

# WITCHCRAFT<sup>1</sup>

Witchcraft is known as the "Old Religion" and is an ancient practice dating back to biblical times. Witchcraft can be defined as the performance of magic forbidden by God for non-biblical ends. The word witchcraft is related to the old English word (wiccian), "**practice of magical arts.**" It was during the Middle Ages that witchcraft experienced a great revival. It was an age where everyone believed in the supernatural and superstition abounded. If someone wanted to become a witch, there was an initiation process. Some of the techniques were simple and some were complicated, but there were usually two requirements. The first requirement was that the would-be witch must join of his or her own free will. The second requirement was that the prospective witch must be willing to worship the devil.

One writer described a witch in the following manner: Witches are those who, because of the magnitude of their crimes, are commonly called (malefici) or evil doers. These Witches, by the permission of God, agitate the elements, and disturb the minds of men less trusting in God. Without administering any poison, they kill by the great potency of their charms.... For they summon devils and dare to rouse them so that everyone kills his enemies by evil stratagems. For these witches make use of the blood of victims, and often defile the corpses of the dead.... For the devils are said to love blood, and so when the witches practice the black arts, they mingle blood with water, so that by the color of blood they can more easily conjure up the devils (Gratian, Decretum).

## WITCHCRAFT TODAY

The modern witch does not fit the stereotype of the old hag, for many people who are practicing this art are in the mainstream of society. The question is why? Why a renewed interest in this ancient art among both the educated and the ignorant? Daniel Cohen list a couple of possible reasons: First, there is the eternal appeal of magic, the promise, however muted, that there are secrets available that will give a person power, money, love, and all those things he or she desires but cannot seem to obtain. Second, witchcraft is a put-down and a revolt against some of the establishment beliefs in organized religion, science, and rational thinking. The historic connection between witchcraft and drugs and sex also has undoubted appeal. Here is a set of beliefs that claim to be part of an extremely ancient religion. Yet this is a religion in which drugs and free sexuality are not condemned, but might be encouraged. (Daniel Cohen, A Natural History of Unnatural Things, New York; McCall Pub. Co., 1971, pp. 31,32).

Modern witchcraft bears little resemblance to the witchcraft of the Middle Ages or to witchcraft in still primitive, preliterate societies. Modern witchcraft is a relatively recent development (the last 200 years), embraces hundreds of beliefs and practices and has hundreds of thousands of adherents. The one common theme running through modern witchcraft is the practice of and belief in things forbidden by God in the Bible as occultic. Today, in a massive spin-off from the culture-wide interest in the occult, this has changed. Tens of thousands across America - some of them with university degrees - are dabbling in witchcraft, Satanism, voodoo, and other forms of black and white magic. Witches appear openly on television. Every high school is said to have its own witch. In Cleveland you can rent a witch to liven up a party. There are some 80,000 persons practicing white magic in the United States, with 6,000 in Chicago alone. (George Vandeman, Psychic Roulette, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1973, pp. 99, 100). Witchcraft is not dead today as can be observed by an article appearing in the Los Angeles Times concerning the goddess movement: ..... Eerie monotonous... reverberated on the UC Santa Cruz campus. Cheers and whoops went up for the goddesses of yore - Isis, Astarte, Demeter, Artemis, etc. ... The event was indicative of a burgeoning spiritual dimension to the women's liberation movement in America.... Christine Downing, head of San Diego State University's religious studies department, estimates that many - if not most - spiritually sensitive women in the women's movement are willing to replace the biblical God with a frankly pagan and polytheistic approach. Witchcraft is aiding the women in their search for roots and rituals - without the connotations of evil usually associated with witchcraft. A Santa Cruz woman...said, "Some of the women think of themselves as witches, but not all." A brief, unscheduled appearance - met with enthusiastic applause - was made by Z Budapest. A self-described witch... the goddess movement knows her more as a leader of the Susan B Anthony Coven No. 1 in Los Angeles and a charismatic spokeswoman for a feminist brand of Wicca, an ancient women's religion (witchcraft). The goddess movement, also called the women-spirit movement, apparently considers its first major gathering to have been a conference attended by about 1,200 women at the University of Massachusetts in late 1975..... The ancient Mediterranean world, pagan Europe, Native America and Hindu tradition are all sources for goddess imagery.... A religious phenomenon virtually unknown outside feminist circles, "goddess consciousness" will be widely known in three to five years (Los Angeles Times, April 10, 1978).

## THE BIBLE AND WITCHCRAFT

Both the Old and New Testament make repeated references to the practice of witchcraft and sorcery, and whenever these practices are referred to they are always condemned by God. The Bible condemns all forms of witchcraft, including sorcery, astrology and reading human and animal entrails. The following passages describe the various forms of witchcraft which are condemned by God. You shall not allow a sorceress to live (Exodus 22:18, NASB). You shall not eat anything with blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying (Leviticus 19:26, NASB). Do not turn to mediums or spiritist; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19:31, NASB). Now a man or a

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woman who is a medium or spiritist shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones, their bloodguiltiness is upon them (Leviticus 20:27, NASB). You shall not behave thus toward the Lord your God, for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods (Deuteronomy 12:31, NASB). 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 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 (Deuteronomy 18:10,11,14, NASB). 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 (1 Samuel 15:23, NASB) 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 (2 Kings 17:17, NASB). And he made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritist. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord provoking Him to anger (2 Kings 21:6, NASB). Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums, and the spiritist and teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 23:24, NASB). So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the Lord, because of the word of the Lord which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, and did not inquire of the Lord. Therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse (1 Chronicles 10:13, NASB). And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritist who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? (Isaiah 8:19, NASB). Then the spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized within them; and I will confound their strategy, so that they will resort to idols and ghosts of the dead, and to mediums and spiritist (Isaiah 19:3, NASB). Stand fast now in your spells and in your many sorceries with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you may cause trembling. You are wearied with your many counsels; let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you (Isaiah 47:12,13, NASB). But as for you, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." For they prophesy a lie to you, in order to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out, and you will perish (Jeremiah 27:9,10, NASB). "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me." says the Lord of Hosts (Malachi 3:5, NASB). And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:6- 10, NASB). Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19- 21, NASB). But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the Lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Revelations 21:8, NASB).