

## Babylonianism at the Gates

### Christians and the Encircling World of the Occult

**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?* The Prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 8:19**

#### Introduction

Like many others in the world, our culture has become obsessed with the paranormal, the appetite for it being stimulated and fed by video games played, television programs and movies watched, books read, music listened to, art exhibits visited, spiritual activities engaged in, and more. Recently, a local arts center hosted an exhibit called “Encounter” that was “devoted to dragons, robots and other science fiction and fantasy themes.” [1] The same sectional front page also publicized “LARP-ing” (that is, **live-action-role-playing**) where participants gather together to act out “vampire-themed” scripts related to “those tabletop Dungeons and Dragons-style games that gained huge popularity in the 1980s and continue to draw a steady base of faithful players.” [2] In his coverage of the vampire-themed games, the reporter issued the following caveat: “They pretend to be vampires, but that doesn’t make them devil worshippers.” [3]

#### Souls under Siege

At first glance, “LARP-ing” might appear to be the activity of people belonging to one of society’s eccentric fringe groups (perhaps that’s why they consider themselves “nerds”), unless, of course, it is set against the backdrop of our overall culture, a culture fascinated not only by vampires, but also by werewolves, wizards, witches and warlocks (*a la* the popular *Harry Potter* novels and movies), Halloween, visits to and visitations from the netherworld (*23 Minutes in Hell*), near-death experiences (NDES), intergalactic soul travel, alien visitations (*E.T., Cowboys and Aliens*), spiritist séances, demon possessions (*Rosemary’s Baby*), Satanism (*The Omen Trilogy*), fortune telling, horoscopes, psychic readings, apparitions and poltergeists (*The Apparition*), horror films and TV programs (NBC’s *Grimm*), drug induced altered states of consciousness (*experiencing the divine*), extra-sensory perception (ESP), Sci-Fi, and on and on a listing can go. In fact, one can walk in any American shopping mall and see people, from adults to kids, wearing dark T-shirts and sporting tattooed bodies emblazoned with occult themes, grotesque human-like images, skulls and bones, and other occult symbols. The signs and stuff of the occult seem to be everywhere! [4]

#### A Post-Christian Phenomena

The popularity of paranormal spirituality, as it has now emerged in the United States during the latter half of the 20th century and the beginning of this 21st century, mirrors in many ways what happened at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th in Great Britain. History repeats itself. As the influence of Christianity began to wane amongst the British at that time, there arose a corresponding popular interest in the occult. As one historian describes the spiritual morphing that took place in Great Britain during late 19th and early 20th centuries:

A revival of interest in mysticism and mystery traditions of all kinds, however, abounded . . . and a variety of groups promised access to esoteric readings of the world's sacred literatures and an unmediated experience of the divine. In this heightened spiritual atmosphere . . . most [of the] spiritually inclined no longer identified in any way with formal Christian observance. They turned instead to the heterodox spirituality of occultism, with its animistic sense of a living universe and a broad range of teachings drawn from sources as diverse as those of mystical Christianity, the Hermetic traditions of the West, and the religions of the East. [5]

As it became in Great Britain then, so it has become in America now. As the influence of Christianity has waned, our society too has morphed to become a culture besieged by the occult. Seemingly, mankind cannot live without the supernatural. So the question arises, from whence does this all derive?

### **From Time Immemorial**

Since the occult is sourced from a time when before creation Lucifer—a created light-bearer within the angelic realm—aspired to be the Light (“**I will be like the most High**,” Isaiah 14:14b); and from a time when after creation in the Garden of Eden Satan conned Eve into thinking she possessed the potential to reset her life and become God (“**Ye shall be as gods [“like God,” NASB] knowing good and evil**,” Genesis 3:5), the influence of unseen forces (i.e., evil spirits) has been pervasive in this universe and our world (See Ephesians 6:12.).

