspects of divination in Deuteronomy 18:10. The first word (No 2 in Table) means the act of 'divining' to determine the will of God. The second word (No 3) literally means "observing clouds". People have observed cloud shapes (and other heavenly signs such as thunder/lightning, wind changes, etc) as messages from heaven. The third word (No 4) means the interpreting of "signs" as when the Arameans saw the the King of Israel's behaviour as a sign of mercy; "*The men took this as a good sign*" (1 Kings 20:34).

In divination, people claimed that the signs they saw - in such things as the intestines of animals - revealed to them the will of God. Most Bible versions translate the reading of signs as the reading of omens.

All three activities are aimed at discovering God's will. Diviners profess to have access to the knowledge of God and claim they can read the divine will from signs in heaven and on earth.

God repeatedly declares that searching for His will in these ways is wrong - it is a sin.

Seeking answers

Seeking answers to important questions has always been attractive to man. King Ahaziah of Israel had injured himself by falling from an upstairs room and wanted to know what would happen to him. So he sent messengers to ask a foreign god whether he would live or die (2 Kings 1:1-2).

On the way his messengers were met by a prophet of God named Elijah who said to them; "*Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore this is what the Lord says; 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die'*" (2 Kings 1:3-4). God ordained the outcome and that is what happened.

This incident with King Ahaziah shows that true knowledge and true power lies with God. God knows the future because He is the one who will bring it to pass. There is no power with any other god.

God says; *"I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. **See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare;** before they spring into being I announce them to you"* (Is 42:8-9). God knows what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future. He has all knowledge.

No other god knows the past or future, as we read in Isaiah 41:22-24: *"Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. **But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless.**"*

No other gods can provide man with knowledge of the past or the future so there is no point consulting them.

As Psalm 115:3-5 says: *"**Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.** But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats."*

Only the one true God, the God of Israel, possesses all knowledge and He has chosen to reveal certain aspects of His knowledge to mankind and recorded that knowledge for us in the Bible.

The knowledge of mysteries, past, present or future, is not with man either. Even the top advisers to the great King of Babylon knew this. When asked to explain what the King had dreamt about the previous night, they said; *"There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks!"* (Dan 2:10).

Daniel agreed with their conclusion when he told the King;

*"**No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about.**"* However, he then went on to explain: *"**but there is a God in the heavens who reveals mysteries"*** (Dan 2:28).

Mankind has no knowledge of the future whatsoever. This is clearly stated in Ecclesiastes; *'since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?'* (Ecc 8:7, 10:14, 7:14). This is echoed in James 4:14 where he writes: *"you do not even know what will happen tomorrow."* Since no-one know what is going to happen it is pointless asking any person to foretell the future.

In Act 16:16 we read of Paul's encounter with a slave girl who people believed could tell fortunes. Some versions say she had 'a spirit of divination' but the original Greek says she had a 'spirit of Python'. It seems she claimed to be able to tell the future and attributed this skill to the mythical being called 'Python'. She made a lot of money for her owners by appearing to tell fortunes.

When this fortune teller came across Paul and Silas, she recognised the truth of what they did and said (v17). She went around telling all the people about this and causing a disturbance. As a result of her faith, and her disturbance, Paul healed her (v18). The fortune teller recognised the true power of God when she saw it.

When falsehood comes across truth, it usually recognises truth. In this incident a gentile woman understood the true power of God working through Paul.

Balaam the diviner

Balaam was a diviner (Josh 13:22) who lived at the time of Moses. He had a reputation for being able to bless and curse people. The King of Moab hired by him because he wanted Balaam to curse the people of Israel (Numbers 22:7).

There was more to this than meets the eye. The King of Moab's planned to make war with Israel (Num 22:11) and so get rid of the Israelite nation. Moab was not alone; the Midianites were also part of this plan (Num 22:7). However, Moab was not going to wage war unless the signs were in their favour. They hired Balaam as the deciding factor as to whether to fight or not.

