

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GHOSTS?

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The Bible indicates that there are a variety of spirits or what we might call “spiritual beings” which exist.

The Holy Spirit/Spirit of the LORD.

Angels.

Cherubs.

Seraphs.

The “living creatures” in Revelation (perhaps a way of describing cherubs).

Humans have a spirit.

“Spirits”.

Demons.

Satan.

What most people think of when they say “ghosts” is the departed spirit of a dead human. So what happens to people after they die, and what does the Bible say about the departed and interaction with “spirits”?

People die once (unless miraculously raised from the dead [cf. Lazarus]) and are judged (Heb 9:27; 2 Cor 5:10; Luke 16:19-31).

To be absent from the body (for believers) is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6-8). Dead people, whether righteous or wicked, are conscious and have a memory of their life on earth (Luke 16:19-31; Rev 6:9-11).

Communication with the dead, or attempting to do so, is forbidden (Deut 18:9-14; Lev 19:26,31; 20:6,27). The Bible does not say it is impossible, but forbidden (see the next point).

Angels frequently appear to people in the Bible (Gen 16:7-11; 19:1f; 21:17f; Zech 1-5; etc.), and are often mistaken for humans (Gen 18:1f; Judg 6:11f; 13). Communicating with angels who show up is not a theological problem, but worship of them is forbidden (Col 2:18).

When King Saul got a medium to contact the prophet Samuel, the Bible says Samuel showed up, was obviously irritated, and prophesied the same kinds of things he would have had he been alive (1 Sam 28:6-25). The medium appears surprised that Samuel showed up (1 Sam 28:12). As for the Bible’s evaluation of what Saul did here, it is classified as being as wicked as his most wicked activities (1 Chr 10:13).

Jesus’ disciples thought they were seeing a spirit/ghost when He came walking on the water to them (Matt 14:26; Mark 6:49). That does not mean the Bible supports the notion of ghosts, but just that His disciples thought that at the time.

Non-Christians who have divination abilities evidently get them from demons (Acts 16:16-20). If they accurately present mystical information but not in the name of the God of the Bible, their predictive abilities are still from the wrong side, and we should not listen to them (Deut 13). False prophets can nevertheless be given information by deceiving spirits, sometimes with God’s intention being the destruction of the listeners (1 Kgs 22).

Demons can possess people and be cast out of them (Mark 5), and in one instance pigs (Mark 5). Where demons are when they do not possess someone is unclear (Matt 12:43), but they exist somewhere. That said, while demons are often described as possessing people, there is no Scriptural evidence that Christians need to be casting demons out of buildings or objects.

The bottom line is this: popular conceptions of ghosts, i.e., spirits of dead people, dwelling in houses or haunting places, do not line with the Bible. Demons do exist, and are described as possessing people or, in one instance, animals.