In this world, the occult, sourced in Lucifer’s rebellion against God in Heaven, and then transplanted by him on earth, initially appeared in the Garden of Eden, in the same geographical vicinity where the religious system called Babylon “**the mother of harlots and abominations on the earth**” emerged (Revelation 17:5). The multifaceted spiritual religious system called Babylon is a magical belief system in which humans think they, if even by digital imagery, can manipulate and control their reality and destiny. Such spirituality totally opposes faith in the sovereign God who rules the universe. Therefore, from the biblical perspective, occultism is at the heart of an “**i-am-ness**” system of religion that designs to unseat God as the creator and ruler of the universe. Repeatedly, the Lord affirmed His sovereign “**I-am-ness**” to Israel and the nations when He said: “**I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me**” (Isaiah 44:6; 45:5, 6, 18, 22; 46:9). Then there had developed the competing claim of the Babylonian religion which, amidst her “**sorceries . . . enchantments . . . astrologers . . . star gazers . . . monthly prognosticators**,” dared to declare its “**i-am-ness**”: “**I am, and none else beside me**” (Isaiah 47:8-13; \*10).

### **A Prevalent Worldview**

In their godlessness, ancient civilizations became intrigued by and possessed of a magical worldview sourced from ancient Babylon (Isaiah 47:12-13; Ezekiel 21:21; Daniel 1:20; 2:2, 10, 27; 4:6-7; 5:7), and from there, dispensed to the Egyptian (Genesis 41:8; Exodus 7:11, 22), Canaanite (Deuteronomy 18:9) and Assyrian (Nahum 3:4) civilizations and cultures. But in his day (*circa* 2000 B.C.), God called upon Abraham to separate himself from the hotbed of the occult arts that was Ur (Genesis 12:1), and journey by faith to an unknown land which the Lord would show to him. Upon ending their seventy-year exile of captivity in Babylon (*circa* 520 B.C.),

the Lord also instructed the Israelites to “**Depart ye [from Babylon], depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing [anything contaminated by the occult Babylonian religion]; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord [the clean things]**” (Isaiah 52:11; Compare 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 for commentary; See Revelation 18:4.). All of which is to say, any involvement in the occult is, in God’s eyes, “**an unclean thing**” and therefore a serious breach of faith!

### No “Crossover” Spiritualities

The spirituality of these civilizations posed an ever-present threat to the spiritual life of the nation of Israel for reason of that nation’s necessary commerce with and concourse amongst them. So the great question was, would the Lord’s people, as His priestly nation in that world (Exodus 19:5-6a), maintain a testimony of their abiding faith in Jehovah and remain separate from the heterodox and occult spirituality of their neighbors? Therefore, the Lord commanded the Israelites: “**Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God**” (Leviticus 19:31).

### Deadly Dispatches

To exhibit their keeping covenant with Him, the Lord through Moses, just before their entering the land of Canaan, expanded His commandment telling the nation:

When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. (Deuteronomy 18:9-14) **[6]**

All of the idolatrous activities listed above, and more, served as litmus tests for the faith-keeping of the Israelites. Repudiating those activities would mark them out to be *covenant keepers*. On the other hand, indulging in those activities would mark them as *covenant breakers*, as being unfaithful to the Lord their husband (Isaiah 54:6). Unfortunately, much of the Old Testament record portrays how the Israelites spurned their covenant with the Lord, and like a spiritual whore, chased after the abominations of the occult (Isaiah 8:19; Jeremiah 27:9-10; Ezekiel 8:1-18; 13:1-23; Malachi 3:5). So it was to a people who refused to consult “**the law and . . . the testimony**” (Isaiah 8:20) that God sent Isaiah as His ambassador announcing the coming of divine judgment, all the while knowing that the apostate majority within Israel, having been so mesmerized by a magical worldview, would spurn the Word He had given the prophet to speak (Compare Ezekiel 3:4-11.).

### “This People” and “My People”

As our nation is fascinated with, even captivated by, the occult, so was Israel during the days of

the prophets. [7] During Isaiah's days of ministry, there were two groupings of people: *the majority*, who had been seduced by spiritualities of the surrounding culture, and who Yahweh designated as "**this people**" (Isaiah 6:9-10; 8:6, 11, 12; 9:16; 28:14; 29:13; etc.); and a *minority* who, by refusing to conform to the religion of the surrounding culture, the Lord called "**my people**" (Isaiah 1:3; 5:13; 10:24; etc.). [8]

### Seducing Spirits

As for Isaiah, the Lord instructed him "**not walk in the way of this people**," the majority who, manifesting their denial of the coming judgment, counseled that Isaiah and his disciples should seek a more favorable verdict, and "**Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter**" (Isaiah 8:11, 19; Compare 1 Timothy 4:1.). Think of it . . . the prophet who had been given the Word of the Lord was being advised by a rebel majority to consult the familiar spirits of the dead in order to divine the nation's future; and this despite the biblical statement that "**the dead know not any thing**"! (Ecclesiastes 9:5) For any people, ancient or modern, who are under the influence of the prevailing culture, the straight-forward and living Word of the Lord is never sufficient. A mesmerized majority rather prefers the charade of hearing the "**chirping and groaning**" of the so-called spirits of the dead. [9] As one commentator assessed the spiritual attitude of the Israelites, "Their enthusiasm for fortune-tellers and spiritists evidences both their withdrawal, foolishly and treacherously, from their God and his withdrawal, justly and judgmentally, from them." [10] This undiscerning majority and their false prophet-teachers had been caught up into deception's vicious cycle, of deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).

### Conspiracy Theory

Having been seduced by the surrounding spiritualities, the majority of Israelites ("**this people**") demonstrated they had broken covenant with Yahweh, were no longer considered priests of His holy nation, and were ripe for divine judgment (Isaiah 7:17-25; 8:9). This majority lived in denial as they dismissed all this prophetic talk of coming judgment on the part of Isaiah and as a "conspiracy theory" ("**It is a conspiracy!**" Isaiah 8:12, NASB.). No fear of the Lord resided within them (Isaiah 8:12b-13). The majority felt that in an ecumenical show of strength and unity ("**A confederacy . . . A confederacy**," Isaiah 8:12, KJV.), they could treaty-up with the Assyrians—"Devise a plan . . . State a proposal," Isaiah 8:10, NASB.) and negotiate themselves out of the coming invasion by that nation which they presumed were their "spiritual brothers". Israel had rejected the Lord who was their source of pure spiritual life—"the gently flowing waters of Shiloah" (Isaiah 8:6)—even as they chose to remain oblivious to the fact that a tsunami of divine judgment was about to sweep over the land (Isaiah 8:6-8). The brutal Assyrians, the people whom the majority in Israel thought they could negotiate with, were coming to wipe them off the face of the map, and all they chose to do was by divination seek a different verdict and outcome. As F.C. Jennings observes:

The "mediums" of these communications are "wizards" (*wise-ards*), and if you want any secret revealed—from the whereabouts of a lost article to the eternal condition of a deceased relative—you have only to consult some 'medium,' and you will be put into communication with the spirit of the departed, who will tell you—just what you want to hear! [11]

### They Dared to be Different!

In contrast, a minority (“my people”), by holding fast in their separation from the spiritualities of the surrounding nations, demonstrated their fidelity to the covenant. They didn’t go along with the majority. These are the ones the prophet called “**my disciples**” and “**the children whom the Lord hath given me**” (Isaiah 8:16, 18). This cleavage between the majority and the minority illustrates the words of the apostle Paul when wrote, “**For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel**” (Romans 9:6). Such a grouping may be likened to that existing between true believers on the one hand, and professing Christendom on the other (“**wheat**” and “**tares**,” Matthew 13:24-30; “**sheep**” and “**goats**,” Matthew 25:32), the later of whom, as Anton Bosch points out, though they are conformed to the church, they have been transformed by the world (The inverse of Romans 12:2.). **[12]**

### Signs and Wonders

The majority did not know how to take or what to do with the discerning minority, for they, along with the prophet Isaiah, were to them as “**signs and . . . wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts**” (Isaiah 8:18b). This small band of true believers within Israel was a miraculous testimony to the nation. Their commitment to Yahweh and His prophet was curious to majority. The spiritually numb majority simply could not understand their “legalism” and “narrow-mindedness”. But neither could they explain the minority away, for the Lord had raised them up as “signs and wonders”. The minority was like those whom Malachi observed in his day:

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. **[The Lord speaking:]** And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. **[Malachi affirming:]** Then shall ye **[the Lord returning]** return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. (Malachi 3:16-18)

### Conclusion

So, to which group do we belong? Motyer notes that in Isaiah there exists “a distinction between the secularized, politicized professing people of God and those, within that people, who turn to him in repentance and faith, who look to his word and obey it.” **[13]** Are we part of a minority who serve as “signs and wonders,” or are we numbered amongst those who do not fear the Lord? To the question, we should note that in their book *UnChristian*, even two emergent authors from the Barna Research Group contrasted the spiritual and moral behavior of “born-again” to “non-born-again”. Their research indicated that “professing” evangelicals are just as likely as unbelievers “to consult a medium or a psychic.” **[14]** So in what we watch, read, play or listen to, are we conforming to this occult culture, or are we being transformed and set apart from it by God’s grace to be “signs and wonders”? If we conform, we need to be aware that embracing mere “human wisdom (even spirit-sought) is to reveal a hopeless state and to lose the possibility of repentance.” **[15]** And that is why all “sorcerers” will be excluded from the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

Abraham revealed his faith by separating himself and his family from the spiritualities of

Babylon. And like Abraham, our choice, to separate or not to separate, will also reveal our faith or lack thereof.

Fast forward fifteen centuries . . . At the beginning and during Judah's Babylonian Captivity (*circa* 589 B.C.), Daniel and his three friends refused to compromise with Babylonian spirituality (Daniel 1:8; 3:12; 6:6-10). At the end of that captivity, Isaiah told the Jews who were about to depart from Babylon after their 70-year exile in that land, **"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean"** (Isaiah 52:11). Then the Apostle Paul, alluding to Isaiah's injunction, wrote to the Christians at Corinth:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing;** and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Emphasis Added, The Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Could the mandate to separate from the culture of the occult be any clearer?

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## ENDNOTES

[1] Vic Ryckaert, "'Encounter' at Garfield Park," *The Indianapolis Star*, August 16, 2012, Local Living section, 1. As to our culture's increasing fascination with science fiction, whether in comics, literature, the arts, movies, toys, role playing and so forth, Sci-Fi represents an attempt on the part of people to imagine and visualize a mystical image-idol which in their perception of reality will bridge into experiencing transhumanism, that pseudo-science which postulates that mankind can ultimately transcend human limitations and attain divinity and immortality; and this in defiance of the limits that Almighty God has placed upon humanity as recorded in the Bible.

[2] Vic Ryckaert, "Nerds and Proud of It: Serious Gamers Dress the Part, Act Out Vampire-Themed Script," *The Indianapolis Star*, August 16, 2012, Local Living section, 1.

[3] *Ibid.* 3.

[4] Kurt E. Koch, *Occult ABC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1986). Originally published as *Satan's Devices* (1978), Koch's book categorizes scores of occult activities.

[5] Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2004): 4. During the morphing of British culture, Dr. Owen also notes that there occurred "a series of notable conversions to Roman Catholicism."

[6] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

[7] At this juncture, it is suggested that readers take out their Bibles and read Isaiah 7:1-8:22, as this author gives exposition to this passage upon which this chapter is based.

[8] By referring to the majority in Israel as **"this people,"** the Lord depersonalizes His

relationship to them even as He distances Himself from them as they ripen themselves for divine judgment. As a majority, “**this people**” will seek to find strength in their “ecumenical” numbers!

[9] On this point, Motyer observes that, “In the Bible, to die is not to acquire powers or wisdom beyond those on earth. The dead greet the king of Babylon with, ‘you too have become weak as we’ (14:10). The dead Samuel (1 Sa. 28:16ff.) knows and says nothing other than what he knew and said on earth. Indeed, in the Old Testament the dead are weaker than the living for they are but shadows (see on 14:9) of their former selves, half-persons, souls without bodies.” J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993): 97.

[10] Ibid. On this point, F.C. Jennings (1847-1948) observed: “As dependence upon ‘God and the word of His grace’ is loosened, the chains of ‘spiritism’ are bound upon truth-rejecting men. All kinds of information is sought from those who have been introduced by death into a sphere where the future is assumed to be clear to them as the past is to the living.” F.C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1935): 103.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Anton Bosch, “Conformed or Transformed?” *Herescope*, July 3, 2012 (<http://herescope.blogspot.com/search?q=transformed>).

[13] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 92.

[14] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007): 47. Though personally, I do not agree with the authors’ emergent view of the Christian faith, nor recommend their book (my copy was given to me), I do believe their assessment regarding the increasing openness of professing evangelicals to the occult is correct and a dangerous trend.

[15] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 97.