

concerning a fig tree that is under threat of removal because it is not doing what it exists to do—bear fruit. It represented Israel, and the forthcoming judgements on Jerusalem and the Jews were such that they caused Christ to weep. But they still came.

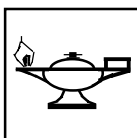
We too weep for the world we live in: so many lives slipping away into everlasting death through old age, sickness, disease, starvation and poverty; oppressive and cruel governments, through hate and vain ambition; false religious beliefs—the list is endless. But one thing above all else takes people into that helpless condition: ignorance. Jesus knew that it was essential that people be made to face up to the truth about him, his teaching and God's purpose with the earth.

There can be no peace (the word means unity) between different faiths because there is only one true faith. When the angels sang at the birth of Christ, "and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lk. 2:14), they were not referring to harmony and peace between men and women on the earth. Rather they were confirming that there

would be unity between God and man through Christ, and it was God's good will that was being extended to man.

So it is that in this present dispensation Christ is not preaching peace but challenging us to have the courage to stand apart from others, to seek only unity with God. When those who believe in a triune god seek unity with those who see Christ as just one of many prophets, or who as a people reject Christ as their Messiah, it is bound to end in failure. There can be no unity for the believer in such a gathering. The true faith will divide families and cause us to search our conscience to see where our real loyalty and love lies. This will not prevent us as individuals or as a community extending help to those in need, but it should ensure that we do not allow such activities to draw us into a unity with the world.

Christ prayed for his disciples: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth" (Jno. 17:15-17).



## Encounter

*Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor*

# The Law given through Moses\*

## 10. Witchcraft

Islip Collyer

**O**NE MORE matter of capital punishment under the Law calls for attention. The well-known command, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Ex. 22:18), has been attacked as harsh and unjust. It may readily be admitted that the attempt to apply this law in comparatively recent times has certainly been unjust. The grossest of superstition has often prevailed, and the old law has been quoted to justify a senseless cruelty.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the savagery in this matter was an evil of primitive ignorance, and that it has only given way before the advance of modern learning. The truth is that in the earlier centuries of the Christian era

there was not nearly so much of this superstition as that which developed later. Probably the worst period was between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The savage persecution of old and friendless women, on the assumption that they were witches, increased in Europe even while the men who wielded power were greatly increasing in worldly knowledge and wisdom. In England the decline of this abomination, as with the gradual decrease of many other cruelties, coincided with the translation of the Bible into English and the consequent delivery of apostolic teaching to the multitude. The Authorised Ver-

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sion of Scripture was published in 1611. The penal laws against witches, after being much modified during the years in which the Bible became better known, were finally repealed in 1736.

IN the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the superstition is traced through the centuries in many countries. In the course of the article there is a brief reference to the witch of Endor, and the writer points out quite correctly that this was spiritualism or spiritism rather than witchcraft as practised or suspected in other lands. This is an important matter to remember. It was necromancy which was so strongly condemned in the Law of Moses and by many of Israel's prophets. There was no persecution of old women on the supposition that they could raise storms or cause disease. In Bible times it was fully recognised that when storms came God had sent them, and when men suffered from diseases God had afflicted them. But there were some wizards and witches who claimed to converse with the dead, and they were condemned as unfit to live.

The 'bringing up' of Samuel at Endor (1 Sam. 28) has been interpreted in three different ways by various students. Some have supposed that the necromancer actually had the power to bring up those who had died, and that Samuel, or the ghost of Samuel, was disturbed and brought up clad in his familiar mantle at the call of a banished witch. This idea, although with considerable effort it might be forced into line with popular conceptions of the soul, comes into such violent collision with Scripture teaching that we may reject it unhesitatingly. Some other students, recognising that the necromancers were rebels who in defiance of Divine law tampered with those wonderful but little understood powers of the subconscious mind, have regarded the whole matter as subjective, a vision produced in the abnormal mind of the woman by the agitated thoughts of the distracted king.

A third school of thought has insisted that the words are too definite for the reality of the appearance to be disputed. It has been urged that, not only did the woman see Samuel, but Samuel spoke, and his words were not at all such as might have been expected. The complaint, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?", and the prophecy, "to morrow shalt thou . . . be with me" (vv. 15,19), were not like the supposed words of a righteous being brought from the spheres of light to answer the questions of a man who could

not hope to go to the same favoured realm. They were the words of a prophet disturbed from the sleep of death to tell a degenerate king that on the morrow he would come to the same 'land of forgetfulness'.

