

The Old Testament Response to
Ancient Near Eastern Pagan Divination Practices

Dr. Michael S. Heiser

Much of the Old Testament's recounting of the salvation history of the people of God concerns the disastrous effects of Israelite adoption of the beliefs and practices of the surrounding nations. The people of Israel were to avoid the gods of other nations and any practice that involved the worship of those other gods. The Gentile nations had been put under the jurisdiction of these other gods by God himself as a punishment in response to the rebellion of the nations at the tower of Babel.¹ After disowning the nations at Babel, God called Abram and created his own people anew, confirming his abiding love for the patriarch's descendants by means of a covenant relationship. As a result, any use of divination to contact one of the foreign gods was viewed as a covenant violation and disloyalty to the true God.

1. The Principle of Realm Distinction

In reality, the notion of "covenant separateness" was a familiar and frequently reiterated idea to an Israelite. The barrier between God's people and the disinherited pagans was communicated in various ways in the Law of Moses. Some laws were clearly aimed at prohibiting a mingling of the populations due to fear of idolatry, such as laws forbidding intermarriage between Israelites and the peoples that were to be driven from the land promised to Israel.² Such laws taught the Israelites in very concrete terms that their loyalty and worship was only to be directed to the God of their fathers. Other laws provided more abstract reminders that there were "two realms" of reality—that which was holy and that which was not ("profane"). For example, there were laws aimed at preventing people with disabilities or lack of bodily "wholeness" from entering sacred space.³ The "uncleanness" in these cases was not concerned with morality but was to reinforce the notion of God's "otherness" and the notion that he was without flaw or blemish. The same can be said for laws prohibiting mixing types of cloth or cooking techniques.⁴ Maintaining distinctiveness and unmixed wholeness was a reflection of the perfection of God. The lesson for the Israelite was simple: God has set up boundaries that need to be obeyed for spiritual wholeness and holiness before the God who loves us and redeemed us.

“Realm distinction” was also what lay behind laws forbidding human beings from transgressing the boundary between the terrestrial realm of humanity and the non-terrestrial spiritual realm. More properly, there was a realm of embodied living beings (humans, animals) and disembodied beings (God, angels, demons).⁵ While it is true that Scripture contains examples where member of each group were permitted entrance into the other realm, human efforts to tap into the “other side” apart from God’s sovereign permission and initiation were forbidden. In some respects, this prohibition kept humans safe. The disembodied spiritual realm was a place that could not be accurately understood, controlled, and processed by humans. Humans were therefore vulnerable to malevolent forces they could not trust or understand. In another respect, violating the barrier between these realms was an affront to God in that it echoed another yielding to the seduction of the temptation in Eden. Willfully contacting the other side through means of divination without God’s approval telegraphed one’s desire to “be like a god,” to have the knowledge and attributes of God and the other entities that inhabited the disembodied spiritual world.

2. “Abominable Practices”

2.1. Deuteronomy 18:9-14

The foundational passage in the Old Testament that articulates God’s demand that Israel reject pagan divination is Deuteronomy 18:9-14:

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 passes his son or his daughter through the fire, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or makes potions from herbs 11 or a spell binder, or one who consults a non-human spirit that has knowledge, or who inquires of the human 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 those who practice divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.”⁶

There are a number of terms in this passage that require brief explanation.

2.1.1. One “who passes his son or his daughter through the fire” (*ma’ābîr bēnô ūbittô bā’ēš*)

It is likely that this wording refers to child sacrifice, but it is not certain.⁷ Either the practice spoken of here involved burning the child in the fire as an offering,⁸ or the child was “passed through” the fire but not burned alive. The question depends in part on whether the practice in Deut. 18:10 is identical to that of Deut. 12:31, which is a clear reference to child sacrifice, and other texts that speak of child sacrifice for Molech.⁹ It is striking that Deut. 18:10 does not call for the death penalty, whereas other clear references to child sacrifice in the Law do (Lev. 20:2, child sacrifice to Molech). This may imply Deut. 18:10 refers to a practice that did not involve killing the child. Additionally, since all the other practices mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:9-12 have something to do with seeking or using knowledge from non-human sources, “passing through the fire” may refer to an act of divination that didn’t involve the death of the child.

2.1.2. One “who practices divination” (*qōsēm qēsāmîm*)

This wording casts a very broad net of prohibition. The terms refer to the attempt to elicit information from a deity or “supernatural” source through “reading” or “interpreting” natural resources or events. Divination can thus be broken down into more precise practices by the means employed. For example, the use of water for such a purpose is called hydromancy (cf. Joseph, Gen. 44:5, 15). Interpreting the appearance and constitution of a sacrificial animal is called hepatoscopy. One of the more common practices included within this term is casting lots to discern divine information.¹⁰ The description here thus condemns a wide range of practices.

2.1.3. One “who tells fortunes” (*me’onēn*)

This is another very broad portrayal, pointing basically to the practice of telling the future. The great Jewish interpreter Ibn Ezra thought that the term was derived from ‘*anan*, “cloud,” thereby indicating the practice of telling the future on the basis of the shape and movements of clouds.¹¹

2.1.4. One “who interprets omens” (*menaḥeš*)

The meaning of this term depends on the Hebrew root from which it derives.¹² If the term comes from *nḥš*, a root which is the basis for the noun “snake,” the term may refer to snake charming or some other practice related to snakes.¹³ If the term derives from *lhš*, it likely refers to other types of enchantments.¹⁴

2.1.5. One “who makes potions out of herbs” (*mēkaššēp*)

This term is most frequently translated “sorcery,” but comparative terminology in other Semitic language points us in the direction of one who concocts potions from plants or an herbalist.¹⁵

2.1.6. One “who is a spellbinder” (*ḥōbēr ḥāber*)

Scholars generally agree that the root *ḥbr* refers to the use of charms and spells since the root conveys the idea of “uniting, joining, and weaving,” which may by extension speak of the practice of “tying or wrapping magical knots or threads around people or objects . . . to bind the gods to do one’s will or to bind (disable) the object or person to be affected.”¹⁶

2.1.7. One “who consults a non-human spirit; that is, a knowing one” (*šōʿēl ʿōb yiddēʿōnî*)

My translation here is somewhat interpretive. The Hebrew phrase in Deuteronomy 18 literally means “one who asks a disembodied spirit (*ʿōb*).” This Hebrew word is often translated “medium” but this is misleading, since Lev. 20:27 uses the word to refer to an entity that enters or controls or is channeled by a man or woman, not the man or woman themselves. The *ʿōb* being contacted is often accompanied by the word *yiddēʿōnî* (“knowing one”; i.e., an entity who has knowledge). The coupling of the terms conveys the idea of someone who channels a spirit or who is possessed by a spirit for the purpose of communicating with the disembodied spiritual realm. Several passages in Leviticus illustrate the connection:

Leviticus 19:31 - “Do not turn to the spirits (*ʿōbōt*), to the ones who have knowledge (*yiddēʿōnī*); do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am Yahweh your God.

Leviticus 20:6 - “If a person turns to the spirits (*ʿōbōt*), to those who have knowledge (*yiddēʿōnī*), whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.

Leviticus 20:27 - “A man or a woman who is with a spirit (*ʿōb*) or one who has knowledge (*yiddēʿōnī*) shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”

The entity (*ʿōb*) of Deut. 18:10 is also to be distinguished from the next descriptive category below, where someone who inquires of “the dead” is condemned for that practice.¹⁷ Since none of the more precise terms for malevolent underworld entities is used here (e.g., *šedīm*, “demons”) the warning includes both good and evil non-human beings. Contacting *any* non-human entity, even an angel, is forbidden. God might send an angel to communicate with a human being—something that happens with a fair amount of frequency in the Bible—but soliciting contact with such a being is something for which permission is never granted in Scripture. For the Israelite, the true God is the only source of information from the disembodied spiritual realm.

2.1.8. One “who inquires of the human dead” (*dōrēš el-hammētīm*)

This description refers to necromancy, contacting the human dead. The fact that this wording diverges from the phrasing considered above, where non-human entities are contacted, illustrates that, as in the wider ancient Near Eastern world, the Old Testament distinguishes ghosts (spirits of human dead) from demonic spirits.

These practices were serious offenses. Deuteronomy 18:9 calls them “abominable” and those who do them “abominations.” Other texts describe those who practice these things as having “sold themselves to do evil” (2 Kings 17:17). Specifically, those who made contact with a *non-human* spirit was to be put to death (Lev. 20:27). However, hiring the medium was not a death penalty offense (read Lev. 27:20 carefully), nor does the Bible make contacting the *human* dead

or any of the other practices in Deuteronomy 18 a capital crime. Nevertheless, they were all “abominations” to the Lord.

2.2. Other Practices and Terms¹⁸

The Old Testament utilizes other descriptive terms for divination. Space constrains us to consider only those practices that could be construed negatively in some way.¹⁹

2.2.1. “Astrologer”

Several Old Testament terms cover astrological divinatory practices, among them “one who gazes at the heavens” (*hōbērēw šāmayim*); “one who gazes at the stars” (*hahōzīm bakkōkabīm*); and “astrologer” (*gāzērîn*). The former two terms occur in Isa. 47:13, where the prophet mocks the effectiveness of such practices and describes the practice in terms of apostasy (not trusting the true God). However, no harsh penalty is imposed in the Old Testament for the practice. The last term is Aramaic, and is used in connection with the Babylonian magicians, wise men, and enchanters described in the book of Daniel (Dan 2:27; 4:7; 5:7, 11). The job description conveyed by these terms is, broadly, to “read the signs in the heavens in order to determine and make known that which has been decreed.”²⁰ Daniel is included in this fraternity by virtue of his training in Babylon and his ability to interpret dreams, a task normally performed by “wise men” in Babylon.

2.2.2. Dream Interpretation

The interpretation of dreams (*hālôm*) or “night visions” (*hezayôn laylâ, marʿôt hallaylâ*) was a widely recognized form of divination, and there are frequent accounts of the practice within the Old Testament and in texts of other ancient cultures.²¹ It was Daniel’s ability in this area that led to his elevation as “chief of the magicians” (Dan. 5:11). Joseph’s elevation to high office came by the same route (Gen. 40-41). There is no penalty in the Mosaic Law for interpreting dreams per se, and God’s use of dreams is presumed as a viable method of communicating information. However, false dream interpretation was a capital crime. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (ESV) is explicit:

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says,

‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

3. Getting Away with Divination?

There is certainly no doubt that the Old Testament views the practices sketched above very negatively. The condemnations are clear. What isn’t so clear is why God would allow some of these very same divination techniques to be practiced by Israelites who were his faithful servants, or by people God chose to contact. This of course means that God dispensed information to certain biblical characters by means of these practices.

Before answering the question of how this is theologically consistent, we need to take note of just what I’m talking about more precisely. First, it needs to be pointed out that godly Israelites did not engage in all these practices. For example, I hinted above in several places that godly Israelites were involved in these practices. Far from being under judgment, people like Joseph and Daniel were blessed by God through these practices, as they were the means by which the true God gave them revelation, saving their lives. But a close look at these cases reveals that no godly biblical character is ever found to be engaging in a practice that was a capital offense (i.e., contacting the non-human spirits, giving false dream interpretations, passing children through the fire). Second, in those passages that describe the “procedural use” of the practice in question, it was God who initiated the means of information, often as an answer to prayer, or the person very obviously assumed God was going to speak to him in response to some crisis. We are familiar with how this worked with Joseph and Daniel,²² but there are other fascinating, less familiar cases.

