

SESSION 3

THE PARANORMAL

▶ ***The Point***

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

▶ ***The Passage***

Deuteronomy 18:9-18

▶ ***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.²

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.

▶ ***The Setting***

The Israelites lived in a world that embraced occult practices. The Egyptian Pharaoh, for instance, had magicians to advise him. (See Gen. 41:8.) When Moses confronted the Pharaoh, the Pharaoh summoned the "wise men and the sorcerers ... the magicians of Egypt" who did their "secret arts" (Ex. 7:11). Occult practices were widespread in the promised land of Canaan as well. God instructed the Israelites, His covenant people, that they were to completely reject these practices.

What does the Bible say?

Necromancer (v. 11)—
Based on the Hebrew word meaning “to know,” a necromancer claimed to be able to contact the spirits of the dead to acquire secret information.

Deuteronomy 18:9-18

⁹ “When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations.

¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer

¹¹ or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead,

¹² for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you.

¹³ You shall be blameless before the LORD your God,

¹⁴ for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

¹⁵ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’

¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken.

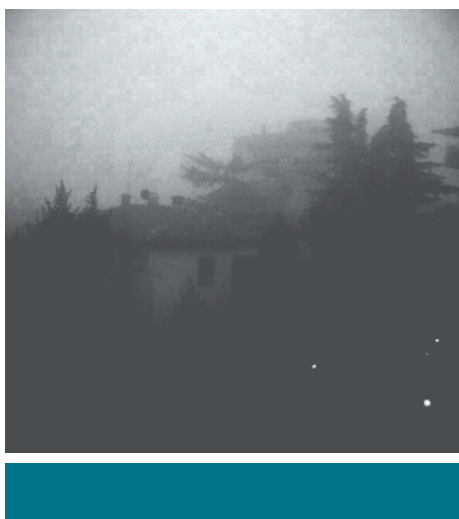
¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.’”

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 29 of the PSG: **“What movies or TV shows bank on our culture’s interest in the paranormal?”**

Note: These can be movies and shows from the past or ones that are currently popular in the culture.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Bring several copies of newspapers and/or magazines to your group gathering. Pass out one copy to each group member, and ask

them to look for stories, advertisements, articles, and so on that may encourage readers to dabble in the paranormal. (Meaning, items that promote or encourage a non-biblical view of the supernatural.) Encourage volunteers to share what they find, as long as those finds are appropriate for your specific setting.

Note: If you’re not able to collect a bunch of magazines and newspapers, you can ask group members to use their smartphones to look through popular websites, explore news websites, and check the spam filter on their email accounts, and more in search of offers or advertisements that dabble in the paranormal.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 30 of the PSG. Introduce the dangers of modern “dabbling” in occultic practices by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 30 of the PSG: **“Dabbling with evil is destructive; seeking direction from God brings life.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by praying for discernment on behalf of yourself and your group members. Ask God to grant you clarity on what is (and what’s not) appropriate in connection with the supernatural world.

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STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Deuteronomy 18:9-11

⁹ “When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer ¹¹ or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead,

READ: Deuteronomy 18:9-11 on page 31 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to skim through the bullet list on pages 31-32 of the PSG in order to gain some additional information on the different practices forbidden in these verses.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 31 of the PSG: **“What have you been taught about the practices mentioned in these verses?”**

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 32 of the PSG: **“Why do people still dabble in these kinds of practices?”**

Note: Encourage group members to go beyond the surface-level answers to this question, including, “Because people are sinful.” Instead, ask group members to engage and identify the core motivations that drive people to occultic practices. What are they looking for? What are they hoping to achieve?

RECAP: Read aloud the first paragraph after the bullet list on page 32 of the PSG:

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.

TRANSITION: As we continue with verses 12-14, we’ll gain even more clarity on God’s commands regarding these practices.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
When have you come face-to-face with one of the practices mentioned in these verses?

Deuteronomy 18:9-11 Commentary

Our culture is full of paranormal practices.

[Verse 9] The Book of Deuteronomy consists mainly of three sermons preached by Moses to the people of Israel as they prepared to enter the promised land of Canaan. Part of Moses' words were instructions concerning the absolute necessity of rejecting the occult practices of the Canaanites. God warned the Israelites to avoid the **abominable practices** of these nations. The Canaanites believed in many different gods, not the true God followed by the Israelites. These customs were of the occult—activities used to gain secret knowledge and/or power from the supernatural. In today's terminology, these practices involved the paranormal. The Canaanites believed that by their incantations and rituals they could communicate with their gods and even get the gods to intervene in their lives. Other rituals were performed in order to influence or control people. They also sought through their rituals to communicate with the dead. For the Israelites, to **follow** such practices was a rejection of God and His will.

[Verses 10-11] Moses identified several specific occult practices forbidden by God. The specific details involved with some of these practices are not completely understood today, so the meanings of the terms overlap at times. Some pagan cultures practiced human sacrifice to their gods; they would sacrifice their children by burning them in fire. This practice is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (see 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6) and is sometimes associated with the pagan god Molech. (See 23:10.)

The next three activities are similar in nature. The practice of **divination** is a general term referring to the use of natural objects or the observation of natural phenomena for gaining understanding of the will and purposes of the gods and to predict the future. The pagans also believed some people could tell **fortunes**. To interpret **omens** meant to interpret natural phenomena as a message from a god.

The next two practices involve the use of occult in order to exercise control through the supernatural. A **sorcerer** was one who engaged in witchcraft, which involves the use of spells or signs to provide protection from evil. A **charmer** was believed to be able to pronounce curses upon a person so as to bring the individual under the caster's control. The Hebrew expression for the charmer is literally translated "the binder with a band."

The next group of three terms refers to the practice of consulting the spirits of dead people in order to gain understanding or to predict events. A **medium** practiced necromancy, seeking to communicate with the dead to gain secret information. The best Old Testament example is the medium at Endor, whom King Saul visited. Saul wanted her to bring up the spirit of Samuel. (See 1 Sam. 28.) A person who dealt with the spirits of the dead was also known as a **necromancer**. The Israelites were not in any way to attempt inquire of **the dead**.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Deuteronomy 18:12-14

¹² for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you.

¹³ You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, ¹⁴ for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

READ: Deuteronomy 18:12-14 on page 32 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the final two paragraphs on page 32 of the PSG in order to see some interesting statistics on our culture’s tendency to dabble in the paranormal.



LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 3, “Paranormal Activities,” to show the impact of paranormal practices in our culture. Ask group members to talk about which statistic they find most surprising.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the major points from pages 32-33 of the PSG:

1. “It’s worth repeating: nothing good comes from dabbling in the paranormal.”
2. “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.”
3. “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.”

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 33 of the PSG: **“What makes paranormal practices so dangerous and destructive?”**

TRANSITION: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 33 of the PSG:

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.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some ways Christians water down or ignore the dangers of the paranormal?

Deuteronomy 18:12-14 Commentary

Paranormal practices are condemned by God and should be avoided.

[Verse 12] God takes the occult and the paranormal very seriously. God reminded Moses and the Israelites that all of these practices, along with the people who did them, were **abominations** to Him. The Hebrew term translated “abominations” means “loathsome” or “repulsive.” These practices were not merely strange and unusual; they were radical alternatives to faith in the true God.

In fact, these practices were so repulsive that God was now going to drive the Canaanites who used such practices out of the land the Israelites would then possess. These practices were ingrained in the Canaanite culture. If God had allowed the pagan Canaanites to remain in the land, they would have led the Israelites into sin. (See Deut. 7:1-6.) The spiritual and moral condition of the Israelites was so important that a radical strategy was necessary to protect God’s people.

[Verse 13] God’s expectation for His people was that they be **blameless**. That Hebrew term in this context carries the meaning of fidelity in relationship—in this case the relationship between God and the Israelites, His covenant people. The standard for their behavior was God’s commands, not the local customs of the Canaanites. A recurring temptation for God’s people is to try to fit into a culture. Even today, the fear of being considered odd or strange causes some immature Christians to follow the customs of their society that contradict God’s will. The apostle Paul reminded the Christians living in the city of Rome, “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). Likewise, God warned the Israelites not to compromise with the occult customs of the Canaanites.

The word “blameless” represented a high standard for the Israelites. They were called to be faithful to God and reject all the things He detested. They could not and did not achieve sinless perfection, but they needed to be aware of the danger of compromise with sin. In the years that followed, God’s chosen leaders and prophets often reminded the people that they faced an either-or choice. They had to choose either to follow God faithfully or to follow the pagan gods. A both/and decision was not possible. Joshua placed this “God or pagan gods” issue before the people. (See Josh. 24:14-15.) Years later, the prophet Elijah posed the same decisive challenge; the people needed to choose between God and the Canaanite god Baal. (See 1 Kings 18:21.)

[Verse 14] The Israelites were strictly forbidden to adopt the practices of a culture that listened to **fortune-tellers** and **diviners**. These two examples of the occult represented an entire worldview opposed to the worship of the true God. There was no room for compromise. God would choose the means by which He would communicate with His people. The Israelites were not to seek out their own alternative means through the occult and supernatural. Such practices were **not allowed**.

Although the Israelites were victorious in the conquest of Canaan as reported in the Book of Joshua, later Scripture references in the historical books and the prophets indicate the struggle with the occult continued. For example, Micah 5:12 and Malachi 3:5 mention the lingering problem of occult practices in Israelite society.



STUDY THE BIBLE

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Deuteronomy 18:15-18

¹⁵ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— ¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ ¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.’”



DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “What Would You Say?” on page 34 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.

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?

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Where do we draw the line between what’s harmless and harmful in terms of the paranormal?

READ: Deuteronomy 18:15-18 on page 35 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Ask a volunteer to read aloud the final paragraph on page 35 of the PSG to stress the truth that God offers us a greater hope (and a clearer truth) than anything we can find through paranormal practices.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 35 of the PSG: “What are reliable ways for us to seek out God’s plan and purpose in our lives?”

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 Commentary

The direction we seek—and need—is found in God.

[Verse 15] God reminded the Israelites that He communicated with them in specific ways. They did not need the occult, since the true God had revealed Himself to them and made a covenant with them. One purpose of the Book of Deuteronomy was to remind the people what God had done for them through their liberation from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the journey to the border of Canaan.

In this passage, God stressed that He would continue to reveal Himself through His chosen prophets. Moses announced that God would **raise up** for His people **a prophet like me**. When that prophet did appear, God expected His people to **listen** to him. God was clearly affirming that He would continue to reveal Himself and His plans for His people to the Israelites. This future prophet would be a fellow Israelite, from among **your brothers**.

These words of Moses served two functions. The first was to anticipate a long line of faithful prophets who would deliver God's messages to His people. These included prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, and Nathan as reported in the Old Testament books of 1 Samuel through 2 Chronicles. The messages of other prophets are recorded in the books of Isaiah through Malachi.

Another purpose of Moses' words was to point to the Prophet greater than Moses. After the death of Moses, it was stated, "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). Across the centuries, many genuine Israelite prophets appeared, but there was no one "like Moses." The coming of this Prophet is associated in the New Testament with Jesus, the Messiah. In fact, early Christian sermons proclaiming Christ to be the Messiah and Savior quote Deuteronomy 18:15. (See Acts 3:22-23; 7:37.)

[Verse 16] Moses reminded the Israelites of their request earlier at Mount **Horeb** (Sinai), on **the day of the assembly** when they had asked **God** for someone to deliver His message to them so they would not **die**. This likely refers to Exodus 20:18-21. The Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai, and God had begun to reveal His laws to Moses. Standing at a distance, the people were frightened by the events accompanying the manifestation of God's presence on the mountain. In fear for their lives, they asked Moses to be their representative to receive God's word and then deliver it to them. Moses recounted this episode in Deuteronomy 5:22-31.

[Verses 17-18] God had approved the request of the Israelites. However, they would need to know God's will for their lives after Moses died. In the future, many times and in many different circumstances, God would **raise up** another prophet like Moses. The key function of these prophets was to communicate God's message. God would **put my words in his mouth**. The prophet had authority as God's messenger. The prophet was to tell the people **all that I [God] command him**. God directed His prophets to address spiritual, economic, military, and political issues. Sometimes the people listened, but sadly more often the people disobeyed God and His prophets.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following steps for shining the light of Jesus this week against the darkness of the paranormal:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **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 everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form 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.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 36 of the PSG:

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.

PRAY: Conclude by affirming your desire to obey God regarding paranormal practices and other forms of the occult. Pray for clarity each day to see what is harmful in the world, and then to reject those practices.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra