



UNIT: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

LESSON 3 | WITCHCRAFT AND SUPERSTITION

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: How people use witchcraft and superstition as an attempt to control the world without relying on God, and why this practice, like all sin, takes us further away from God.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To understand why the Bible takes a stance against witchcraft, and also to identify areas of their life that they turn to the world for comfort and control rather than relying on God.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Deuteronomy 18:9-12, Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 1 Samuel 28:3-19, Revelation 21:5-8.

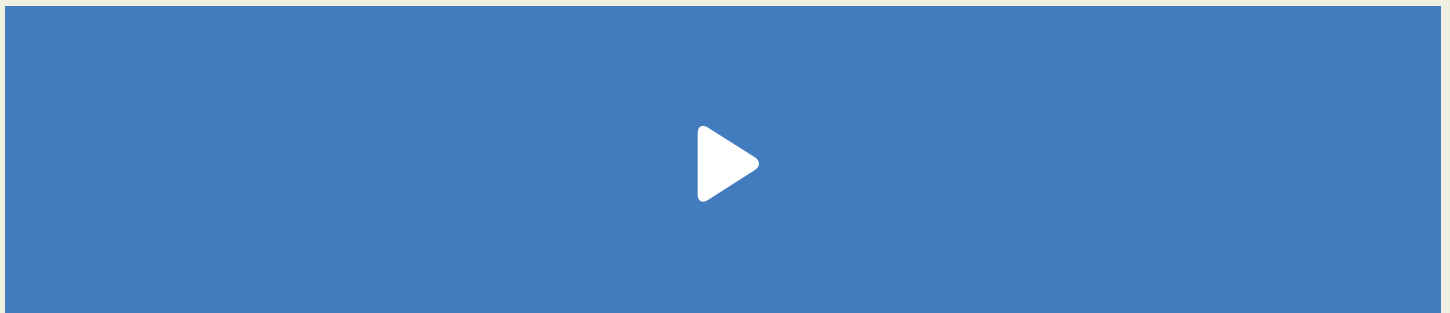
ANCHOR STATEMENT: Witchcraft and superstition are addressed in Scripture as humanity's desire to take control over spiritual matters that belong solely to God.

OVERVIEW:

Across many cultures and time periods, the presence of spells, mediums, diviners, and witchcraft has made itself known. This lesson talks honestly about these practices and shows students the areas of their lives that may have been casually infiltrated. This lesson addresses more than the practice of witchcraft and superstition and goes to the heart behind these practices. Behind these rituals is a desire for control that we do not have.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *Anchored* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is a focused, brief overview of some of the background info for the main passage you will be teaching.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the *Bible Background* to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

Deuteronomy

- *Author:* While there's no specific author named within the text, Moses is the accepted author for Deuteronomy, with some editing and additions done after his death (such as the account of his death!).
- *Time frame:* The dating of the Deuteronomy is a point of debate. The issue is that no one knows for sure when the Exodus occurred, whether it was in the mid-1400s BC or a later date around the mid 1200s BC. The writing would have occurred around those general dates.
- *Purpose:* Deuteronomy means "second law." It was a reminder of the law of God for the second generation of Israelites in the desert before they entered the Promised Land. It reminded the people that the Lord is God. He is faithful to keep his promises to His people.

Leviticus

- *Author:* While there's no specific author named within the text, Moses is the accepted author for Leviticus, with some editing and additions done after his death (such as the account of his death).
- *Time frame:* The dating of the book of Leviticus is thought to be around the fifteenth or thirteenth century BC, depending on when one dates the Hebrew exodus out of Egypt.
- *Purpose:* The title "Leviticus" simply means "things concerning the Levite," but the book is not just for those concerned with priestly duties. It is considered to be a continuation of Exodus and, therefore, a continuation of the story of the Hebrew people and their relationship with God.

1 Samuel

- *Author:* The author of 1-2 Samuel is unknown. While it's certainly possible that Samuel wrote some of what's recorded in these books, the mention of his death in 1 Samuel 25 means that he didn't write all of it. The books are given the title of "Samuel" because of his prominent role in the establishment of the monarchy.
- *Time frame:* It's difficult to say for certain when 1-2 Samuel was written. It's very possible that they were written and edited over a period of time. More than likely, they were established in their final form around the 10th century BC.
- *Purpose:* The main theme of these books is God's choosing to accomplish His purposes through the lineage of David and to set up Jerusalem as the location for the temple. There are many "ups and downs" throughout 1-2 Samuel and David goes through times of obedience and rebellion. He experiences blessings and consequences for sins.

Revelation

- *Author:* The writer of Revelation identifies himself as John four times. Scholars agree that it is most likely John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' most beloved disciples.
- *Time frame:* Revelation was written toward the end of John's life somewhere between 90 and 95 AD.
- *Purpose:* The purpose of Revelation was to reveal the fullness of Christ's identity and to provide hope for suffering Believers at the time who were encountering grave persecution and suffering. Today, it provides us hope for what is to come, as well as a stark warning of the battle that rages until Christ returns.