In contrast to the King of Moab, God's plan was to take Israel into the land of Canaan. God was not going to allow Balaam to curse Israel and intervened at this critical time.

Balaam went to the Moabite king as requested, offered sacrifices and then went to speak to God (Num 23:1-5). We learn from chapter 24:1 that Balaam used omens as part of his ceremony.

Despite Balaam being a diviner, which was evil in God's eyes, God worked through him to bless Israel. The king of Moab was outraged. He made three attempts to make Balaam curse Israel, but every time God intervened to bless them instead!

As we read in a later comment on this incident; *"they ... had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing)"* (Neh 13:2).

There is no doubt that God knew Balaam was an evil man from the beginning. He had warned Balaam not to go to the King of Moab in the first place (Num 22:12), and yet Balaam persisted in asking to go (v19). As Balaam was travelling, God had to send an angel to warn him not to do wrong.

God even rebuked Balaam by his own donkey; *"But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey – a beast without speech – who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness"* (2 Peter 2:16). God worked through a donkey to warn the diviner.

God giving His word to an evil man was unusual but the circumstances required it. God got involved to stop the king of Moab making war with Israel.

We are told to consider God's righteousness in this incident; *"Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord"* (Micah 6:5). This was the time when Balaam lived. God worked through an evil diviner to rebuke a king and stop a war. When it is put like this, we can see that God was right to do this. God is righteous in all his ways.

Reading the Signs (Omens)

Diviners often work by reading signs or omens as we have seen in the case of Balaam. Omens played a major part in the way Gentile nations made their decisions.

The Philistines read signs in the clouds (Is 2:6). The Babylonians cast lots with arrows and looked at an animal's liver to discover military targets (Ezek 21:22).

In this example, it seems God overruled the whole process so that the Babylonians would attack Jerusalem in order bring about punishment for Jerusalem's sins (Ezek 21:25).

Just as God used Balaam to prevent war with a righteous Israel, here God worked through omens to bring war on a wicked Israel. **God works in different ways at different times to bring about His purpose.**

The Israelites often lapsed into the false practices of the nations and was removed from the land of Israel because it was following the evil ways of the countries around them (2 Kings 7:7-8). Specifically we read; *"They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They **practiced divination and sorcery** and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger"* (v17).

The prophet Micah complained about Israel's sinful behaviour and warned those practicing witchcraft: *"I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast your spells"* (Micah 5:12).

King Manasseh of Judah was a very wicked king. He practiced all forms of witchcraft – killing his own son in the fire, practicing magic and divination, consulting mediums and observing clouds (2 Kings 21:6, 2 Chron 33:6).

God was not at all happy with this; *"The Lord said through his servants the prophets: "Manasseh king of Judah has committed these **detestable sins**. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah to sin with his idols"* (2 Kings 21:10-11).

God's plan was for Israel to be different from the surrounding nations and not to follow their evil practices. Israel did behave differently to these nations when it first occupied the land of Canaan as Balaam testified; *"I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations"* (Num 23:9).

All those who truly wish to be holy and please God must also be different and not have any involvement in the behaviours of the nations which practice witchcraft.

Conclusion on Seeking Answers by Divination

The Bible is clear that seeking answers by divination is wrong. Those who practice this do not really have access to divine answers and are misleading the people. This is mentioned by Zechariah; *"the **diviners see visions that lie**; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain"* (Zech 10:2).

God alone has all knowledge and He gives this knowledge to whoever He wishes. The prophet Daniel said; *"He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things"* (Dan 2:21-22).

The greatest king of his day, Nebuchadnezzar, agreed with this; *"Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries"* (Dan 2:47).

If people want to learn and be wise they need to approach God who is the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

God takes action against those who turn to divination:

*"I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, **who foils the signs of the false prophets and makes fools of diviners**, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense"* (Is 44:24-25).

God makes fools of them, as we saw when Balaam was made a fool of by his donkey. We read of Balaam's embarrassment; *"Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me!"* (Num 22:29).

