



# Critical Issues Commentary

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## THE DANGERS OF DIVINATION

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*"When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead." (Deuteronomy 18:9-11)*

Recently I was asked to speak at a seminary. Before the meeting I had lunch with a couple of the professors, one of whom had spent many years as a missionary in Taiwan. The former missionary recounted a story that illustrates the reality of the spirit world. Here is the story in his words:

A twelve-year-old boy in Taiwan was having strange experiences. He felt as though someone was often following him but when he turned around, he saw no one. Often in the morning after a fitful sleep he would have bruises and tell his parents that someone had been hitting him in the night as he slept. His parents took him to medical doctors who could find nothing wrong with the boy. Finally, they took him to a blind fortune-teller – one who had a reputation for his effectiveness in perceiving the spirit world.

This fortune-teller told the boy and his parents that the boy was born as a twin and that the other twin had died at birth. This was of course known to the parents, but few other people knew about this as they had kept it a secret. The fortune-teller went on to say that the

boy's problems were caused by the spirit of the deceased twin who was angry about being neglected. His parents had not been faithfully worshiping him and providing for him in the spirit world. Therefore, this spirit was punishing them by harassing their son (his twin). The solution was to set up an altar for the spirit of the deceased twin, worship him with food and incense, and burn spirit money on his behalf. When the family did as they had been instructed, the boy's strange experiences ceased.<sup>1</sup>

One might ask, "How can it be that this worked"? The answer is that Satan has good reasons to make it work. The spirits tormenting the child were doing what evil spirits delight to do. The fortune-teller is connected to real spiritual knowledge. The spirits told the fortune-teller of the twin. The spirits gave him the "prescription" and other spirits quit their tormenting because by doing so, they have immersed that whole family in the animistic beliefs of spirit worship. Imagine how solid would be their beliefs and how unlikely would be their turning to Jesus Christ. Divination and spiritism work — that is what makes the danger so great. Deceptions that do not "work" have a short shelf life.

## THE NATURE AND HISTORY OF DIVINATION

Old Testament scholar Eugene H. Merrill gives a general definition of divination: "The phrase 'practicers of divination' refers generally to the whole complex of means of gaining insight from the gods regardless of any particular technique."<sup>2</sup> Here is another definition: "[The] practice of making decisions or foretelling the future by means of reading signs and omens."<sup>3</sup> All pagan societies, ancient and modern, practiced divination. They knew they lived in a world of spirit beings and "gods," and needed ways to gain information about the spirits that they believed created good or bad fate. Various techniques were developed to gain this knowledge. There is no logical limit to the varieties of techniques that might work. These techniques persist because they do work to some extent and the spirits are all too willing to provide their deceptive information.

There are general categories of divination that were popular in the ancient world. One of the most prevalent ones was reading anomalies in nature. The ancients believed that the gods were behind the events of nature. When extraordinary events occurred, the ancients saw the possibility of learning from the gods. "These anomalies were understood as allowances by the gods in order to communicate a message to humans (as more direct forms of communication were not normally possible)."<sup>4</sup> The practice of astrology arose because planets were anomalies in that they took a different course of movement than the stars. People used to examine the liver or entrails of animals to gain information from the gods. This is mentioned in the Bible: "*For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the household idols, he looks at the liver.*"

(Ezekiel 21:21). What they were looking for was abnormalities that might be read as signs. The arrows might be poured or tossed out of a quiver and the direction or pattern in which they stuck in the ground could be read so as to indicate where to attack.<sup>5</sup>

Not all forms of divination had to do with reading anomalies. Some forms were means of making direct contact with spirits. Necromancy is one of them. "Necromancy, consulting the spirits of the dead (Lev. 19:31; Isa. 8:19; Isa. 19:3), is a way of obtaining foreknowledge from a supernatural source which was illicit among the Jews . . . but licit amongst all other peoples."<sup>6</sup> What divination is always looking for is secret information whether about the past, present or future.

Divination is often linked with sorcery, enchantments, and other practices. For example: "Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him. So the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah" (2Kings 17:17, 18). The phrase "made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire" is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:10 along with divination. It is quite possible that in this context it was a specific means of divination rather than child sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> Possibly it was a form of divination that involved interrogation by fire. The exact nature of the practice is not certain. But what is certain was that it was a pagan practice linked with divination and forbidden by God. In many passages a number of closely related terms are cited to show that all such activity is forbidden. For example, speaking of Manasseh: "And he made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord provoking Him to anger" (2Kings 21:6).