THE SETTING

The book of 1 Samuel recounts the journey of God's people under the leadership of Saul and David, Israel's first kings. Samuel is the major prophet and representative of God throughout the book. God rejects Saul and his leadership because Saul fails to walk with and obey God, while God raises up David to be the next king to lead the people faithfully.

THE MAIN POINT

Witchcraft and superstition are both ways that people seek to control the universe and get direction without God. There are real spiritual powers at work in the world that oppose God. When people pursue these powers, they stand in opposition to God. God wants us to trust and follow Him for guidance because He is the One who reigns as sovereign over all the Universe.

LESSON PLAN

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible Study section called *The Main Event*; and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

THE LEAD IN

- *Goal*: To help students see how superstition and desire to control the Universe is a part of our sin nature.
- *Set-Up*: None needed.

FIRST, explain to your students that today, we will explore the topic of witchcraft and superstition. At our core, humans want to control the universe and have things go according to their plans, and some people view witchcraft and superstition as viable means to control the universe. To begin with, **ask students**:

- **What does it mean to be superstitious?**
 - *Answer*: “A belief or way of behaving that is based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic or luck”
– Encyclopedia Britannica

NEXT, explain to your students that people do many different things to avoid bad luck and ensure things go their way. These are activities that, at their core, would be considered superstitious. For example:

- Someone may avoid saying something out loud that appears to be happening to them, so they won’t “jinx” it.
- A sports fan might always wear the same shirt and sit in the same spot so that they can do their part to ensure that their team wins the game.
- A musician might have a routine that he or she does before every show in hopes that they have a good crowd.

THEN, explain that none of these things are bad in and of themselves, but they become problematic when we look at the underlying belief behind them. Superstitions assume that a person can do certain things to ‘force’ life to go their way. **Say something like**:

- **A mindset of superstition puts us in a place of power that we don’t really have. Those things fall under God’s control. We cannot control the universe or outcomes. Seeking out these methods of control hurts our faith because it directs us away from God and toward ourselves. When we embrace a mindset of superstition, we put ourselves in the place of God. As we dive into witchcraft and superstition, we will see the great extent people go to control the outcomes and the danger of not relying on God and failing to follow Him.**

FINALLY, if there are no questions, transition into the Main Event.

THE MAIN EVENT

- *Goal*: To help students identify the heart behind witchcraft and superstition, and point to Scripture’s call to repent from these things.
- *Set-Up*: Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FIRST, ask your students to describe how they have seen witchcraft and superstition portrayed in the culture around them. **Say something like**:

- **A lot of times, we see a witch or warlock portrayed as part of a story, like we would in Lord of the Rings or other fantasy novels and movies. We see them side by side, things like ogres and unicorns, and we mistakenly think of witchcraft as something that only happens in a land ‘far, far away.’ But witchcraft and superstition are actual practices that are happening in our world as we speak. There are groups of people who genuinely study spell books and practice different forms of magic. Tarot readers, Wiccans, Diviners, Fortune tellers, psychic mediums, and more are practicing occult magic all around us, and it’s not just for fun. These people**

are practicing seriously, and inviting us to take part. And their practices aren't just new-age or something that has recently come about. These practices go all the way back to the early days of humanity. We even see God warning His people in Deuteronomy about these exact things.

NEXT, read or have a student read Deuteronomy 18:9-12. **Ask:**

- **What practices of the nations could be considered witchcraft or superstition?**
 - *Answer:* Things like divination, telling fortunes, interpreting omens, sorcery, charms, mediums, necromancers, and inquiring of the dead.
- **Why do you think these things are offensive to the Lord?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

Explain to students that by performing these rituals and witchcraft, the people were trying to bypass the Lord's power and rule by rejecting Him. Instead, they were trying to make the Universe move in their desired direction. Thus, these things became offensive to the Lord and were a product of sinful hearts. God's hatred of witchcraft and superstition is highlighted in His law to His people. Read or have a student read Leviticus 19:31 and Leviticus 20:6. **Say something like:**

- **God promises to cut off and oppose those who are seeking to take control of the world around them through witchcraft. Witchcraft is dangerous because it seeks out spiritual forces that are in opposition to God. Remember our last lesson on angels and demons? We agreed that they do not have power over us, but they do have power. When people take part in witchcraft and superstitions, their intentions are usually found in one of two categories: Either they are worshipping something apart from God, or they are seeking to subdue spiritual beings for their own personal use. Both are rooted in the rejection of God as the Ultimate Authority in the world.**

THEN, explain that despite the warnings against superstition and witchcraft in the Bible, people still chose to disobey God and seek answers from these places. After the death of Samuel the prophet, Saul, Israel's first king, sought a witch to help him bring back Samuel from the dead to seek his advice. Have your students turn in their Bibles to 1 Samuel 28:3-7 and while they are turning, refer to the Bible Background section to give context.

Read or have a student 1 Samuel 28:3-7. **Ask students:**

- **Why does Saul feel like he needs help?**
 - *Answer:* Saul is afraid because of the great Philistine army that is coming against him and the people of Israel.

Say something like:

- **In this moment of desperation, Saul has two choices. He can either be patient with God and entrust his fears to Him, or he can try to take back control of his situation so that he feels comfortable again, since God isn't answering him as quickly as he hoped. And unfortunately, Saul chooses to take matters into his own hands.**

NEXT, read or have another student read 1 Samuel 28:8-14. **Ask:**

- **Why was the woman that Saul visited concerned?**
 - *Answer:* Because those found practicing witchcraft were usually expelled from the land, or worse.
- **What does this passage show us about the woman's power?**
 - *Answer:* The witch has some level of power that God has allowed her to have. She was able to bring Samuel back from death to talk to Saul.

Say something like:

- **This woman actually had the ability to perform great signs. And she isn't the only one in Scripture who we**

see putting on big magical displays. In Exodus 7, the Pharaoh of Egypt had on-staff magicians who were able to imitate the miracles God performed through Moses. In the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar calls upon magicians who interpret dreams, but their interpretations fall short of what God reveals to Daniel. And in the New Testament, we see Simon the magician, who was able to do all sorts of signs and wonders, but was called to repent from these things and follow God in Acts 8.

Explain to students that these powers and practices do yield results. If they didn't, then people probably would have stopped doing them a long time ago. But just like other forms of sin, our ability to do something does not give us the approval to do it.

THEN, have another student read 1 Samuel 28:15-19 and **ask the following questions:**

- **What is Samuel's response to Saul?**
 - *Answer:* Samuel tells Saul that he has made the Lord his enemy. God has given the kingdom over to David because of Saul's unfaithfulness. God will cause the people to lose in battle to the Philistines.

Say something like:

- Thanks to Samuel, we are getting to see a little bit more of the story than we are able to read today. See, this thing with Saul not relying on the Lord has been going on for quite a while. We probably could've figured that out when Saul knew exactly how to find a sorceress, even though God commanded him to remove sorcery from the kingdom. But Samuel also mentions that the thing Saul is trying to avoid is the natural consequences of his actions. Saul knew he was losing control, and rightfully so. But he was looking for any way to avoid it.

Ask students:

- **Can you think of a time that you were going to receive a punishment or consequence for something you did, but you tried everything you could to get out of it?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

Explain to students that we (usually) grow out of this behavior and learn to accept the consequences of our actions. But Saul could not. His desire for control, the benefits he got from being king, and his general pattern of ignoring God were all factors in his decision to turn to witchcraft.

NEXT, read or have a student read Revelation 21:5-8. **Say something like:**

- This passage can be difficult to read. We want to believe that God only sends people into this 'lake of fire' as a last resort. After all, you might know someone or be someone who practices these things! But let's think about something before our feathers get too ruffled. When you look at the heart behind these things listed, especially sorcery or witchcraft, there is more than just 'doing what God told us not to.' There is rebellion, yes. But the heart of these things is fear of losing power, control over others, the elevation of self, and possibly the ruthless pursuit of things despite what that means for others. God is throwing those who practice these things into the lake of fire because He is creating an eternal home for people where they are safe and free from the oppression of others. The reason this list is so scary is that, without God's intervention, this would be ALL of us. Not just those who practice witchcraft or superstition.

Explain to your students that although these passages have been confusing and, at times, hard to understand, we have seen the power of witchcraft and superstition. When we seek after these things, like Saul, we fail to follow God and walk with Him. In seeking wisdom and blessing in these places, we show that we fail to follow God and take the side of God's enemies.

FINALLY, close this section of the lesson by reminding students of this lesson's Anchor Statement:

WITCHCRAFT AND SUPERSTITION ARE ADDRESSED IN SCRIPTURE AS HUMANITY'S DESIRE TO TAKE CONTROL OVER SPIRITUAL MATTERS THAT BELONG SOLELY TO GOD.

Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions, then transition to the Last Word portion of your lesson.

THE LAST WORD

- *Goal:* To help students see the ways that they are tempted to turn to other things instead of God.
- *Set-Up:* Paper and pens for each student or a dry-erase board.

FIRST, explain to students that we have come to understand throughout the lesson that the desire to seek after witchcraft and superstition ultimately comes from a failure to trust in and follow God. When we find ourselves like Saul, scared and overwhelmed, where do we turn for help? Ask your students to brainstorm the places or people they tend to turn to for wisdom and guidance instead of God. Have them record their answers on a sheet of paper or a dry-erase board.

Once you have compiled a list of places the students turn rather than God, **ask the following questions:**

- **Why is it easier to turn to one of the things or people on the board than God?**
 - *Answers will vary* (but could include the idea that God sometimes seems far away while these things are closer and may seem more available.)
- **What does it look like to trust and follow God in hard moments?**
 - *Answers will vary* (but could include a prayer to express your thoughts and concerns to God, reading God's Word for wisdom and direction, and seeking to obey Him.)
- **How has God been faithful to you in difficult moments?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

NOW, explain to the students that we are going to end today's lesson by spending some time writing a prayer to God for Him to help us trust Him and go to Him first for guidance in difficult times. Pass a sheet of paper and a pen to each student to write their prayers.

FINALLY, if there are no more questions, close the lesson in prayer.

- Don't forget to remind students about their devotions this week. If you're posting them on Social Media or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.