Those who turn to false ways cannot expect God to be pleased with them, nor can they expect God to answer their questions.

God does not answer evil people; *"Then they will cry out to the Lord, but **he will not answer them**. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done ... The seers will be ashamed and the **diviners disgraced**. They will all cover their faces because **there is no answer from God**"* (Micah 3:4-7).

The advice is clear. We must not resort to divination. Divination is a system of falsehood. True knowledge and wisdom comes from God alone. If people want to find truth, they must turn to God and listen to God's words in the Bible.

If people do not listen to God's words, then why should God listen to their words? This is the teaching of Proverbs; *"But since you rejected me when I called ... Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me"* (Prov 1:24-28).

On the other hand, if people follow God's commandments then God will hear and answer them; *"Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I"* (Is 58:9).

Sorcery

A sorcerer or magician is someone who claims to have supernatural powers to perform 'magic' usually by using rituals, incantations, etc. In the Bible, the first recorded mention of sorcerers is the magicians in Egypt at the time of Moses.

When God brought the first two plagues on Egypt, the Egyptian magicians appeared to be able to bring about similar things by their magic arts although they would not have been able to fully copy the extent of each plague.

In the case of the first plague, the whole of the river Nile was turned into blood by God. This could not have been repeated by the magicians. Nevertheless they were able to give the impression of turning water into blood and they did it well enough to convince Pharaoh; *"But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said"* (Ex 7:22).

It is not clear what the "secret arts" of the magicians were, but the original word in the Hebrew means 'flames'. It therefore seems likely that they were able to give the impression of miracle working through the use of flames.

The Egyptian magicians were able to give the impression of producing something resembling the first two plagues (water to blood, frogs). However, they were not able to produce anything at all for the other eight plagues.

The third plague was gnats/lice which covered both people and animals throughout the whole country. *'All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. but when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, **they could not**'* (Ex 8:18).

The magicians recognised this plague was beyond their abilities and told Pharaoh this was '**the Finger of God**' (Ex 8:19) as they realised this miracle had been brought about by the God of Israel. These magicians recognised the hand of God working when they saw it. They knew what was within man's ability, what was beyond his capability and what was in the realm of the works of God.

When God brought the plagues of flies, murrain (a disease of domestic animals), boils (a skin disease like leprosy), a hail storm, locusts, deep darkness and the death of the firstborn, these were all recognised as the works of God not man.

God made a name for Himself through the 10 plagues of Egypt, so that all the nations came to learn of His greatness; *"You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. **You made a name for yourself**, which remains to this day"* (Neh 9:10).

The plagues set the pattern for the rest of the Bible. Some people were very clever and gave the impression of miracle working, like the Egyptian magicians. However, when they are compared with the true workings of God, even these people recognised that real miracles were completely beyond their own abilities.

The Babylonian magicians also learnt about the extent of the abilities of the God of Israel. God saved Daniel from the lion's den. When this happened, Nebuchadnezzar said; *"He rescues and he saves; **he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth**. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions"* (Dan 6:27).

God has all power and can do all things.

When Nebuchadnezzar forgot about God, God turned the mind of Nebuchadnezzar into that of an animal and then changed it back again. After this experience, Nebuchadnezzar declared that God: *"does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No-one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"* (Dan 4:35). God is in full control.

Babylon, like their king, forgot about God's greatness. So God prophesied that they would be punished; *"Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day, loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, **in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells**"* (Isa 47:9).

Despite its claims, Babylon had no real power compared to God. It is God who does all things and who punished Babylon for its sorceries and spells.

Examples of Sorcerers in the Bible

We read about the work of Simon the sorcerer from Samaria in the Acts of the Apostles: *"Now for some time a man named Simon had **practiced sorcery** in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great"* (Acts 8:9).

Simon could do some amazing things, so that the people believed in him and his message; *"and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the "Great Power". They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic" (v10-11)*. The whole town had been convinced by him.