So these earnest students would say: "Grant that the necromancers were abnormal people who in defiance of Divine law played with the powers of the subconscious mind; grant that the witch of Endor was a medium who could bring herself and her dupes into an artificial condition of mind in which they might see almost anything. Still, we have to admit that at Endor something happened beyond all human power or expectation, something that frightened the witch as much as it frightened the king, for we read that when she saw Samuel she cried with a loud voice, and asked, 'Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul'. God gave Saul this last message, and He gave it through the prophet who was disturbed from his rest to deliver it".

WHATEVER may be the truth of this matter, we have to remember that necromancers were condemned utterly in the Law given through Moses and in all other references in Scripture, whether in history or prophecy. Then, while remembering this, take note of the fact that we do not read in the Bible of those superstitions which have prevailed in later days; no suggestion of witches able to raise storms, to cast spells, to cause epidemics of disease, to fly through the air or to change their form into that of animals. There is no suggestion in Scripture that human beings ever had such powers, or that anyone ever believed in such things. We frequently read of necromancers and those who claimed to have familiar spirits, and they were condemned as unfit to live. That which, as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* points out, was an ancient form of spiritism, was regarded as such an abomination that death was the penalty for those who practised it.

There seems to be a natural tendency in many minds to seek for dark and mysterious things. If a record of the days in which we live and descriptions of our modern cities could be written with such fearless candour as we find in the Bible narrative, ordinary people would be surprised and shocked at the revelation. Dark and evil practices occasionally come to light, but for the most part they are out of sight and out of mind. Several writers have commented on the hypocritical tendency of the public conscience to

wake up occasionally for a zealous persecution of a particular delinquent, and then to relapse into prolonged indifference to the conduct of many other men just as evil. It is the same with this tendency to tamper with forces little understood and to explore along those border lines of mental mysteries which may easily lead to insanity. The evil is constant but is only heard of occasionally.

IN ancient Israel there was a constant tendency to tamper with the occult. There were fortune tellers who professed to get messages from the moon and the stars, and there were abnormal individuals who claimed to have familiar spirits which could guide them. For the most part these people were restrained by fear of the Law, just as with us at the present time. There were occasions, however, when even kings paid heed to these matters, and then the necromancers would come into the open.

It is instructive to note that, in describing one of the most sinful of kings, the approach to these deeds of darkness is presented as the climax of his wickedness. We read that Manasseh "did . . . evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen . . . he built again the high places" (2 Chron. 33:2,3). The latter was always the first false step of erring kings. He made altars and groves for Baal. He worshipped the stars, he caused his son to pass through the fire in the Valley of Hinnom. He also "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" (v. 6). Clearly the practice of necromancy was an utter abomination from the Divine point of view, and so it ranked with other evil and unnatural practices in being condemned even to the point of death.

There is an instructive and significant contrast between the unchanging Law given through

Moses and the constantly amended laws of modern days. The most severe of the Mosaic precepts sought to abolish practices which were abominable to God, although some of them were attractive to mankind. In all ages there have been vicious perversions which do not seem much to have disturbed the serenity of ancient pagans and might have been ignored in our days but for the influence of Bible teaching. These evils were certainly dealt with more severely in ancient Israel than they are in modern Europe. The Mosaic Law sought to cleanse the land from the vices which had prevailed among the former inhabitants and which were abhorrent to God. The most severe laws in modern Europe have been to protect the property and power of the ruling class. In pursuit of this aim, rulers have gone to extremes of savage injustice. They have only been restrained by the growing power of the people and the increasing knowledge of Christian teaching.

Under the unchanging Mosaic Law there was never any suggestion of capital punishment for theft. If a thief was caught breaking into another man's home, and in the ensuing struggle he was killed, no blood would be shed for him. He would be regarded, as in modern English law, as suffering a fate which he had brought upon himself. If he were caught, however, he would be forced to make full restitution, and he would be punished as the judges determined. The supreme penalty of death was to put away evils that God would not tolerate.

Among these evils necromancy was especially condemned. In later times the prophet Isaiah denounced the practice of seeking to the dead and to "wizards that peep, and that mutter". He stated a principle that should be remembered by all who desire to obey God: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (8:19,20).

#### Curbs leave Palestinian economy near collapse

Restrictions on the movement of goods and people in Israel and the occupied territories in response to the eighteen-month-old *intifada* have brought the Palestinian economy close to collapse, according to the World Bank. The report, produced for donors who are keeping the West Bank and Gaza economies afloat with nearly a billion dollars a year, said the continued closure of border points would cause irreparable damage. "If closures persist or intensify, the economy will eventually unravel", said the World Bank director for the West Bank and Gaza, Nigel Roberts. "Public services will break down, helplessness, deprivation and hatred will increase, and chances for reconciliation will pass". He continued: "Any significant recovery of the Palestinian economy requires that the system of internal checkpoints be dismantled and border restrictions eased".—*J.B.*