

Some QUESTIONS & ANSWERS About The BIBLE and the OCCULT

(From e-mail correspondence)

These questions are based some e-mail correspondence that dealt with claims that certain occult practitioners had made about the Bible. To a degree, the way the questions are worded is based on the accusations or claims that were made, rather than on the reality of the situation.

- Are Old Testament prohibitions against the occult like the O.T. dietary laws (and thus not relevant for us today)?
- What about verses that (supposedly) support the practice of the occult?

Question #1 - Are Old Testament prohibitions against the occult like the O.T. dietary laws (and thus not relevant for us today)?

To answer this question, we had to explore the differences between the *moral* and *ceremonial* laws. The occult violates the *moral* law, and thus is not an option under *any* circumstances. But the principles we examine here are applicable to *many* situations we may come across in life. Some activities may be perfectly acceptable in some circumstances, but be sinful in other circumstances.

Hi. How do you answer occultists who claim that the O.T. laws against the occult, are just as meaningful today, as the Jewish dietary laws are, etc?

A person who doesn't want to accept the Word of God will probably not accept anything I write below. But in case the person who raised this issue does have a willingness to hear the truth, here are a few comments.

First of all, I presume you are aware of my article, "The Bible and the Occult." If you look at the verse list given in the article, you will notice that both Old and New Testaments condemn the occult. It's not merely an Old Testament issue.

Now concerning the dietary laws, etc., Scripture makes a distinction between the ceremonial laws (such as the dietary laws) and the moral laws (such as the commands against occult practices). Violations against the moral law are always condemned, regardless of circumstances. In contrast, violations against ceremonial laws are condemned only within certain defined contexts.

For example, the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament were given to Israel, as part of the covenant (agreement) that was made between Israel and God. Non-Jews had no obligations to follow those ceremonial regulations - although, they could have voluntarily chosen to follow them. And even for the Old Testament Jew, the moral obligations took precedence over the ceremonial obligations. There are numerous verses - in both Old and New Testaments - in which obedience to the ceremonial law was actually condemned because the people were ignoring the moral law. God said to FIRST comply with the moral law, and THEN do what the ceremonial law required. (Compare with Matthew 23:23.)

For example, Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6, Jeremiah 9:25-26, Romans 2:28-29 and Colossians 2:11 all mention the ceremonial ritual of circumcision. This act was originally intended to be a reflection of a spiritual truth, or principle - which in some of these verses is described as "circumcision of the heart." These verses show us that God condemned those who focused on the ceremonial, while neglecting the moral... but he approved of those who focused on the moral, even though they had not done the ceremonial.

Animal sacrifices and burnt offerings were commanded in the Old Testament. Yet Psalm 51:16-19 tells us that the "sacrifice" of a broken spirit must come first... then God would be willing to accept the animal sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Many religious activities were required, under the Old Testament law. Yet when the people's hearts were not right, God rejected those activities - even though they were commanded, as part of the ceremonial law. (Examples: Isaiah 1:11-15 and Amos 5:21-23.) God claimed that he hated their religious activities, because the people were filled with evil: they were violating the moral law.

1 Samuel 21:6 describes a situation in which David violated the ceremonial law, but because of his circumstances (he was running for his life - compare to 1 Samuel 20:33), it was not sin. Jesus refers to this event in Matthew 12:4 (also Mark 2:26 and Luke 6:4), as Scriptural proof that his own disciple's actions were not sinful, when they picked some heads of grain, and ate them on the Sabbath (see Matthew 12:1-8).

Dietary laws were commanded in the Old Testament, as part of the ceremonial law. They were intended to reflect spiritual principles - like an object lesson - that both Israel and the surrounding nations could visibly see. This concept involved not only their dietary customs, but also various practices, such as not weaving two types of material into one piece of cloth (Deuteronomy 22:11). It was all part of the special agreement (covenant) they made with God, at Mount Sinai, as Moses led them to the land of Canaan.

In contrast, moral laws, such as prohibitions against the occult, applied to all people everywhere, whether or not they belonged to the nation Israel. There are many examples in the Bible, in which God condemns non-Jews for their occult practices. These people were not bound by the ceremonial regulations, such as the dietary rules, but God still held them accountable for the moral laws. (Note that Paul says, in Romans 1 - 2, that ALL people have at least some awareness of God and the moral law, even if they don't have the Bible in their possession.) In the end, God warns that all who violate the moral law (and do not repent) will have their place in the lake of fire. **NO SUCH WARNING EXISTS FOR PEOPLE WHO MERELY FAIL TO OBSERVE CEREMONIAL PRACTICES RELATED TO DIET.**

Today, things have changed even for Israel. First, as far as the ceremonial law is concerned, Jesus Christ has fulfilled certain aspects of the law. Second, because Israel persistently broke the covenant they made with God (at Mount Sinai), God said he would replace that old covenant with a new one. This was accomplished by what Jesus did on the cross. (See Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:4-13; 12:18-24; 13:20.)

The occultists you referred to might not accept it, but God does make a distinction between the ceremonial practices that were required by Israel, and the moral violations of those who practice the occult.