There are a couple of practices that can be seen as divination in a pagan sense or something God uses. One example of this is the interpretation of dreams and another is the casting of

lots. There is a technical term for dream interpretation which is described as follows: "Oneiromancy, the interpretation of dreams, is tolerated in the OT (Gen. 40:5-8; Dan. 1:17). The narratives attribute interpretation completely to Yahweh, seeming to the exclusion of the interpreters being trained in the disciplines of dream interpretation (which was of enormous interest in Egypt as well as Mesopotamia)."<sup>8</sup> In the Bible God provided the interpretation of a dream at His discretion through specific individuals such as Joseph and Daniel. Pagan dream interpretation was an art that was practiced like other forms of divination. A dreamer of dreams needs to be judged like a prophet does, as we shall see when we discuss Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Later we shall discuss the use and misuse of dreams.

The practice of casting lots to determine the Lord's decision was allowed under certain circumstances. The Urim and Thummim of Aaron's breast piece evidently served that purpose (see Exodus 28:30 and Numbers 21:7). This passage shows that God did not always answer: "When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets" (1Samuel 28:6). When that happened, Saul departed from what God ordained: "Then Saul said to his servants, 'Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.' And his servants said to him, 'Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at Endor'" (1Samuel 28:7).

Any of the means God did ordain, be it dreams, prophets, or the casting of lots, could be misused. The means God provided in the Old Testament could only be used through people He truly called and ordained and in the manner He ordained. We shall discuss the tests the Lord gives to determine if they are legitimate later. It is also important that all other methods of seeking spiritual information are illegitimate in every case.

## WHY GOD FORBIDS DIVINATION

The Bible forbids divination because it involves lusting for secret knowledge that God has not chosen to reveal. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). This desire for forbidden knowledge has its roots in man's first sin. Here is what the Serpent said: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like

**What is forbidden is secret information not available through ordinary means of learning and not revealed by God. Divination involves various techniques to gain this spiritual information.**

God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5). He tempted Eve with a desire to know what God had not chosen to reveal and thus transgress the boundary between

Creator and creature. Eve and then Adam succumbed to this temptation (Genesis 3:6). Divination is an ongoing attempt to gain forbidden knowledge.

There are only two legitimate sources of knowledge available to us: 1) the things revealed by God, 2) that which can be learned through general revelation. What is revealed by God is contained in the Bible. General revelation is limited to what can be learned through the physical senses and rational implications of what is seen in the creation. What is forbidden is secret information, not available through ordinary means of learning and not revealed by God. Divination involves various techniques to gain this spiritual information. For example, in the case of the child who was brought to the fortune-teller, had there been an inquiry and the results of careful investigation found that the child had a twin brother who died, that would be a legitimate source of information. What influence if any that fact had on the child could only be discerned as far as evidence and rational implications could provide. However, the information from the fortune-teller, though "true" at least in the fact of the death of the twin, is still forbidden because it came through divination.

The fortune-teller illustration shows **why** divination is forbidden. It works because of the operation of evil spirits. Evil spirits are willing to give out some factual information as long as it serves their purpose of telling a bigger lie. People get sucked into the occult because of the accuracy of the secret information they gain.

I have interviewed people who had participated in séances. In some cases specific information was given about a deceased relative that the necromancer had never known. This information convinces the clients that they are actually contacting their deceased relatives. However, demons have this information and can dispense it to cause people to believe a greater lie. In some cases the lie is that the deceased relative is in a "better place" in spite of the fact that they had never believed the gospel. This perpetrates the lie that all people go to a "better place" and therefore there is no need to repent and believe the gospel. This serves the purpose of the deceiving spirits who make the séance "work."

What is important to keep in mind about divination is that there is very good reason why people in diverse cultures throughout human history have practiced it: **it works!** This is what makes it so seductive. To naively claim that it is not real and doesn't work will never get people to give up divination. What needs to be known is that these methods are forbidden because they do give access to the world of the spirits. These spirits are not good beings, though they would like to make us think so. They are deceiving spirits and they have been practicing their deceptions for thousands of years. Their primary aim is to keep people away from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If they fail to keep people from coming to Christ, their secondary aim is to deceive them into embracing false doctrine, thus distorting their understanding of God's revealed truth.