Now the apostle Philip went to Samaria to preach the gospel. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Philip was able to perform many signs; *"With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:7-8)*. As a result, the people of Samaria believed Philip's preaching and were baptised (v12).

The interesting thing is that Simon the sorcerer was also convinced by the miracles; *"Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw" (v13)*.

When Simon saw the marvellous deeds that Philip performed, the sorcerer was able to appreciate that they were truly miraculous. This means that Simon's own 'miracles' had not actually been miraculous at all but were designed to fool the people and help him earn a good living. Like the magicians of Egypt, Simon recognised true power when he saw it.

When in Ephesus, God did extraordinary miracles through the hand of the apostle Paul (Acts 19:11) and some false teachers were shown to be frauds (v13-16).

As a result of all these events, a number of sorcerers believed in Jesus and gave up their sorcery; *"A number who had **practiced sorcery** brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas" (Acts 19:19)*.

Again, we see that falsehood recognises truth when it is brought face-to-face with it.

Paul met another sorcerer named Elymas when he went preaching in Cyprus. Unlike the other sorcerers, Elymas opposed the preaching of the gospel; *"But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (Acts 13:8)*. Elymas was afraid he would lose the favour and respect of the proconsul.

Paul confronted him; *"You are a child of the devil (ie not a child of God) and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of **deceit and trickery**. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"* (v10). As a result, Paul afflicted him with blindness (v11). This miracle convinced the proconsul of the truth of the gospel (v11) as he could clearly see the difference between true miracles and fake ones and between truth and falsehood.

The example of Elymas explains how sorcerers work. Their 'miracles' are achieved through deceit and trickery. They do not truly have the powers they claim, but they are clever at performing tricks to deceive the people. Since their works are false, so is their teaching.

God's view of this type of person is given in the Psalms; *"No-one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no-one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence"* (Ps 101:7).

False Teaching from Sorcerers

The Bible warns us about false teachers who can perform 'miracles'. God uses these supposed 'miracle workers' as a test for the people - to see whether they will truly follow Him and His message or not.

We read about this in Deuteronomy; *"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and **if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place**, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him"* (Deut 13:1-4).

From time to time we will come across false teachers who claim to perform special signs and in some cases these signs will take place. When this happens we are being tested to find out whether we will follow the true teaching of God or the false teaching of those who performed the sign.

Another warning comes from Jesus; *"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect - if that were possible"* (Mark 13:22).

So what are we going to do?

Will we believe the false prophets who profess to know the mysteries of the world and the way of salvation? **OR** will we put our trust in the God of Israel? It is clear that if we are wise we will follow the one true God and the truths that He teaches us in the words of scripture. It is obvious that God is the only one who has the power to meet our needs, save us from our sins and grant us everlasting life. **God's Supremacy**

The God of Israel can do all things. We learn this from Jesus; *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Mat 19:26).

God can do the impossible. There is nothing that He cannot do.

Job agrees; *"Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted"* (Job 42:1-2).

God has all power and all knowledge, so He can do anything. Man cannot. Sorcerers cannot.

Jeremiah understood the greatness of God; *"Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. **Nothing is too hard for you.** You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men, you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve. You performed **miraculous signs and wonders** in Egypt and have continued them to this day, both in Israel and among all mankind, and have gained the renown that is still yours"* (Jer 32:17-20).

We are told in the Psalms; *"Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you""* (Ps 66:3).

We have seen this. Elymas the sorcerer was made blind by God. Simon the sorcerer was confronted by real power so that he believed. The Babylonians magicians were powerless to reveal Nebuchadnezzar's dream yet God revealed it through Daniel. The Egyptian magicians declared that they had witnessed *"The Finger of God."* So the shout of heaven is totally true and well deserved; *"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God"* (Rev 19:1).

Conclusion of Review of Sorcery

Many people have claimed to possess special powers to perform miracles from the earliest times. The Bible is clear that these people are false and they lead others into falsehood and sin.

Sorcerers are able to trick people but have no real power of their own. When these people come across the true power of God, they recognise that He is indeed the one true source of power in this world.

Whenever the power of God is compared to the power of man, God wins every time. Man's power is shown to be feeble and insignificant whilst God's power is infinite. We should reject the false ways of man and follow the only true God, the great Creator, who can save us;

"Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal man, who cannot save... Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them – the Lord, who remains faithful for ever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry" (Ps 146:3-7).

Consulting the Dead

This is the third and final topic of this booklet. People have often wanted to make contact with the dead in order get their questions answered. They assume that the dead know the answers and that they can be contacted.

Both these assumptions are wrong.

The Bible teaches that the dead do not know anything at all and that they no longer exist. Therefore trying to contact them is a waste of time and money. More than that, this is not how God wants His people to behave. Those who claim that they can contact the dead are deceivers.

Firstly, we will look at what the Bible says about the dead. Then we will look at the main example of attempting to contact the dead in the Bible, which is the incident of Saul visiting the witch of Endor. Finally we will look at the confusion passages around those who are dead in the Bible but seem to be described as if they are alive.

The State of the Dead

The Bible is clear on the characteristics of those who are dead:

*"For the living know that they will die, but the dead **know nothing**; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; **never** again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6).

This passage is clear. The dead do not know anything, so there is no point trying to contact them for answers. They also have no part in anything that happens under the sun. In other words, they cannot influence those who are living on the earth in any way.

The Bible repeats this information:

*"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither **working or planning or knowledge or wisdom**"* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

There is no knowledge or wisdom in the grave. There is no point trying to ask the dead about any issues because they have no knowledge. They cannot plan or work or do anything at all so it is a complete waste of time asking them about anything.

Not only do the dead know nothing and do nothing, they are not able to speak. Those who are dead are silent:

*"Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the **silence** of death"* (Ps 94:17).

*"It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to **silence**"* (Ps 115:17).

There is no point talking to the dead, since they cannot give an answer.

The same advice was given by the prophet Isaiah when Israel turned to dead people for answers:

*"When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? **Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?** To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn"* (Is 8:19-20).

God's people should look to God for answers, not to mediums, spiritists or the dead. The dead know nothing and cannot answer. So God tells His people off for doing these things. What really matters to God is that His people listen to Him and follow His laws.

This law clearly states that God's people must not consult the dead. Those who try to contact the dead have no light of knowledge, only darkness. They will upset God and become detestable to Him. They will confuse themselves with falsehood and suffer the consequences of disobeying God and following what is false and evil.

In the Isaiah passage above we learn how mediums and spiritists operate. They put on strange voices to appear as if they are able to talk to other people. However it is done, the mediums and spiritists are not truly contacting the dead, but are only appearing to do so. They put on a display to convince the simple, in order to receive money or goods or reputation.

Many nations had practices involving the dead in Biblical times and we still find such practices in our 21st century world.

The Moabites offered sacrifices to the dead as a type of ancestor worship and idolatry. When Israel started to do the same thing, God got very angry; *"They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless idols. They provoked the Lord to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them"* (Ps 106:28-29).

In this passage the original word for 'lifeless idols' in Hebrew is actually the word for 'dead'. The people of Israel had started sacrificing to the dead.

God regarded sacrificing to the dead as something very evil and so He took direct action to counteract it and killed those who did this. In the record of this event in Numbers 25 we read that God killed 24,000 people (verse 5).

The Witch of Endor

The incident of Saul's visit to the witch of Endor is well known and is used by some to teach belief in witches. What is clear is that Saul consulted a witch and he was wrong to do so. God gives this comment on Saul:

*"Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord, and even consulted a **medium** for guidance, and did not enquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse"* (1 Chron 10:13).

Saul was punished for the evil of consulting a witch (that is, a medium). This consultation occurred directly before his death, and it was during this consultation that Saul was told God would cause him to die in battle.