3.1. Jacob and Laban

Readers will recall that the relationship between Jacob and Laban was, to say the least, strained. God had providentially blessed Jacob despite Laban's treachery. During the years that Jacob labored for Laban to earn the woman he really loved, Rachel, instead of her sister Leah, whom Laban had tricked Jacob into marrying (Gen. 29:1-30), Laban had also become wealthy through God's blessing of Jacob. We are never told, though, that Jacob knew this until Gen. 30:27, where Laban says: "But Laban said to him [Jacob], "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination (*niḥašti*) that Yahweh has blessed me because of you." The root of the word "divination" here is the same as that practice condemned in Deut. 18:9-14. Apparently Laban had inquired of the God of Israel by some divinatory means, and God had complied, for only God had this information.

3.2. The "Fortune-Teller's Oak" / "Oak of Divination"

Judges 6-8 record the story of Gideon's deliverance of Israel from the Midianites under the power of God. Chapter 8 ends with Gideon's death, and chapter 9 picks up what happened in Israel when Gideon's son, Abimelech, decided to rule as king, an office his father had declined. Abimelech ruthlessly murdered his seventy brothers, save for Jotham, who escaped (Judges 9:3-6). The place where Abimelech was declared king is our point of interest:

Judges 9:5-6

⁵ And he [Abimelech] went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. ⁶ And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.

The passage mentions an oak tree that marked the spot of a "pillar" at the town of Shechem. We read about this same location later in Judges 9, when Abimelech returned to Shechem to ambush the city:

34 So Abimelech and all the men who were with him rose up by night and set an ambush against Shechem in four companies. **35** And Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from the ambush. **36** And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the mountaintops!" And Zebul said to him, "You

mistake the shadow of the mountains for men.” 37 Gaal spoke again and said, “Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming from the direction of the Fortune-Teller’s Oak (*me‘ōnēnîm ’ēlôn*).”

Readers will recognize that the first Hebrew term in the description of the oak tree is one of the condemned divinatory practices in Deut. 18:9. What was this oak tree? Was it an unholy place used by spiritual rebels during the chaotic time of the Judges? The clear answer to this question is no, based upon other references to the oak at Shechem (note the underlining):

Genesis 12:6-7

6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh (the Teacher / instruction). At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 35:4

So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was at Shechem.

Joshua 24:25-27

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. 26 And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary (*miqdaš*) of the LORD. 27 And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.”

These texts tell us that this oak at Shechem marked the place: (1) Where God had appeared to Abram with the promises of the Abrahamic covenant; (2) Where Jacob had buried his family’s idols after getting right with God; and (3) Where Joshua had erected a stone that contained some portion of the Word of God—specifically because this was a holy place (*miqdaš*) for the

God of Israel. The biblical text connects a place of divination with holy ground and the God of Israel.

4. *Standing in the Council*

For our purposes, we have to address how such passages are to be understood. How is it that God can condemn something on one hand, and then use it or allow it on the other hand? Once we are able to understand what's going on here, we can formulate a coherent answer to how faithful Israelites would respond to divination practices of the surrounding pagan culture.

For the godly Israelite, if someone claimed to be receiving revelation from God, the first concern would be the source of the information. If a person was soliciting some other entity, that was an abomination. The proof required that Yahweh was indeed the source was whether the prophet in question “had stood in the council of God.” That is, had this person had a direct encounter with the God of Israel, *initiated at first* by the God of Israel to mark that person as his chosen mouthpiece to other believers.²³

“Standing in the council”—the direct divine encounter—is actually a frequent pattern in the Bible for those who are receiving revelation from God. The tradition goes all the way back to Adam. We learn this from Job 15:7-8, where we hear Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, ask Job, “Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? *Have you listened in the council of God?* Have you restricted wisdom to yourself?” The questions are obviously rhetorical. They each anticipate “no” for an answer by using contrast. Of course Job was not the first man—Adam was. Job had not listened in the council of God (Hebrew, *sod eloah*)—but the rhetorical contrast implies that Adam *had* listened in the council of God. He had a direct encounter with God in his council throne room—at the time, Eden.

Scripture follows this seed-form idea with the motif of “walking with God” in describing others in the prophetic line (Enoch, Noah).²⁴ The patriarchs also had direct meetings with God, and this is where we begin to see an explicit pattern of God initiating the contact for the purpose of commissioning human mediators or divine revelation.²⁵ Moses and Joshua each met the God of Israel and were approved by him as prophetic figures.²⁶ Samuel and other judges experienced a dramatic divine encounter.²⁷ Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel saw God when they were chosen as prophets.²⁸ The case of Jeremiah is worthy of special attention.

Jeremiah 1:1-10 (ESV; note the underlining)

¹The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ²to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. ⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” ⁶Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” ⁷But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.” ⁹Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Jeremiah’s dramatic call came via the presence and touch of the embodied God of Israel. It was so dramatic that later in his life it served as the touchpoint for his inspired evaluation of any other so-called prophets:

Jeremiah 23:16-22

¹⁶Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. ¹⁷They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’ ” ¹⁸For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? ¹⁹Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. ²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. ²¹“I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. ²²But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.

The implications are clear: true prophets have stood and listened in the council; false prophets have not. True prophets were first contacted by the God of Israel; they did not solicit that contact as though God were some sort of revelatory vending machine.

This test of prophetic status never went away in Israel. It was alive and well in the days of Jesus and the apostles, as seen with Paul on the road to Damascus and the disciples gathered on the Day of Pentecost.²⁹ The pattern was so embedded as a necessity in the Jewish mind that even the record of Jesus' early life has the same sort of divine commissioning incident, where God publicly and verbally sent Jesus into public ministry at his baptism.³⁰

All of these figures became recognized representatives of the God of Israel. They spoke his words, were uniquely blessed by him, and were empowered to do amazing things in his name. Any rival prophet or newcomer had to be able to prove the same pedigree, and could not contradict the words of the person or persons whom everyone in the believing community already knew was a prophet.

The issue with divination, then, was not the means that were used. After a person was chosen to be the conduit of blessing and divine revelation, God would be open to contact from that person through prayer or other means that would be classified as divinatory. God allowed those people whom he had commissioned to attempt to discern the will of God via the casting of lots or other means well known in the ancient world, and that was God's choice. God even provided such means through the ephod, the Urim, and the Thummim. Rather, the real concern was using such means to solicit contact with any other god or spirit. Moreover, those methods that involved direct contact with other entities were especially heinous for this showed, at best, a lack of faith in the true God and, at worst, disloyalty to God in favor of some other deity.

5. Some Final Application

In effect, then, the notion of "standing in the council" provided two answers to the question of how an Old Testament Israelite would react to pagan divination: (1) What is the source of the information, and (2) does the information conflict with revelation previously given by people we know are true prophets of God? For our day, this model compels us to ask the same kinds of questions of someone who claims to speak for God through some "supernormal" means, or who claims to be using occult techniques to get in touch with God or Jesus. Are they in contact with other beings from the disembodied spiritual world other than the true God? What proof is there

that the person was first tapped by God himself for this role, as opposed to seeking that contact on their own? What proof is there that what the person says is binding on the believing community? Is there consistency between what the person says and the content of the Scriptures—that body of prophetic truth dispensed over the ages by prophets embraced by the believing community, and assembled under providence—or is their contradiction? In today’s increasingly pagan spiritual climate, we would do well to go back to the biblical motifs laid out for us in the Scriptures to demand a coherent accounting of those who seek to convince us they have truth “from the other side.”

¹ See Gen. 10:1-32 for a list of the nations dispersed at Babel in Gen. 11:1-9. See also Deut. 4:19-20; 32:8-9. On the latter, textual scholars have agreed that the best reading is that God divided up the nations according to the number of “the sons of God” (cf. the ESV), not the “sons of Israel” (cf. NIV). The reading “sons of God” is supported by the presence of that reading in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as the fact that Israel did not exist as a nation at the time of Babel, a time prior to the call of Abraham. Note the absence of Israel from the nations of the earth in Gen. 10:1-32. For a detailed discussion of Deut. 32:8-9, see Michael S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (Jan. 01): 52-74.

² During the patriarchal period, marriage within one’s own extended clan was the norm (cf. Gen. 11:29; 20:12; 24:15; 28:9). In the Mosaic law, the specific prohibition against intermarriage given to Israel refers to the Canaanites, so as to avoid idolatry (Exod. 34:15–16; Deut. 7:3–4). Specific Mosaic legal issues with respect to the Ammonites and the Moabites (Deut. 23:3) prohibited marriage between their men and Israelite women but permitted Israelite men to marry their women (Ruth 1:4). Outside of Canaan and the regions on the other side of Jordan, intermarriage laws were more lax (Deut. 21:10-14), though the worship of only the God of Israel remained constant (Deut. 6:4-5).

³ Lev. 12:2; 15:16-18; 21:18.

⁴ Deut. 14:21; 22:11.

⁵ By this description I do not mean to say that a being that was created to live without a body (e.g., an angel) cannot assume corporeal, physical form. There are several such instances in the Bible where this occurs (Gen. 18; 19: 1-11; 32:22-32 [cf. Hosea 12:3-4]).

⁶ The translation is the author’s.

⁷ J. H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*. The JPS Torah commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 465.

⁸ See Jer. 32:35; Ezek. 20:26, 31 (scholars are certain that these texts refer to human sacrifice in light of the context of Jer. 7:31; 19:5; Ezek. 16:20–21; 23:37, 39).

⁹ On Molech, see Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35.

¹⁰ Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 96-99.

¹¹ Tigay, 173; Jeffers, 78-80.

¹² Jeffers, 74-77.

¹³ David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 4:468.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* See Isa 3:3; 3:20; 26:16; Jer 8:17; Eccl 10:11.

¹⁵ Jeffers, 65-69.

¹⁶ Freedman, 4:469.

¹⁷ It is impossible to be completely certain whether the *’ôb* is a non-human spirit or the spirit of a human dead person, but the former is quite likely. For example, Isa. 8:19 contrasts “the dead” with “the living.” If non-human spirits were meant by “the dead” this contrast would carry less weight, since non-human spirits were conceived of as living beings. This verse suggests “the dead” refer to human dead.

¹⁸ This listing is by no means exhaustive. For full treatments of divination terminology in the Old Testament and other ancient Near Eastern cultures, see Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); F. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1994); J. A. Scurlock, *Magical Means of Dealing with Ghosts in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Diss., Univ. of Chicago 1988); J. Lust, "On Wizards and Prophets," *Studies on Prophecy* (VTSup 26; Leiden 1974) 133–142; B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead. Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11; Tübingen 1994).

¹⁹ As a result, we will not consider practices such as casting lots, consulting the ephod, and use of the Urim and Thummim. Casting lots was also a widely recognized form of divination across the ancient Near Eastern world, but it was never condemned in the Old Testament (see W. H. Hallo, "The First Purim," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 [1983], 19–29). It was assumed that this was a means by which God would show his will and dispense it (Prov. 16:33; Josh. 18:6-10).

²⁰ Freedman, 4:469. For a fuller discussion of astrological terms, see Jeffers, 146-154.

²¹ See L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*. Transactions of the American philosophical Society N.S. 46 (1956): 178–353; Jeffers, 125-143.

²² The situation of Joseph with his divine cup is ambiguous. We aren't told how he used it, and there is no story that involves its use. We can presume from Joseph's character that his contact with God was not "self willed" as though manipulating a deity.

²³ After a person was chosen to be the conduit of blessing and divine revelation, God would be open to contact from that person through prayer or other means that would be classified as divinatory. See the discussion.

²⁴ Gen. 5:22-24; 6:9.

²⁵ Genesis 12, 15, 18; 26:1-5; 28:10-13; 31:11-13; 32:22-30.

²⁶ Deut. 34:10; Exod. 24:12-18; Exod 33:7-11; Deut. 31:14-23; Josh. 5:13-15.

²⁷ 1 Sam 3; Judges 6:11-23.

²⁸ Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; Jeremiah 1.

²⁹ Acts 2:1-4; 9:1-9. With the disciples, it is fruitful to note the presence of flames at their encounter and Old Testament encounters. In their case, they were encountered by the Spirit, since the new element in God's program was to spread the commissioning to all believers through the Spirit.

³⁰ Matt. 3:13-17.