Question #2 - What about verses that (supposedly) support the practice of the occult?

The occult practitioners who made this claim had already shown their unwillingness to accept the Bible as the final authority on the matter. It seems that, at this point, they were more interested in *attacking* the Bible, than they were in *understanding* it. [Note that the person who asked this question was *not* an occult practitioner, but was just repeating what they had told him.]

How would you explain the following biblical passages? Thanks.

I could quickly summarize my thoughts in this way: I'm not very impressed with people who try to defend the occult with such verses. It is not wise to tear verses out of context, in an attempt to reject the clear commands of the Word. Nor should we use the actions of imperfect people (IF any of these passages reflect human imperfection), as an excuse for ignoring the commands of the perfect God. Whoever gave you these verses was not trying to understand God's Word. Rather, they want you to abandon the Word of God as your foundation, and reinterpret it (and reach false conclusions) based upon THEIR false foundation.

In Genesis 44:5, Joseph's household manager refers to a silver drinking cup "...in which my lord drinketh and whereby indeed he divineth." Later, Joseph accuses his brothers of stealing the cup, saying "that such a man as I can certainly divine [the identity of the thieves]." These passages show that Joseph engaged in scrying. This is an ancient occultic method of divination in which a cup or other vessel is filled with water and gazed into. This technique of foretelling the future was used by Nostradamus and is still used today.

Genesis 44:5 - Joseph & the cup he supposedly used for occult practices

The context says differently. This is a description of how Joseph PRETENDED to not know his brothers. It does not say that Joseph actually did these things. And very clearly, he did NOT use occult practices to identify who his brothers were, or where his cup was. HE HIMSELF RECOGNIZED HIS BROTHERS AND HE HAD THE CUP PUT IN THE BAG!

The Urim and Thummim were two objects mentioned in Numbers 27:21 and 1 Samuel 28:6 of the Hebrew Scriptures. They were apparently devices (perhaps in the form of flat stones) that the high priest consulted to determine the will of God. They might have worked something like a pair of dice.

The Urim and Thummim - Numbers 27:21 and 1 Samuel 28:6 [These were only used when God's will was not already revealed concerning the matter in question.]

The same God who commanded the high priest to use these two stones also condemned the practice of the occult. Nothing could be clearer. To suggest some similarity between the two practices, or to use the one to "justify" the other, is to PRESUPPOSE that the distinction God makes between the two is false.

Elisha was on his way to Bethel. Some small boys came out of the city and made fun of him because of his lack of hair; they called him "baldy." In a violent display of the power of black magic, Elisha cursed the children in the name of God. Two bears, apparently prompted by God, came out of the forest and tore 42 of the boys to shreds, apparently killing them. See 2 Kings 23-24.

Elisha's curse on the children - 2 Kings 2:23-24.

First of all, it wasn't black magic. To claim that it was, is to have already rejected everything God says about the occult. God's prophets don't use the enemies' techniques. God is the one who sent the bears. If the curse had been an expression of personal rage and a desire for vengeance (which I suppose those occult practitioners want you to think it was) then God would not have done what he did. God does not do what people want, when it is contrary to his nature.

There are other issues which are not directly stated in these verses, such as the fact that Bethel was the main center of idolatry in Israel. These children would have been following the ways of their idolatrous parents, most likely knowing full well that they were mocking a prophet of God.

[The Old Testament concept of "little children" can include people who are older than what we tend to think of, today. Back then, they didn't consider a person as reaching maturity until they were 30 years old. Tell that to a teenager today!]

[By the way, showing disrespect and dishonor to authority was considered a much more serious sin, back then, than it is today. In fact, if a child was totally rebellious, he was supposed to be put to death. Though some people even encourage rebellion today, it is horribly evil, in God's sight - Deuteronomy 21:18-21.]

Daniel, the prophet, was employed for many years in Babylon as the chief occultist to the king. He was supervisor "of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers." See Daniel 5:11.

Daniel, supervisor over the magicians, astrologers, etc. - Daniel 5:11.

Scripture does not describe him as the "chief occultist." Daniel 5:11 was the queen's description of it; she describes him as the "chief of the occultists" - which is not quite the same as "chief occultist." Even then, she makes a distinction between Daniel and the others: He, unlike the others, had "the spirit of the holy gods" (as described from her perspective).

The account in Daniel 2:48, which was probably penned by Daniel himself, simply says that he was put in charge of all the "wise men" of Babylon - which (whether Daniel liked it or not) would have included occultists. After all, Babylon was a pagan nation, and could be expected to be involved in pagan practices. To claim he was the "chief occultist" - as though he practiced occult activities - is to lie and presupposes a rejection of God's Word. A constant theme in the book is the fact that Daniel's God was greater than all those who followed the occult.

Furthermore, it wasn't Daniel's choice to be in that position; it was the king's decision - a king who blurred the distinction between Daniel's God and the occult (just like occultists apparently do, today). Daniel probably didn't have much say in the matter. God used the situation to show his power and greatness over the occult, not to endorse it.