

Isaiah 8:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

This verse exposes the temptation to seek spiritist guidance rather than God's word. 'Familiar spirits' (mediums) and 'wizards' (spiritists) were common in pagan religions but forbidden in Israel (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Their 'peeping and muttering' describes the eerie whispers and incantations of occult practices. The rhetorical question exposes the absurdity: why consult the dead concerning the living? This illustrates how crisis drives people to forbidden sources rather than God. The Reformed position clearly condemns all occultism as rebellion against God's revealed will.

Historical Context

Spiritism was prevalent in ancient Near Eastern cultures, particularly during crises. King Saul infamously consulted the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). During the Assyrian crisis, many Israelites likely turned to mediums for guidance. This practice persisted, reaching a climax under Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6). Isaiah denounces this apostasy, calling people back to God's word. Modern equivalents include astrology, psychics, and New Age practices—all attempts to gain knowledge apart from divine revelation.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What modern forms of spiritism or occultism tempt people to seek guidance apart from God's word?
2. Why does crisis often drive people toward forbidden spiritual practices rather than toward God?
3. How do we guard against subtle forms of seeking supernatural knowledge outside biblical revelation?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַרְוּ אֶל־יְדֵיכֶם
H3588 **And when they shall say** H559 H413 **seek** H1875

בְּאָבוֹתָם וְאֶל־מֹזְעָנָם בְּמַחְפְּצָאָפָּם
unto them that have familiar spirits H178 H413 and unto wizards H3049 that peep H6850

וְאֶל־מֹתָתָם עַמּוֹד אֶל־יְהֹוָה
and that mutter H1897 H3808 should not a people H5971 H413 unto their God H430 seek H1875

בְּמִתְיָם אֶל־הַמְּתִים בְּעֵד
H1157 for the living H2416 H413 to the dead H4191

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 10:13 (Spirit): So Saul died for his transgression which he 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;

Leviticus 20:6 (Spirit): And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.

2 Chronicles 33:6 (Spirit): 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.

Psalms 106:28 (Parallel theme): They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.

Leviticus 19:31 (Spirit): Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

Isaiah 19:3 (Spirit): And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.

Isaiah 29:4 (Spirit): And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

Deuteronomy 18:11 (Spirit): Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

Jeremiah 10:10 (References God): But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.

2 Kings 21:6 (Spirit): 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.

