

Tough Topics: Ghosts, Spirits, Demons

What Does the Bible Say About Ghosts?

Matthew 14:24-26 (New Lexham with my emphasis) But the boat was already many stadia distant from the land, being beaten by the waves, because the wind was against it. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But the disciples, when they saw him walking on the sea, were terrified, saying, **“It is a ghost!”** and they cried out in fear.

Luke 24:36-39 (New Lexham with my emphasis) And while they were saying these things, he himself stood there among them. But they were startled and became terrified, and **thought they had seen a ghost**. And he said to them, “Why are you frightened? And for what reason do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that I am I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as [you see that I have].”

That’s it. Both pericopes (Mark 6:49 is parallel to Matthew) use the word “ghost”, a translation of the Greek *phantasma*. Neither point to a *real* ghost, but to what was *thought* to be a ghost. Just so we are on the same page, a ghost is—**an apparition of a dead person that has become manifest to the living.**

There is a well-known “ghost” story in the bible. Open up to **1 Samuel 28**.

Some things to note about this fascinating account. First, Saul (in the story) is actively *working against the will of God*. The context seems to indicate that, while it appears to be Samuel, **it is likely not**. The question is: is this the work of God to thwart Saul or the work of Satan used to trick him? Or both? My interpretation is *that this is an extraordinary work of God to cement Saul in his condemnation*. See 1 Kings 22:21-23.

What Does the Bible Say About the Realm of the Dead?

Deuteronomy 18:9-14 “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. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, 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. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

Ancestor worship was a common pagan practice of the people of the land during the time of the wilderness wanderings and in the land of Canaan. There was a whole host of ways that people would try to be in touch with the realm of the dead.

What Does the Bible Say About the Spirit World?

Ephesians 6:10-12 (Lexham English with my emphasis) Finally, become strong in the Lord and in the might of his strength. Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be

able to stand against the stratagems of the devil, because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

1 Timothy 4:1 (Lexham English with my emphasis) Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the last times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...

What Does All of This Tells Us?

1. The Scriptures clearly indicate that the work of Satan is active in the “spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”. There is a realm in which demonic activity is present. There are evil spirits, demons, and unexplained phenomena.
2. The people of God are consistently warned against having anything to do with engaging in this realm. Saul was condemned for his “breach of faith” and the fact that he “also consulted with a medium, seeking guidance.” (1 Chronicles 10:13) *There are consequences for trafficking in such things.*
3. There is no evidence that *the saints ever reappear to people after death, whether as an angel or a ghost*. We are never told in the Scriptures that a person that has gone to “be with the Lord” may appear to the living. As to the question as to whether people who are **not** with the Lord can appear is also doubtful. Even those who die, “die once, and after that comes judgment...” (Hebrews 9:27) Those who die in the Lord *have every assurance that they are in His bosom*. Using sanctified reasoning based on the Scriptures, once you are in heaven, you will never be separated from the eternal bliss prepared for you through the blood of Jesus.
4. It is likely that Satan and his forces can take on the *guise of the dead* in order to trick people. Satan is a liar, a perverter, and a trickster. He can even disguise himself as “an angel of light”. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

So, do ghosts exist? Sure. Should we **ever** engage with them? **No**. Does God protect you from assault from the evil, demonic realm? **ABSOLUTELY**. We need not fear Satan and his minions, for we are given protection—the full armor of God. (Ephesians 6:13-18)

What is the Proper Christian Response to Things Like Halloween?

1. **Discernment**. While Halloween may be fine, stay away from costumes and decoration that celebrates the occult, violence, and death.
2. Realize the messing around with **the occult** invites contact with a realm **we don’t understand and has some kind of power**. While God is over all things, in the present age, Satan still has some kind of sway.
3. Media and Movies that glamorize death and horror work **to desensitize us from what is truly abominable to God**. We should not watch things that glamorize the demonic realm.

Final Word—it has been my experience that people are drawn to things that scare them. Maybe it’s the human fascination with death, with things that are unknowable, or even things that are fantastical. *Know that there is no “neutral” ground in the spiritual realm*. There are only two options—light or darkness. People are also apt to buy into anything other than the truth of God in Jesus Christ.