

Occult Overview

Interfaith Evangelism

BELIEF BULLETIN

INTRODUCTION

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *occult* as “relating to, or dealing with supernatural influences, agencies, or phenomena.” The occult encompasses several philosophies and religious exercises that include physical and metaphysical energy accessible only to those with secret wisdom or power. It involves such practices as divination, *magick*, Satanism, spiritism, UFO cults, and witchcraft.

Most superstitions had their origin in occultic beliefs and practices. People who accept the occultic worldview regard superstitions such as stepping on cracks, breaking mirrors, and walking under ladders as signs of bad luck.

OCCULT DIVINATION

The American Heritage Dictionary defines divination as “the art or act of foretelling future events or revealing occult knowledge by means of augury or an alleged supernatural agency.” Divination is the most widespread occultic practice.

Many different ways of divining the future are used by occult practitioners. Diviners use such techniques and paraphernalia as astrology, crystal gazing, Ouija™ Board, palm reading, runes, tarot cards, and tea leaves.

Astrology is the practice of interpreting the influence of the stars and planets upon people on earth. Using a horoscope, astrologers claim to predict the future. The horoscope is derived from the location of the sun and planets when the individual was born. Astrology

has been popular for thousands of years. Astrology in the West was strongly influenced by Babylon.

Crystal gazing involves the use of a crystal ball to predict the future. This practice is sometimes referred to as scrying. In addition to the use of crystal balls, a mirror or pool of water may also be used.

William Fuld patented the Ouija™ Board in 1892. It is the most popular game rooted in divination in America today. It includes a four-sided board with the words yes, no, and goodbye printed on it. In addition, the digits 0 through 9 plus the letters of the alphabet are also included. The players ask questions while their hands rest on the mobile pointer. The pointer's movement on the board produces the answer.

Palm reading, or palmistry, is the practice of divining a person's future by examining the lines of their hands. Advocates for palmistry often claim that it provides understanding into a person's character, personality, abilities, and personal relationships. The assertion is frequently made that the palm is the blueprint of one's life. Palmistry is closely linked with astrology by most of its practitioners.

The use of runes is a technique of divination that was popular in Germany. It entails the printing of the rune alphabet on blocks. The blocks are thrown and the letters are interpreted. Tarot is a form of foretelling that involves the use of a special deck of cards. There are 78 cards in the deck, each with a symbol that has a meaning when interpreted by

the card reader. Tea leaves are also sometimes read as a method of divining the future.

Many proponents of the occult argue that divination works even though it cannot be proven scientifically. Jean Dixon is often pointed to as proof of divination. She is credited with predicting President John Kennedy's assassination. Her accuracy, however, is less than astonishing when one examines all of her predications. In 1965, for example, she predicted that "Russia will be the first nation to put a man on the moon, probably in about three years time." (Jean Dixon, *A Gift of Prophecy*, p. 186.)

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The Bible warns believers against practicing divination. Leviticus 19:26 (NIV) warns, "Do not practice divination or sorcery." Deuteronomy 18:10-11 forbids any Israelite from engaging in divination. Second Kings 17:17 indicates that divination is one of the things that provokes the Lord to anger. No Christian should engage in any form of divination.

SPIRITUALISM

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "spiritualism" as "the belief that the dead communicate with the living, as through a medium." It is rooted in the belief that the spirits of the dead can communicate with the living through persons sensitive to the spirit world. Spiritualists believe that the spirits of the dead are able to offer aid and knowledge to the living.

Swedish philosopher and occultist Emmanuel Swedenborg claimed to communicate with the spirits of the dead. The New Jerusalem Church, founded by Swedenborg, brought his teachings to America in the late 1700s. John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) spread his doctrine across early America.

Two young sisters, Margaret (age 15) and Katie (age 12) Fox, began the contemporary spiritualist movement.

The young girls complained of hearing strange knocking sounds in their house. They professed to have developed a code that allowed them to communicate with the spirit they claimed was making the strange noises. News of this event birthed modern spiritualism in 1848. Forty years later Margaret Fox admitted to reporters that the whole occurrence had been a fraud. Margaret demonstrated how she and her sister were able to produce loud knocking and cracking sounds by popping their knee and toe joints.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The Bible warns believers against practicing spiritualism. Leviticus 19:31 warns that those who turn to mediums or spiritists will be defiled by them. Leviticus 20:6 says that God will turn against those who use mediums and spiritists. Leviticus 20:27 records that the punishment for any Israelite who practiced spiritualism was death by stoning. Spiritualism is one of the sins that 2 Kings 21:6 indicates is evil in the eyes of the Lord and that provokes God to anger.

OCCULT MAGICK AND WITCHCRAFT

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "Magic" as "1. The art that purports to control or forecast natural events, effects, or forces by invoking the supernatural. 2.a. The practice of using charms, spells, or rituals to attempt to produce supernatural effects or control events in nature. b. The charms, spells, and rituals so used. 3. The exercise of sleight of hand or conjuring for entertainment." Occult magick refers to the first two meanings and not to the third. Practitioners of occult magick add a "k" to the word "magic" to differentiate it from sleight of hand techniques or conjuring for amusement that makes no claim of supernatural powers. Occult magick is an attempt by the practitioner to manipulate the supernatural in order

to receive power or control.

Closely connected with occult magick is the practice of witchcraft. Witches often refer to themselves as the "old Religion" or "The Craft." They claim that their religion dates back to prehistoric times. They often refer to themselves as "Wiccans." The term comes from the Anglo-Saxon term for "wise ones". Witchcraft is a nature religion that in many ways is similar to the fertility religions that the prophets in the Old Testament confronted. Witches deny that they believe in or worship the devil.

Many researchers credit Gerald B. Gardner (1884-1964) as the founder of contemporary witchcraft. Gardner was a student of the occult and used his occult research to originate modern witchcraft. In 1954, Gardner's book *Witchcraft Today* was published. His teachings promptly spread throughout Britain and North America. Gardner stressed nakedness in worship, but there is a lot of diversity in Wicca rituals. Many witches have started referring to themselves as neo-pagans. They call their group a nest, grove, or circle, rather than a coven.

Witches normally meet twice a month during the full and new moon. They celebrate four major and four minor sabbats. The four minor sabbats are the spring equinox (March 21), the fall equinox (September 21), Yule (December 21), and summer solstice (June 21). The four major sabbats are Samhain (Oct. 31), Imbolc or Candlemas (Feb. 2), Beltane (May 1), and Lammas (Aug. 1). These dates are approximate and vary year to year. It is thought that their origins relate to hunting, agriculture, and animal fertility.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

All forms of magic and witchcraft were prohibited in the Mosaic Law. "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, NIV).

Ezekiel 13:20 indicates that God is against magic charms. In Acts 19:19, Luke tells how those who trusted in Jesus took their books on magick and burned them publicly. Revelation 9:21 lists magical arts as one of the sins that people need to turn away from, while Revelation 21:8 says that those who practice magical arts will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

SATANISM

The biblical name "Satan" literally means "the adversary". In the New Testament, it is used as interchangeable with *diabolos*, or the devil. Satanism is the darkest side of the occult. It involves a submission to Satan's will.

While there are many different types of Satanists, they can be divided into two main categories: self-styled Satanists, and religious Satanists. Some Satanists do not believe in a literal Satan but use Satan as a symbol of their opposition to the Christian God. Others believe that Satan exists and worship him as a god.

Self-styled Satanists are often young people, who are introduced to Satanism through listening to heavy metal music, or by watching movies that glamorize it. Heavy metal music is more influential in introducing young people to Satanism than books or movies. Songs that exalt abuse of women, anger, violence, aberrant sexual behavior, dying, and Satanism typify heavy metal music. Many young people will dabble in Satanism by reading books on it but never get involved in Satanic rituals.

Others will get so involved that they will go on to create their own self-styled form of Satanism. The groups that these self-styled Satanists form are very diverse and tend to borrow from many sources. They make up their beliefs and practices as they go. Much of the documented violence associated with satanic groups comes from self-styled Satanists.

Religious Satanists are members of formal satanic groups. Many of these religious Satanists do not believe in either God or Satan. Anton LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan, claimed that he did not believe in the existence of a literal Satan. He asserted that Satan is a symbol of humanity's ego, lust, and greed. LaVey rejected the existence of sin, heaven, hell, life after death, and anything supernatural.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The Bible warns Christians that they are involved in spiritual warfare against the forces of Satan. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12, NIV).

The Bible also informs us that Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection has already overcome Satan. The reason Jesus came to earth was to destroy the devil's work (see 1 John 3:8). Jesus

attained a conclusive victory over Satan on the cross of Calvary (see Col. 2:15). The Christian has the power to resist Satan's temptations (see 1 Cor. 10:13; James 4:7). Satan will spend eternity in the lake of burning sulfur where he will "be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10, NIV).

WITNESSING TO PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE OCCULT

Determine the degree of the person's involvement in the occult. Many people are dabblers without any commitment to the occult world.

Talk with the person to discover the needs and problems they are facing. Many get involved in the occult because they believe it can help them solve life's difficulties. Share with them that faith in Jesus Christ is the only answer to the spiritual difficulties they face.

Stress the authority and victory of Christ over the occult world and His power over Satan (see Mark 9:14-29; Luke 4:33-36). Christ offers victory over Satan and the occult powers to all who will believe in Him and trust Him as their Lord and Savior (see Rom. 8:35-39; Eph. 6:11-17).

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you share the good news of deliverance through faith in Jesus Christ.

Revised by Bill Gordon.

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