Saul had already become evil by this time and God had deserted him. We are told that God did not answer Saul by dream, by Urim (that is by the High Priest using the Urim) or by a prophet (1 Sam 28:7). The spirit of God had departed from Saul following his God's rejection of him (1 Sam 16:14).

God abandoned Saul because of his disobedience over the matter of Amalek (1 Sam 15). Even Samuel had stopped communicating with Saul, for we read; *"Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again"* (1 Sam 15:35). Now Saul sought answers from a different source. He turned to witchcraft and sought someone who claimed to contact the dead.

The encounter between Saul and the medium is given in 1 Samuel 28. Earlier in his reign Saul had obeyed God's command and removed the mediums from the land (1 Sam 28:3,9). Now he had become disobedient he was willing to consult a medium contrary to God's commandment (Deut 18:10-11). Saul promised to let the medium live (1 Sam 28:10), despite God's commandment to kill such people (Lev 20:27). He had moved so far away from God he was even willing to swear in God's name to let her live in direct contradiction of God's requirements.

The medium not only claimed to be able to contact the dead but also to be able to bring them up from the grave. Therefore, she asked Saul; *"Whom shall I bring up for you?"* (1 Sam 28:11). As we have already seen the dead are dead and cannot respond. The medium was therefore only pretending to be able to do this. Her trade is a trade of deception.

The woman was not concerned when Saul asked to speak to the dead Samuel. What did concern her was when she actually saw him; *"When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice"* (v12). She had not expected to see anything! When she saw Samuel she was totally shocked.

It is clear Saul did not see Samuel, since he asked the medium what she saw (v13). The medium told him; "*I see a spirit coming up out of the ground*" (v13). The Hebrew word for the word 'spirit' is "elohim" meaning "mighty one(s)". This can mean a human ruler, which was what Samuel had been during his lifetime.

The woman saw "*an old man wearing a robe*" (v14) and told Saul this. Saul identified Samuel from this description since this was how Samuel looked when Saul had last seen him (1 Sam 15:35). Samuel had been wearing a robe, which Saul had torn (1 Sam 15:27)

When Saul heard that the woman had seen Samuel, he bowed down with his face to the ground. We are told that Samuel then spoke to Saul (v15). As Samuel had appeared as a vision to the medium she relayed Samuel's words to Saul.

1 Samuel 28:15-19 record the conversation between Samuel (through the woman) and Saul. Saul said God has deserted him and asked Samuel what to do in the imminent battle against the Philistines.

In his answer, Samuel said the reason God had left Saul was because of his sin with Amalek and that the next day both Saul and his sons would be given over to their enemies and die. Only God, Samuel and Saul knew the reason why God had left Saul although we can now read about it in 1 Samuel 15. The witch had not been party to this discussion and so we can conclude that God was working through the medium and providing her with the information.

Only God knew that Saul and his sons would be killed by the Philistines the next day. He knew the outcome of the battle because He was arranging for it to happen.

The woman would not have known about Saul's imminent death and certainly would not have told Saul about this of her own volition. Instead she would have invented a message to please Saul and so earn his respect and money.

God gave the medium a vision of Samuel in order to explain to Saul what was happening and why. Through this vision, Saul realised that God had seen him consult a medium, contrary to God's own law. According to that law, mediums should be put to death (Lev 20:27). It was therefore fitting that God punished Saul with death for disobeying this law.

God had given Saul so much by making him king over Israel, and giving him power and riches. God had even given Saul His own spirit (1 Sam 10:10, 11:6) as well as great victories over God's enemies. In return, Saul had become proud and arrogant, jealous and murderous in his hunt for David and prepared to blatantly disobey God. So God worked through a witch to teach Saul how wicked he had become and what his punishment would be.

Consulting the dead is always a bad thing in the Bible. The wicked king Manasseh did this and caused God to be angry with him; *"He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spirits. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger"* (2 Kings 21:6).

In the New Testament, witchcraft is listed among the works of the flesh (Gal 5:20), and those who practice these things will not enter the Kingdom of God (v21).

Confusing passages about the Dead Giants – the Rephaites

The topic of the Rephaites has resulted in much misunderstanding around the state of the dead. In this section we will look at the Bible teaching about the Rephaites in order to understand God's teaching on death.

The Rephaites (also called Rephaim) are referred to in the Bible as giants. We are told about their great height. They were as tall as the giants called the Anakites; *"the Rephaites, who used to live there ... They were a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites"* (Deut 2:20-21).

The size of the Anakites was mentioned by the spies who spied out the land of Canaan for Joshua; *"We saw the Nephilim there (the descendents of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them"* (Num 14:33). The Nephilim and the Anakites were giants and therefore so were the Rephaites.

When the people of Israel came to take the land of Canaan, they had to defeat the giants who lived there. One of them was Og king of Bashan. He is described as a Rephaite (a giant); *"Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaites. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide"* (Deut 3:11).

This passage not only tells us that the Rephaites were giants but also that they were dying out in those days. Og was one of the last of them (see also Josh 13:12).

A few Rephaites continued to survive in Canaan and in the time of David, we read that several still existed; *"In the course of time, war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer. At that time Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, one of the descendants of the Rephaites, and the Philistines were subjugated"* (1 Chron 20:4).

This passage mentions two other giants, including Goliath's brother (v5-8). David and his men defeated them; *"These were the descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men"* (v8). With that, the giants were removed from history. They became extinct.

The Rephaites then became famous, not so much for their size, but for the fact that they were dead.

They became referred to as those who were 'long dead' in the Bible, much like we refer to dinosaurs as being extinct today. Here are some examples:

"Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead (Hebrew: Rephaites) rise up and praise you?" (Psalm 88:10).

"For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead (Hebrew: Rephaites)" (Prov 2:18). In this passage the translators have translated the Hebrew word "Rephaites" as *"spirits of the dead"* causing the reader to think that there are dead spirits.

This is not the case. The Rephaites are dead people. The passage is saying that if anyone goes to visit a prostitute it is as though they were going down to join the dead. What it means is that they might as well be already dead.

Other verses in Proverbs which use the word Rephaites teach the same thing eg: *'Whoever strays from the path of prudence comes to rest in the company of the dead (Rephaites)'* (Prov 21:16).

Another verse where translators have confused readers is Isaiah 14:9: *"The grave below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed (Hebrew: Rephaites) to greet you – all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones – all those who were kings over the nations."*

This passage converts the word "*Rephaites*" into "*spirits of the departed*". Again, the translation inserts the word "spirits" into the passage when it does not occur in the original Hebrew writing. Isaiah 14 is about the forthcoming death of the kingdom of Babylon. The nations who are already dead are getting ready to greet Babylon when she also dies.

The passage uses figurative language to explain that Babylon is already as good as extinct. All the dead heroes of the past will figuratively rise in the grave to greet Babylon. It is not a vision of reality but a vision of Babylon joining the extinct.

The fact the Rephaites do not live is clear from Isaiah 26:14: "*They are now dead, **they live no more**; those departed spirits (Hebrew: Rephaites) **do not rise**. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them.*" This passage is speaking about the deceased foreign nations who had ruled over Israel (v13). They are dead. Just like the dead giants of long ago, the Rephaites, they do not rise from the dead and are now forgotten. They are extinct.

In contrast, the dead of God's people will rise from the dead: "*But your dead will live, Lord, their bodies will rise - let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy — your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead*" (v19).

In all these passages, we have seen that the Rephaites are dead giants. They are extinct and have become famous for being dead! The books of the Old Testament written later refer to them as the long dead.

Many translations have confused the state of the dead by mis-translating 'Rephaites' to suggest that the dead have spirits that live on. But God's teaching is simple. The dead are dead. No part of the deceased continues to live after death. This is the consistent teaching of the Bible.

There are no ghosts of the dead. This is a common misunderstanding by people. The Bible only mentions a ghost once and even then it was a case of mistaken belief and observation. It is the time when Jesus came walking on the water in the night and the disciples thought they had seen a ghost (Mat 14:26, Mk 6:49). They were mistaken, because they actually saw Jesus.

There is only one person who has attained ongoing life after death and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus was raised from the dead after three days. He is the only person who currently has eternal life; *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive"* (1 Cor 15:20).

Jesus is the firstfruits of those who die, because he was the first person to be raised from the dead to everlasting life.

This will change when Jesus returns. Those who have died in faith in the redeeming work of Jesus will be given eternal life through the resurrection of the dead; *"But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; **then, when he comes**, those who belong to him"* (I Cor 15:23).

We note from this passage the time consideration. The resurrection of the dead will not happen until Jesus returns to this earth. Until then, the dead remain dead and no part of them lives on anywhere.

Summary of Bible Teaching on Consulting the Dead

- The dead do not live following death, so it is wrong to look for an answer from them.
- God says that those who consult the dead and those who contact these people sin against God's commands.
- God worked through the 'witch of Endor' to warn Saul of his imminent death for disobeying God's commands. Consulting a medium was one of the sins that led to his death.
- The dead do not survive death, so there are no 'spirits of the dead'. These only exist in bad translations of the word "Rephaites". The Bible does not teach that ghosts exist.
- Jesus is the only person who continues to live following death. This occurred because God raised him from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion as Jesus had not committed any sin.
- This resurrection from the dead is offered to those who believe and follow Jesus and die in that state of belief.

Overall Conclusion of Witchcraft

Witchcraft, the claim to have supernatural powers and knowledge, has been shown to be false by considering the teaching of the Bible.

In every case, supernatural power and knowledge is shown to belong to God alone. All others attempts to access supernatural power are the work of deceivers. Diviners, sorcerers and mediums are all shown to be false in Scripture; they trick other people to gain money and respect.

Diviners, sorcerers and mediums all acknowledge true power when they see it and in most cases they turn from their deceitful practices to follow the one true God.

Balaam the diviner recognised the ability of God when the donkey spoke to him. Simon the sorcerer recognised the true miracles of the apostle Philip. The Egyptian magicians recognised the plagues as the work of God. The witch of Endor shrieked when she saw the vision of Samuel.

In these examples, all diviners, sorcerers and mediums were given the special privilege of seeing the true capabilities of God. As a result they were able to see truth.

In special cases, God worked through the witchcraft to promote what is true. God used the diviner Balaam to give the King of Moab a clear message. God used Babylon to punish Israel and worked through omens to do so. God used the witch of Endor to pass on a message to Saul.

This does not mean that God condoned what Balaam, Babylon or the witch of Endor were doing. On the contrary, God worked through these people to bring about His plan to bless Israel at the time of Balaam, to punish Israel at the time of Babylon and to punish Saul.

If people really want answers and supernatural help, then they must seek out the God of Israel. He is the only source of real knowledge and power.

But there is a problem. God does not listen to people who do evil; *"Then they will cry out to the Lord, but **he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done**"* (Micah 3:4).

God abandons evil people to receive what they deserve for their evil. We saw this when Saul consulted the witch of Endor. It happened to the people of Israel when they became evil; *"We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be"* (Ps 74:9). Evil people will not have their prayers heard.

However, God will hear the prayers of those who do what is right; ***"The righteous cry out and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles"*** (Ps 34:17).

Those who do what is right will be saved. But those who follow evil will be destroyed. God will reward everyone fairly according to the type of life they live.

We must be clear in our conclusion.

Witchcraft is wrong and a system of falsehood.

God is not happy if we persist in following what is false and there are consequences from doing this; ***"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger"*** (Romans 2:8).

So let us not provoke God, who has all power and knowledge. We cannot fight against Him and win and neither can we hide our ways from Him. Instead let us follow the way of truth which God has shown us in His word knowing that:

***"The Lord is near to all those who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
He fulfils all the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.
The Lord watches over all those who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy"***

(Ps 145:18-20).

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