

SORCERY

Exodus 7:10-22, Acts 13:6

By Raymond White

What does the bible say about sorcery? Plenty. What conclusions you come to is up to you, but here, at least, you have a list of relevant verses to ponder and puzzle over. Make of it what you will. The authors just reported events, you decide what they mean.

[1] PHARAOH

Exodus 7:10 And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent :**11** Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. :**12** For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. :**20** And Moses and Aaron do so ... he lifted up his rod and smote the waters that were in the river ... and the waters that were in the river turned to blood. :**22** And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments ...

Exodus 8:6 And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frogs came up. :**7** And the magicians did so with their enchantments :**17** Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod and smote the dust of the earth and it became lice ,**18** And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not ...

We are suppose to be impressed that Aaron's magic was greater than Pharaoh's magic — that Aaron's serpent ate the magicians' serpent, that while the magicians could repeat some of Aaron's tricks (turn water to blood and create frogs), they could not do others (turn dust to lice). But what's baffling is that the magicians could do them at all. If I saw a magician turn a stick into a snake, I would be impressed whether or not someone else's snake ate his snake. That God's magic is more powerful than Satan's magic is fine, what's troubling is that Satan has magic that works at all.

Did the magicians really do these things? The text says they did and that's weird. But there's another possibility regardless of the text.

Maybe the magicians were doing parlor tricks, you know, the rabbit from the hat kind of thing, and that was the basis of Egyptian religion. So God challenged that by doing what they did *for real*. "You want to convince the people you can turn a stick into a snake? Okay, I'll *really* turn a stick into a snake." Now, that I can believe. Whether that's what happened or not, well, we can ask God when we get there. It may be that Satan really can turn a stick into a snake.

[2] THE LAW

Leviticus 19:26 Ye shall not ... use enchantment, nor observe times. :**31** Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them.

Leviticus 20:6 And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards ... I will ... cut him off from among the people. :27 A man also or a woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones ...

The first is not so bad, to be cut off from the people. But the second, put to death, that's pretty vicious stuff. But then again, people back then were pretty vicious about almost everything, so why should we be surprised and appalled by this?

Deuteronomy 18:10 There shall not be found among you anyone that maketh his son or daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. :11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. :12 For all these things are an abomination to the LORD. :14 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.

The first thing on this list of don't is don't murder your children in religious rituals (pass through the fire).

It seems that child sacrifice and idolatry are always somehow linked — the way to get rid of an unwanted child and do it legally and be guilt free is to offer him or her as a sacrifice. There is no guilt if “God” made me do it, or politically correct women's rights. So maybe God was not so harsh after all to make sorcery a capital crime.

[3] BALAAM

Numbers 22:6 Come now therefore, I [Balak] pray thee, curse this people [Israel]; for they are too mighty for me ... 23:23 [Balaam said] Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought.

This story is long, I'll abridge it for you.

On the way to the promised land, Israel had to pass through the land of their cousins the Midionites. Balak was the Midionite king. Moses assured them, we'll cause you no harm, we're just passing through, the Canaanites who are our enemies, not you.

But Balak didn't see it that way, to him Israel was very threatening and he wanted to be rid of them.

So, what did he do? He hired a prophet, Balaam, a true prophet of the true God, and paid him to pronounce a curse on Israel. And so for money, Balaam tried — a divine hit man, or a hit prophet I suppose.

What happened, however, surprised Balaam and Balak. When Balaam attempted to utter a curse, out of his mouth came a blessing instead. This happened three times until finally Balaam gave up.

The reason this story means anything in this essay about sorcery is because it defines “enchantment” for us. An enchantment is a curse. And the reason you don’t want to curse at someone (cus them out) is because the curse might actually work,

[4] KING SAUL

1 Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou [Saul] hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Rebellion is a pretty bad thing, and it must be very bad to compare it to witchcraft. But if that’s so, then what’s *really* bad is witchcraft in order to be able to make the comparison. When you say “this is as bad as that,” it’s the “that” that’s awful.

1 Samuel 28:7 Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said unto him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor. :8 And Saul disguised himself, and ... came to the woman by night. :11 Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring up Samuel. :12 And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake unto Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? For thou art Saul. :13 And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods coming out of the earth. :15 And Samuel said unto Saul ... :17 ... the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David. :19 Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow thou and thy sons be with me.

This story of the Witch of Endor is stunning for many reasons. First, because this is the mention in the bible of an afterlife. Nowhere in the Torah did Moses speak of an afterlife, this is the first, the beginning of the bible’s declaration of an afterlife. And that it would come to us from the mouth of a witch, is, as I said, stunning.

And more stunning is that it actually happened: she really did encounter the departed spirit of the dead Samuel.

Some will disagree saying that, no, she was just a charlatan, conducting just another fake séance to con someone out of their money. That’s not possible. Or, indeed if she was a fake, the bible goes to great lengths to convince us otherwise.

Consider: (1) She did not know this was king Saul asking this of her until Samuel (or some other dead person) told her so. Then she feared for her life. (2) She prophesied accurately, as only Samuel could, that tomorrow Israel would lose its battle with the Philistines. (3) She prophesied accurately that tomorrow Saul *and his sons* would die. The unlikely accuracy of that prediction has to impress. Finally, (4) there would be no successor to Saul’s dynasty and the kingdom would be given to one specific person: David. If nothing else impresses you, surely that must.

Therefore we must conclude, if we are to believe the bible at all, that this witch was the real deal. Which brings us to this nagging question: if sorcery works, why was God so determined to stamp it out? It appears that God’s objection to sorcery is precisely

because it *did* work — (that and they murdered children in ritual sacrifice). And it does appear (according to the bible anyway) that there really are multiple and competing divine powers at work in the universe.

1 Chronicles 10:13 So Saul died for his transgression which he had committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it. :14 And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

[5] JEZEBEL

2 Kings 9:22 And it came to pass, when Joreb saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?

So, along with all her other faults, Jezebel was a witch as well. You didn't know that, did you? Or maybe you did.

[6] CHILD SACRIFICE

2 Kings 17:17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divinations and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

2 Kings 21:3 And he [Manasseh] made a grove, as did king Ahab in Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. :6 And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger.

2 Kings 23:24 Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away that he might perform the works of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah found in the house of the LORD.

2 Chronicles 33:6 And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger.

Always, it seems, that murdering children and sorcery go together. False gods permit and even require people to do evil things. In this case, finally, one good king, Josiah had had enough and “put away” the evil; which probably means he killed those child murdering priests of Baal and the rest of those monsters. They deserved it.

Hinnom, you should know, morphed into its Greek transliteration Gehenna, which is translated into the English word hell.

When the Jews returned after the Diaspora, they were determined to never repeat any of that evil — no Jew would ever again bow to an idol. But they wondered, what should they do with the Hinnom valley, that evil place where children were burned alive? What they decided to do with it was (and it was fitting) they used it for a trash dump.

And so from then on, at night the Jews of Jerusalem could see off in the distance the glow of trash burning in the Hinnom valley which reminded them of evils long ago.

Then, 500 years later, a prophet named John came and said, “Who hath warned you to flee from the fires of hell (Gehenna, Hinnom)?”

You’ve always wondered why hell burns with fire? Well, now you know. Because children died there in excruciating agony, as children do today in abortion clinics.

Who deserves hell? Maybe those who kill children will be the first in line.

[7] ISAIAH

Isaiah 2:6 Therefore thou [God] hast forsake thy people the house of Jacob, because they ... are soothsayers like the Philistines ...

Isaiah 8:19 And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?

Isaiah 19:3 ... I will destroy the counsel therefore: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmors, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards. :12 Where are they? Where are thy wise men? :13 ... the princes of Noph [Memphis, Egypt’s religious center] are deceived.

Isaiah 29:4 ... thy voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit.

Isaiah 44:25 That frustrated the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backwards, and maketh their knowledge foolish.

Isaiah 47:12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. :13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

[8] JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 10:2 Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.

Jeremiah 14:14 Then the LORD said unto me, the prophets prophecy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them:

they prophecy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of naught, and the deceit of their heart.

Jeremiah 27:9 *Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon.*

Jeremiah 29:8 *... Let not your prophets and your diviners ... deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. :9* *For they prophecy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD.*

[9] EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 12:24 *For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel.*

That was true. When the Jews were taken captive into their Diaspora, they learned the bitter lesson that God had been trying to teach them. And when they finally returned home seventy years later, no Jew would ever again bow to an idol or practice sorcery.

Ezekiel 13:6 *They have used vanity and lying divinations ... :7* *Have ye not seen a vain vision, have you not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? :23* *Therefore ye shall see no more lying vanity, nor divine divinations ...*

Ezekiel 21:21 *For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver.*

Ezekiel 22:28 *... vanity and divining lies ...*

[10] DANIEL

Daniel 2:2 *Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dream. :4* *Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live forever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation. :5* *The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me, if you will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation therefore, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.*

The king has probably long suspected that his magicians are useless, that they feign supernatural powers to get political power. He's always tolerated them, but this dream of his has so disturbed him that he needs the truth, "What does my dream mean?" And the only way he could be sure he was getting a true interpretation is if they could tell

him his dream. “The thing has gone from me” probably doesn’t mean “I’ve forgotten it,” it probably means, “Why should I tell you?”

***Daniel 2:10** The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king’s matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asketh such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean.*

Not the truth comes out. They have no clue. They’re a bunch of phonies and always have been. Now they have to admit it because their lives are on the line and they have to come clean to say, “But what you’re asking of us cannot be done.”

***Daniel 2:24** Therefore Daniel went ... and said ... Destroy not the wise men ... I will shew unto the king the interpretation. :27 ... The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king? :28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these ...*

And so Daniel, being the true prophet that he was, told the king his dream and the interpretation. And because Daniel told the dream, the king believed the interpretation

Notice Daniel’s magnanimity: “Destroy not the wise men.” Daniel could have told the king to go ahead and kill all the wise men. But instead, Daniel saved their lives, and he became their boss.

***Daniel 2:48** Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men.*

There is no indication that the wise men were bitter or jealous of Daniel’s sudden rise to power. Later there was a plot, but that was political (governors) not religious. I believe that these wise men, these religious leaders of Babylon, were grateful, first of all to be alive, but also to finally have a religious leader who actually knew what he was talking about, who could actually do it, who could talk to God and get a real answer. I further think they were loyal to him and to all things Jewish, and that loyalty became a long running tradition which trailed through the years until five centuries, a group of Persian Magi saw a new star and understood that to mean that it was time for the Jewish Messiah to be born. Then they caravanned to, of all places, a small po-dunk town in Israel called Bethlehem where they found the child king and gave him gifts.

***Daniel 5:7** The king [Belshazzar, the final king] cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers, :15 but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing.*

So here we go again. This time it’s God’s writing on the wall that the magicians cannot read. But Daniel can, and so again the king (different king) rewards him.

Of course it doesn't do Daniel any good because Babylon is conquered by the Persians that night. But soon after that, Daniel impresses the Persians as much or even more than he impressed the Babylonians.

But the point is, true prophets of the true God are useful, but magicians and sorcerers are useless.

[11] MINOR PROPHETS

Micah 3:6 ... ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine.

Micah 5:12 And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers:

Nahum 3:4 Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcraft, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.

Zechariah 10:2 For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain...

Malachi 3:5 ... I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger ...

[12] GOSPELS

Matthew 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

And now the most familiar story in the world: the Christmas story. Just who were those wise men, these Magi, from "the east" actually "far east" which can only be Persia? How did they know? What did they know? Why did they come? All Matthew tells us is that they came to worship him who was "born king of the Jews." And why should they take an interest in a Jewish monarch?

Those are mysterious questions, and the answers are just as mysterious, and too involved (and out of context) for this short essay on sorcery. But suffice it to say that the Magi had long religious traditions, and much of it trailed from Babylon and from a Jewish prophet named Daniel. That's what I believe. I know it's circumstantial, but nothing else makes sense.

Matthew 24:24 For there shall arise false Christ, and false prophets, and they shall shew great signs and wonders; inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the verily elect.

[13] ACTS

Acts 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that he was some great one. *:13* Then Simon himself believe also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. *:18* And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money. *:19* Saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. *:20* But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

This Simon the Sorcerer recognized power when he saw it. He was no fool. And he knew that such power could be very profitable. Could you imagine the money you could make if you walk through hospitals and cure everyone of everything just with a touch? That's what Simon wanted. Power. Profitable power. But what he got instead was a rebuke from Peter and a curse, "Your money perish with thee."

This was exactly the deal that Satan offered Jesus in the first temptation. "You have power. Use it — to serve yourself." Thank God that Jesus had a much different objective than Simon the Sorcerer.

Acts 13:6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus. *:9* Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. *:10* And said, O full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? *:11* And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a midst of darkness and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

Being a false prophet and pretending to have divine powers that you don't have can bring serious consequences, especially when you're face to face with someone who really does have such powers. Fortunately for Barjesus, his curse was only "for a season." Paul could have been much more brutal. But Paul was not vicious, probably because he had himself been stricken by that exact same curse (blindness) on the road to Damascus.

Acts 16:16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. *:17* The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. *:18* And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

This is a very peculiar story, all the more reason to believe it actually happened, that the author is just reporting facts without trying to explain them. If the author were making it up, he certainly would not have made up *this* odd story.

Question: Why would a demon testify for Christ? You'd think a demon would rather try to create problems. Maybe a demon can't lie, not about Jesus. Or maybe the demon was trying to curry favor, since he's damned. Or maybe he was trying to get in on the action. All of these seem outlandish, but I can think of no other explanations.

But I do think that the spirit world that surrounds us is more complex than we think, and God has good reason to forbid necromancy — because it is dangerous.

Another question: Why would the apostles not be glad for such testimony as it would only bring more people to Christ? Because regardless of any beneficial result from a demon's true testimony, demons are still the enemy seeking to destroy lives and souls. And besides, this poor girl deserved to be free of the demon that possessed her.

The story rings true because it is bizarre — it's not at all pat like fiction must be.

Acts 19:13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. :15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? :16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. :19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them ...

Demons are dangerous as these would-be exorcists found out.

[14] EPISTLES

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these ... :20 ... witchcraft ... :21 ... they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 Even him, whose coming is after the workings of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders :11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they shall believe a lie.

Revelation 9:21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

Revelation 18:23 ... for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

Revelation 21:8 But the ... unbelieving ... and sorcerers ... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Revelation 22:14 For without [outside the city of God] are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murders, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.