### DIVINATION IS REBELLION

Consider what the prophet Isaiah had to say: "And when they say to you,

*'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn*" (Isaiah 8:19, 20). The murky world of secret, spiritual knowledge is characterized by unclear "whispering and muttering." Seeking such secret information is the equivalent of failing to consult God who has revealed His truth objectively in His word. Those who are not satisfied with what God has chosen to reveal go to other spiritual sources. This, as we shall see, is rebellion against God.

What diviners do is forbidden because diviners do not speak for God. Deuteronomy 18 contains a list of forbidden practices:

*There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)*

What Moses goes on to say shows that these practices were an alternative to listening to God's chosen spokesmen. "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:14, 15). Moses was God's ordained law-giver. The "prophet" that God would raise up is Jesus Christ (See Hebrews 1:1, 2; John 5:37-57; and Acts 3:22, 23 where Peter specifically claims that Christ was this prophet).

Moses was the one through whom God gave the law. The prophets did not

add to the law of God, but exhorted from it and predicted the future. They specifically prophesied of the Messiah, the prophet Moses predicted. According to Hebrews 1:1, 2, Jesus Christ has spoken to us in these last days in full and final revelation. Going beyond what was given in the Old Testament and spoken by Christ and His apostles in the New Testament is rebellion. It is practicing divination in order to gain spiritual revelations about things God has not revealed.

In 1Samuel 15, Saul refused to listen to God. He took spoil when God commanded him not to. This is what the prophet Samuel told Saul: "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king" (1Samuel 15:23). Those who reject God's word are "diviners" in as much as they refuse to acknowledge what has been revealed. Such refusal is literally divination in that they go elsewhere for their spiritual information. One either listens to what is objectively revealed or seeks information from the realm of divination and secret knowledge. This is the realm of the spirits. The result of Saul's action was that he soon became tormented by an evil spirit: "Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him" (1Samuel 16:14).

It may be shocking that the evil spirit is said to be "from the Lord," but this agrees with other Scriptures about the results of rejecting the truth. Those who willingly and purposely go outside what God has chosen to reveal put themselves under the judgment of reprobation. This means that God allows them to be deceived:

*[T]hat is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe*

*what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.* (2Thessalonians 2:9-12)

Like Saul, those deceived by antichrist's signs are led astray by their own lusts. The diviners and spiritists cater to the desires and lusts of sinners. God sends the deception not directly, because God cannot lie, but indirectly by giving Satan permission to unleash deceiving spirits on his victims.

In the Greek, the passage in Thessalonians says, "that they might believe **the lie.**" The definite article is important because it points to the lie that Satan told in the Garden, "you shall be like God, knowing . . ." The lie points to forbidden knowledge. In this passage it is in antithetical relationship to "**the truth.**" In its simplest form, the lie points us to secret knowledge that God has not revealed and the truth points us to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who practice divination are departing from the gospel for the sake of learning what God has not chosen to reveal. They end up deluded by the lie!

### DIVINATION AND FALSE PROPHETS

Balaam was an occultist. **Joshua 13:22** calls him a "diviner." He went to high places to read omens. He practiced "augury." His renown in dealing out spiritual curses was such that Balak was willing to pay a lot of money to have Balaam curse Israel. Whenever mentioned in the Bible, Balaam is condemned (the story of Balaam is in **Numbers 22-24**; he is condemned in **2Peter 2:15**; **Jude 1:11**; **Revelation 2:14**).

One remarkable thing about Balaam is that though he was a false prophet, he made a significant true prophesy. He prophesied about the coming of Messiah! He said, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, And a scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth"

(**Numbers 24:17**). Balaam, though normally practicing divination, had the Spirit of God come on him: "When Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times to seek omens but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him." (**Numbers 24:1, 2**) Balaam blessed Israel though he was hired to curse them.

There are three tests of prophets given in Deuteronomy: 1) if they use forbidden methods they are false (**Deuteronomy 18:10-12**), 2) If they make a prediction that does not come to pass they are false (**Deuteronomy 18:22**), and 3) If they make a true prediction yet lead the Israelites away from faithfulness to God they are false (**Deuteronomy 13:1-5**).

Given the fact that God spoke to and through Balaam, how can it be that he was a false prophet? Balaam failed two of the tests given in Deuteronomy. He was a false prophet according to Deuteronomy 18 because he used forbidden methods. The Israelites were specifically told not to listen to anyone who practiced divination.

He also failed the test of prophets given in Deuteronomy 13:

*If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)*

A prophet may give an accurate prediction or do a sign that would indicate he has power from God, yet still lead the people astray.

Balaam, after failing to directly curse Israel through divination, taught Balak how to lead Israel astray and thus

get them cursed. We learn this in the New Testament: "But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality" (**Revelation 2:14**). Failing to curse Israel, he taught Balak how to get them to put themselves under God's curse. Thus Balaam led Israel away from covenant faithfulness and failed the test of Deuteronomy 13.

False prophets are linked with divination in this passage: "Then the Lord said to me, 'The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds' (**Jeremiah 14:14**). These prophets were telling the people what they wanted to hear, that the judgment that Jeremiah was predicting would not come to pass (**Jeremiah 14:15**). They were soon proven false. The point is this: God's people need to be able to distinguish between prophets and diviners. The criterion for doing so is objective and not subjective. The false prophets were diviners whose source was subjective: "deception of their own minds."

### THE TRUE ROLE OF THE PROPHET

The true prophet in the Old Testament had several important roles. One was to exhort the people to faithfulness to the Law of Moses, which contained the stipulations of the covenant. One type of prophetic material in the Old Testament is called a "covenant lawsuit." The prophet would list the terms of the covenant, then bring in witnesses to the people's transgression of it, and then pronounce the verdict. Prophets were not law-givers, but exhorters. Another role was that of predicting the future. The topics of their predictions included the future of Israel and her relationships to the nations, oracles against the nations, and the details of the coming of Messiah, the "Prophet" about whom Moses spoke. Prophets also

gave specific prophecies to kings and specific guidance at key times in Israel's history.

As we have seen, if they did not preach covenant faithfulness they were false, if they did not accurately predict the future they were false, and if they used forbidden techniques they were false. True prophets were not practitioners of divination. They were called by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Their source was not special techniques to plumb "the divine" to gain secret information, but God who sovereignly spoke through them. There was no prophetic, secret technique that could be taught to others. Since it was God's inspiration that gave them their words, their words were true.

### GOD'S ORDAINED MEANS

There remains a question about those practices that God allowed that were considered divination when used by the pagans. The key concept is whether or not God ordains a practice. For example, when the Israelites went into the Promised Land and conquered it, the land was to be divided among the tribes by lot. Here is what God said, "*But the land shall be divided by lot. They shall receive their inheritance according to the names of the tribes of their fathers*" (Numbers 26:66). Joshua 19:51 shows that they did this and thus divided the land. Since God ordained that they cast lots to determine the division of the land, when they did so the outcome was God's will. He spoke through the lots because He ordained their use in this situation.

There were other situations in which lots were used to make decisions. Some of these included criminal cases, appointing to office, the division of property, and the selection of the he-goat on the Day of Atonement (Joshua 7:14; 1Samuel 10:20; Acts 1:26; Leviticus 16:10).<sup>10</sup> The last use of lots in the Bible was in Acts in the choosing of Matthias. Once the Holy Spirit was given there is no further use of lots. The Book of Acts shows that the Holy Spirit guided the apostles as they made decisions. The fact that God ordained the

use of lots in the Old Testament under certain circumstances does not justify their use for divination by anyone for any reason. The ordained usage was carefully prescribed.

Dream interpretation is another practice that was popular with pagans and sometimes allowed for God's people. God particularly used Joseph and Daniel to interpret the dreams of pagan kings which turned out to be significant to the future of Israel and her relationship to the nations. However, as with other forms of prophecy, not all were valid. As we saw in Deuteronomy 13:1-5, a "dreamer of dreams" might give a sign that came true and still lead the people astray by promoting idolatry. The same criteria for judgment of one who claims to have a divinely given dream or interpretation of a dream applies as for prophecy and prophets. That means that they must preach and practice covenant faithfulness and their predictions must be completely accurate.

It is also important to note that dream interpretation was not a technique to be learned. Not all dreams were from God nor were they necessarily significant. God sovereignly chose to use certain individuals to understand dreams. Those individuals did not claim some innate power to know the meaning of dreams that could be used at their discretion. Knowing the meaning of certain dreams was a gift God gave, particularly to Daniel (Daniel 1:17). Those who used divination techniques to interpret dreams failed when called upon: "*Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners came in, and I related the dream to them; but they could not make its interpretation known to me*" (Daniel 4:7). But God gave the meaning to Daniel (Daniel 4:8ff).

There was big problem with false use of dreams during Jeremiah's ministry. For example: "*I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!'*" (Jeremiah 23:25). The false prophets tried to gain legitimacy through their dreams, though they were departing from God's revealed will:

*"How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart, who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:26-28)*

This shows that even with those practices that God allows or ordains, there always must be discernment. The criteria laid out in Deuteronomy must be followed.

In summary, if a practice is a forbidden form of divination, it is always sinful and is never a "neutral" method. If a practice is allowed or ordained under certain circumstances, it still must be scrutinized. Even God's ordained means can be abused.

### GOD'S ORDAINED MEANS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we saw, Moses prophesied of a coming One who would speak authoritatively for God. The New Testament claims that this One was none other than Jesus Christ, as mentioned earlier. The very Creator Himself, the eternal Son, came and spoke for God in full and final revelation (Hebrews 1:1, 2). His apostles wrote Christ's teachings in the New Testament. Those who depart from the faith are as false as those who claimed to speak for God in the Old Testament but departed from the Law given through Moses.

Are there legitimate usages of divination for the New Testament believer? This would only be possible if God specifically ordained certain methods. I do not see any evidence of God providing New Testament believers with methods of divination through which God would speak. The use of lots in Acts 1 involved keeping an Old Testament practice. It is not said

whether or not the use of lots in this case was ordained by God, it just says they did so. Also, after the Day of Pentecost, this practice is never repeated.

There are dreams and prophecies mentioned in the New Testament. When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he cited Joel:

“And it shall be in the last days,” God says, “That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; Even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:17, 18)

The key point of this is “all mankind.” Rather than just certain individuals like prophets receiving the Holy Spirit, now He will, in a greater way, indwell all who believe. “Prophesying” is no longer restricted to a certain few people. All types of people will receive the Holy Spirit (young, old, male, female, and bondslaves). All may prophesy (1Corinthians 14:24, 31).

That there are dreams and prophecies is not different, but the purpose is now restricted. Since we have already received the fullness of authoritative, divine revelation until Christ returns, the purpose of dreams and prophecies are restricted to non-authoritative guidance and “edification, exhortation and comfort” (1Corinthians 14:3). Dreams and prophecies are subject to judgment just as in the Old Testament. There is no legitimate art of dream interpretation in the New Testament. Neither in the Old or New Testaments is there a process to be learned that makes one a dream interpreter.

There are ordained means in the New Testament, by which the Christian grows in the grace and knowledge of the Lord: the Word, ordinances, and prayer. Also, fellowship is a means of corporately sharing in the means of grace that God has given us. If by faith we avail

ourselves of God’s ordained means, we are assured that Christ will thereby convey the benefits of His redemption to His people.<sup>11</sup> As in the Old Testament, to depart from God’s ordained means is to put oneself outside of God’s blessing and protection. Likewise, as in the Old Testament, even what God has ordained can be abused. For example, the Word can be misinterpreted, baptism can be viewed as a means of justification apart from faith, communion can be turned into a meritorious work, and prayer can be turned into a mystical process to seek new revelations. We not only need God’s ordained means, but we need to avail ourselves of them **on His terms**.

Divination always involves a lust for secret knowledge. The means God has ordained seem mundane and slow to many people. People lust for an experience or special revelation that will instantly answer their question or solve their immediate problem. Like Saul who was not getting an answer through God’s ordained means and therefore consulted a witch, many today go into forbidden practices. They say, “I tried studying God’s Word, prayer, and Christian fellowship and it does not work.” So they go to someone they think can get secret information from God for them.

Divination is attractive to people for two basic reasons: fear and greed. They fear they will not get over their hurts so they look for secret information about their past. They fear a bad outcome so look for omens. They hope to find an anointed curse breaker to avert bad fate. They lust for success and wealth in this life so they seek secret information about the future. They imagine that with the right supernatural information they could be successful in all they do. They fear that the demons are keeping them from happiness so they look for secret information about the names and functions of demons hoping to escape their unhappy state. Like in the story of the fortune-teller at the beginning of this article, they want information that will solve their problems.

What we really need is to continu-

ally avail ourselves of the means of grace that God has ordained. In faithfully doing so by faith, we shall have all the blessings and benefits that are promised in this life. We lay aside the lust for secret, forbidden knowledge and accept that there is suffering. The vast arena of spiritual knowledge that is unknown to us must be left that way. But what is known is God’s revealed will and the joy of coming to God on His terms through Messiah. Here is a passage with an exhortation and a promise: “*Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). God will honor His promise when we come to Him on His terms through Messiah.

#### FALSE CLAIMS OF CHRISTIAN DIVINERS

Divination is any technique for gaining secret or hidden information that is not ordained in Scripture. Its practice is sinful and forbidden. People who do not want to be restricted from using divination techniques offer two arguments: “methods are neutral,” and “God can use anything.”

From the Scriptures we have shown that the first claim is unbiblical. Methods are not neutral. Let me share an example. Most people would agree that the Ouija board is a form of divination and forbidden for Christians. But what if someone devised an Ouija board that was just like a real one, only was covered with Bible verses. Two people could put their hands on the pointing device and allow whatever forces make the board “work” to point to the appropriate verse. This, they would then take as God guiding them. This may seem absurd, but is a logically valid thing if indeed “methods are neutral.” As a matter of fact, those who use the practice of closing their eyes, allowing their Bible to flop open, and sticking their finger into it to find a verse for guidance are using a similar technique. They are practicing divination. Some methods for obtaining spiritual knowledge are ordained by God, all others are forbidden.

The claim that, "God can use anything" is misleading. Though technically true, it is misleading in that there is a distinction to be made between what God has the power to use and what God ordains. There is also the fact that God can use something that is against His moral will and still bring judgment. God actually did use the Witch of Endor, but it was a very bad thing for Saul. God can use evil for good purposes, but it is a very bad thing for the doers of evil who are thus used. Another example is found in this passage: "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled" (**Revelation 17:17**). God will use the rebellion of the human race during the tribulation to bring about the fulfillment of prophecy, but it is very bad thing for those thus used.

What is truly important is that we determine from the Scriptures what God's will is and submit to that. Conjecture about what God could use is deceiving if we end up putting ourselves under judgment by participating in something God could possibly be using. God used Pharaoh, but it was a bad thing for Pharaoh and his army.

### CONCLUSION

Divination is forbidden not because it does not work, but because it does. It works to put people in touch with spiritual forces and secret knowledge. The spiritual beings thus accessed have factual information at their disposal that could not be gained through the means God gave us to know spiritual or secret things. This information could make someone very wealthy, or it could destroy them. The evil spirits who disperse this information intend to keep

people from coming to God through Messiah. They also seek to deceive Christians into thinking that what has been provided through Christ is insufficient. They are very good at what they do.

Fifteen years ago I was hosting a pastor's meeting, hoping to appeal to pastors to preach and teach the Bible accurately. A pastor came to the meeting who had recently been to see the Kansas City prophets. I asked him what happened there. His reply was that a prophet had been able to correctly identify his ministry though he had no natural source of this information. I asked how he did so. The answer was that the prophet had the man hold up his hand with his fingers spread. The prophet saw colors emanating from the hand that revealed which of the "five-fold" ministries he had. I said to him, "That is aura reading which is from the occult." He answered, "God can use anything and besides he was right."

What was so very wrong about that was that the secret information did nothing other than convince the pastor that Christian aura reading was allowed and that he had met a true prophet. The man knew he was a pastor before he went to the prophet, he did not need secret knowledge to show what was known by ordinary means. This is the same sort of procedure that many practitioners of divination use to convince their victims that they have legitimate powers. There are dozens of "Christian" versions of divination being practiced in the church today. The next issue will expose several of them.

What we must do is forsake the lust for secret knowledge and put ourselves under God's ordained means of grace. God will use His ordained means to give us all the healing and help we are going

to get in this life. By submitting to the gospel through faith we are assured of the future resurrection unto eternal life.

### END NOTES

1. From Dr. Joel Nordtvedt, President Lutheran Brethren Schools.
2. Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy in The New American Commentary*; (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, 1994) 271.
3. Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Holman: Nashville, 2003) s.v. "Divination," 433.
4. Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2000) s.v. "Divination," 349.
5. Op. cit. Holman
6. Scribners Dictionary of the Bible (Scribners: New York, 1903) Vol. 1. s.v. "Divination," 612.
7. Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9 in Word Biblical Commentary*; (Nelson: Nashville, 2001); 408.
8. Op. cit. Eerdmans, 350.
9. For example, Hosea 4:1 announces a "case" against Israel. See Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers*, (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, 1994) 40 for a discussion of the covenant lawsuit.
10. Op. Cit. Scribners, s.v. "lots," 153.
11. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Vol. III; (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1995 edition) 499. See 466-708 for a full discussion of means of grace.

#### Critical Issues Commentary

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## Coming Next Issue

### Divination in the Church Today

We will examine various forms divination takes in the contemporary evangelical church. These include various inner healing techniques.