

## **“To the Law and to the Testimony”**

*“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? **To the law and to the testimony!** If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,”* Isaiah 8:19-20.

These verses were taken from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah, the man, labored as a prophet during the last days of Uzziah (790-739 B.C.), Jothan (739-731), Ahaz (731-715), and Hezekiah (715-686), Isaiah 1:1. Added information regarding this time period may be obtained by reading 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chron. 26-31, wherein we learn much regarding the reigns of the kings just mentioned. Suffice it to say, Isaiah labored as a prophet of God at a critical time in Old Testament history. During this period Gods people had largely *“rebelled against”* Him, Isa. 1:2; they had *“provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel,”* Isa. 1:4; the land was *“full of idols,”* and many of the people worshipped *“the work of their own hands,”* Isa. 2:8. The people largely had no sense of shame, Isa. 3:8; the northern Kingdom (Israel) was facing imminent captivity in Assyria, Isa. 8:4, and the southern kingdom (Judah) was also being severely threatened, Isa. 8:7,8. There were also false prophets who taught *“lies,”* Isa. 9:15, and many of the people were described as *“rebellious people, lying children,”* who cared not for the word of God, but who would say *“to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us right things: Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits,”* Isa. 30:9-10. It was a very critical time in their history, a time when they should have genuinely repented, a time when they should have turned to God and to His word; however, they despised the *“word”* of the Lord and trusted in *“oppression and perversity,”* Isa. 30:12. In keeping with our opening text, Isa. 8:19-20, instead of turning to the law of God, they were turning to *“mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter;”* they sought *“the dead on behalf of the living,”* Isa. 8:19. Of course, the law of Moses strongly condemned such activity (Lev. 19:31; 20:6,27; Isa. 47:12-14, etc.). In fact, God said to His people, *“a man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones...,”* Lev.20:27. However, notwithstanding these clear warnings against such, many of the people during the time of Isaiah turned to and sought direction from *“astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators,”* Isa. 47:13. Or, in the language of our opening text, they sought *“mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter;”* they sought *“the dead on behalf of the living,”* Isa. 8:19.

Sadly, in principle, multitudes today are guilty of doing the same things for which the Israelites were condemned, and which contributed to their complete departure from God. Many pay more attention to fortune tellers, astrologers, palm readers, so-called mediums, etc., than they do to the word of God. Countless people read their daily horoscopes, seeking to make their plans based upon the relative position of the planets, while neglecting to investigate the word of God, the very One Who made the planets! And in the religious realm there are countless so-called *“prophets”* who, like Israel of old, are prophesying *“lies,”* Isa. 9:15, and multitudes who want preachers to *“speak...smooth things,”* Isa. 30:9-10, who become very upset when a preacher actually strives to follow the example of the apostle Paul who endeavored to proclaim *“the whole counsel of God,”* Acts 20:27!

Jesus fulfilled the Law and the prophets, Matt. 5:17, and by reason of His death upon the cross that law was taken out of the way, being “*nailed...to the cross*,” Col. 2:14. Indeed, Jesus is the “*Mediator of the New Covenant*,” which became “*in force*” after, and by reason of, His death, Heb. 9:15-17. However, though we are not “under” the law of Moses, it is a fact that the things which “*were written before*” (i.e., the Old Testament scriptures) were “*written for our learning*,” Rom. 15:4. And one lesson we ought to learn from the Old Testament is the folly of turning to the wrong sources for spiritual instruction. Instead of listening to false prophets, mediums, witches, astrologers, stargazers, monthly prognosticators, wizards, etc., they should have turned “*to the law and to the testimony*,” Isa. 8:20. By way of application, as it affects those of us who live on this side of the cross of Christ, we must turn to Jesus and to His New Testament, which now constitutes “*the Law*” (of Christ, cf. Gal. 6:2), and the “*testimony*” (revealed by the Holy spirit for us to follow, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). But, alas, multitudes (in matters religious) follow their feelings, human tradition, religious creeds, manuals, disciplines, etc., written by uninspired men (and women), while completely ignoring **the word of God**, thereby, in principle, committing the same sins committed by the Israelites of old who, ignoring Moses’ law, turned instead to their mediums, prognosticators, stargazers, witches, and false prophets!

Having shown the folly of the Israelites who fell away from God, and who were instructed instead to turn to “*the law and to the testimony*,” Isa. 8:20, let us now make **application** of the principle so clearly set forth in our text. By way of application, we urge all accountable people to turn to “*the law and to the testimony*” (i.e., “*law of Christ*,” Gal. 6:2) and to its “*testimony*” regarding:

**1. How to live our lives.** “*The grace of God that brings salvation*,” Tit. 2:11, teaches us that “*we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age*,” Tit. 2:12. We must “*cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*,” 2 Cor. 7:1; we must present our bodies “*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...*,” Rom. 12:1,2.

**2 What church to be members of.** Sadly, most moderns urge us to “join the church” of our choice, argue that “one church is as good as another,” and that membership in any church is not essential to salvation. But when we turn to “*the law and to the testimony*,” we learn that Jesus built His church, Matt. 16:18; to His church the “*saved*” are “*added*,” Acts 2:47, that the church is Christ’s “*body*,” over which He reigns as “*head*,” Eph 1:22-23, that therein both Jews and Gentiles are “*reconciled*” unto God,” Eph. 2:16, and that Jesus is its “*Savior*,” Eph. 5:25. To say that the church is not essential, and that “one church is as good as another,” is to sentence Jesus Christ (who died to purchase the church, Acts 20:28), to a useless death!

**3. The Plan of salvation.** Study the book of Acts, which is an inspired history of the establishment of the church and the spread of the gospel, and the many examples of conversion contained therein. In so doing, you will discover that in order to be saved, lost people had to **hear** the gospel, **believe** on Jesus Christ as the Son of God, **repent** of their sins, **confess** their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Acts 2:21-41; 8:12, 35-39; 9:18; 10:48; 16:13-15,30-33; 18:8. In New Testament days no person was saved by anything “only,” no one was promised salvation by simply “accepting Jesus Christ as your person Savior,” nor was any “alien sinner” promised salvation just by “praying the sinner’s prayer!”

**Conclusion:** If more space were available, we could make further application by referring also to the **Worship** of the church and the **Work** thereof. But, hopefully, we have made our point. We must have divine authority for all that we believe, teach, and practice religiously, Col. 3:17. God has not left us adrift upon the sea of life with neither chart nor compass. “*All*

*Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” and by it “the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,” 2 Tim. 3:16-17. And we are divinely prohibited from perverting the doctrine of Christ, Gal. 1:7-8, or going beyond “the doctrine of Christ,” 2 John 9, or adding to or taking from God’s holy word, Rev. 22:18-19. We must avoid the mistakes of ancient Israel, and submit to “the law” and “testimony” of Jesus Christ!*

\*\*\*\* —B. Witherington