



The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Proverbs 18:15

Are spirits of the dead sent to us by God?

General question: Is the message of Christianity true?

Also asked as:

Are ghosts and spirit appearances real or are they hallucinations?

Can séances conjure up appearances of my dead relatives?

Are spirit-appearances good ... or are they evil?

Do angels or Jesus appear to people?

Similar questions answered separately :

Is the Bible reliable?

Is Jesus God?

A caution:

This is a serious and sensitive subject for someone who experienced a real or imagined appearance. Ghosts, spirit-appearances, and séances are often subjects for scary movies. They may be imagined or staged. They may also be real. The realm of spirits and consulting the dead is dangerous especially if an appearance is possibly a demon in disguise. Demons can do much more than frighten us ... they can do great harm. Some Christians and churches may take a casual approach to all of this ... they should not. Do not let others dissuade you from the seriousness of all of this. