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THE PARANORMAL



What movies or TV shows bank on our culture's interest in the paranormal?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

*Dabbling with evil is destructive;
seeking direction from God brings life.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Everyone's heard of ghost stories. In fact, among Americans:

- ▶ 71 percent claim to have had a paranormal experience.
- ▶ 34 percent believe in ghosts.
- ▶ 56 percent believe ghosts are spirits of the dead.
- ▶ 37 percent believe houses can be haunted.
- ▶ 55 percent believe psychics have real power.¹

Even many of those who don't "believe" in ghosts still think it can be fun to play with the paranormal. That's a problem, because the paranormal is a slippery slope. Once a person gets curious and opens the door to the paranormal world, they only find trouble—and once opened, that door can be difficult to close.

How can we escape the appeal of these dangers? Moses, the great lawgiver, provided us with a helpful road map for avoiding the dangerous pitfalls of the paranormal.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Deuteronomy 18:9-11

⁹ When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.

Interest in the paranormal may seem trendy at the moment, but it's nothing new. God's people have been dealing with it literally for thousands of years. Indeed, one of the reasons God removed the Canaanites from the promised land was because of their spiritual darkness.

God wanted His people to be warned and prepared before they entered that promised land. Therefore, Moses identified several paranormal practices that were common among the pagans:

- ▶ **Child sacrifice.** Children were killed in order to appease a pagan god and influence events that god supposedly controlled. This was merely a cultural euphemism for child extermination.
- ▶ **Divination.** This was a general term for trying to gain insights from the gods through various means, including other practices listed in this passage.
- ▶ **Sorcery.** While the Hebrew word used here is hard to define with certainty, it literally means "those who cause to appear." It might have referred to making apparitions appear or making a person's course of action visible through occultic practices.
- ▶ **Interpreting omens.** Those who practiced this sought to determine the future through the use of objects. For example, a diviner might have attempted to interpret the future based on how objects fell out of a cup.

What have you been taught about the practices mentioned in these verses?

QUESTION #2

- ▶ **Witchcraft.** Witches and sorcerers attempted to manipulate the powers of nature. Today we often refer to those who practice “black magic” in a similar way.
- ▶ **Casting spells.** The Hebrew term has the sense of binding or fascinating; it meant to bind a person with a curse.
- ▶ **Consulting the dead.** Moses used several terms—“medium,” “spiritist,” those who inquire of the dead—that each address attempting to communicate with the dead.

Though the distinction between these practices might seem minor, the combined list makes it abundantly clear: God considers “detestable” any form of divination, the occult, and paranormal practices. No matter how popular or profitable such practices may appear, we are never to “imitate” them.

Why do people still dabble in these kinds of practices?

QUESTION #3

Deuteronomy 18:12-14

¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. ¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God. ¹⁴ 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.

It’s worth repeating: nothing good comes from dabbling in the paranormal. Yet studies show that almost one-third of Americans have consulted their horoscopes. Nearly 12 percent of Americans (roughly 42 million people) have personally consulted a psychic, medium, or fortune-teller.²

The Bible’s teaching is clear: “You must be blameless before the LORD your God.” Not only that, but “Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.”

To be “blameless” doesn’t mean we live in sinless perfection. Rather, we’re blameless when we live with hearts fully committed to God—when we reflect His integrity and display an undivided heart committed to Him. David used the same Hebrew word in Psalm 101:2 when he wrote: “I will conduct the affairs of my house with a blameless heart.”

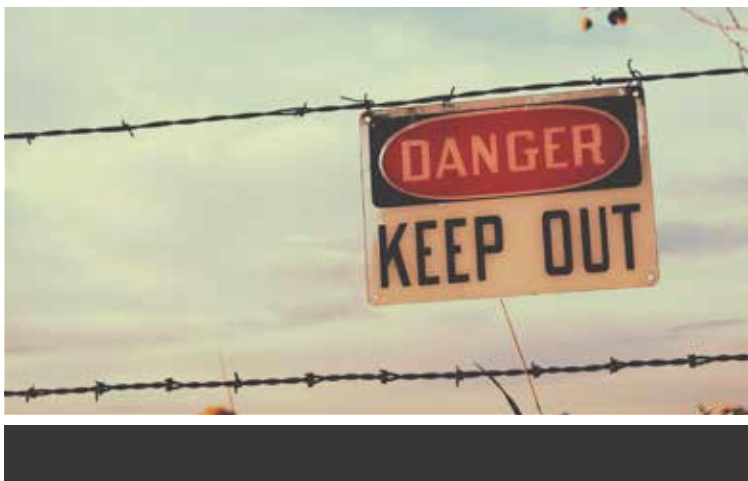
Notice there’s no gray area or middle ground. Paranormal practices are in absolute conflict with pure devotion and worship of Yahweh—the One true God and the Creator of all. Therefore, if we’re looking into any of the activities condemned in Deuteronomy 18, we’re not looking toward God.

And when we fail to look to God, we will not be held blameless.

God’s condemnation of these practices did not apply only to those in the Old Testament. The New Testament also commands followers of Jesus to avoid all interaction with the paranormal world:

- ▶ “Reject every kind of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22).
- ▶ “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly” (1 Tim. 4:7).

As we’ll see in the next portion of Deuteronomy 18, there’s another reason why we should stay away from the paranormal: God has given us something far superior.



***What makes
paranormal practices
so dangerous and
destructive?***

QUESTION #4

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

People use a lot of excuses to rationalize dabbling in different paranormal activities. How would you respond if a close friend or family members used the excuses below? Choose one and respond.

“Reading my horoscope helps me get a sense of what I might encounter each day. It’s just a little extra information.”

“A group of people at the party wanted to use a Ouija Board, so I joined them. It wasn’t a big deal.”

“I went to the psychic because I was worried about Mom. I wanted to make sure she was in a good place after the accident.”

How can the situation you addressed above become an opportunity to proclaim the truth of the gospel?

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.” ¹⁷ The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.”

At first glance, it might appear as if Moses abruptly changed subjects in verse 15. Actually, he was right on message. The pagans were using paranormal practices to seek divine guidance, determine the future, or manipulate events in their favor. Moses was pointing to something better for God’s people.

In the place of pagan paranormal activity, Moses promised that God would raise up a new order of prophets who would reveal God’s words to His people. He was speaking of more than just Deborah, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets of the Old Testament. Moses was also pointing forward to the coming Redeemer—the Messiah, Jesus Christ. When Peter and Stephen preached to their fellow Jews about Jesus, they both used this same passage to point to Jesus as the supreme Prophet. (See Acts 3:22-23; 7:37.)

God spoke clearly through His prophets, but one Prophet gave the ultimate word from God, because He is the ultimate Word of God. As the author of Hebrews wrote: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1-2).

As I’ve counseled hurting people, I’ve discovered that those who turn to the paranormal world for help don’t find the answers they seek. In fact, they find the opposite: depression, abuse, and even suicide. Jesus is a much better answer to our spiritual questions—and He offers a far greater hope.

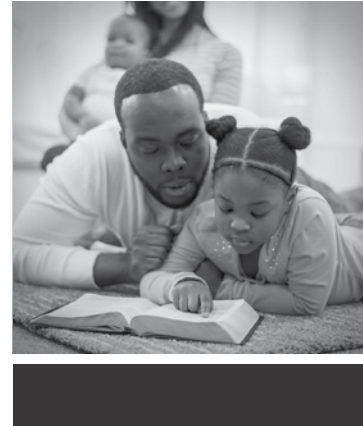
What are reliable ways for us to seek out God’s plan and purpose in our lives?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

What steps can you take this week to shine the light of Jesus against the darkness of the paranormal? Consider these suggestions:

- ▶ **Be educated.** You will only know God's guidance as you immerse yourself in His Word. Commit to reading the Bible on a daily basis and develop the practice of studying its truth.
- ▶ **Be discerning.** Make discernment a regular part of your prayer life. Ask God to guide your thoughts and actions away from evil. "But test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21-22).
- ▶ **Be blameless.** Seek to demonstrate a blameless heart, fully devoted to the Lord, by removing from your presence anything that promotes and encourages the use of paranormal practices. Make a line in the sand.



People in our culture are fascinated with the paranormal because they are longing for God. Choose the path of light over darkness—not only for yourself, but for those who need to see Christ.

My thoughts

1. "Americans' Beliefs in Paranormal Phenomena" (Infographic) *LiveScience* [online] 28 October 2011 [cited 28 October 2016]. Available from the Internet: livescience.com/16748-americans-beliefs-paranormal-infographic.html.

2. Christopher Bader, Carson Mencken, and Joseph Baker, *Paranormal America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 73, 107.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLdarkside**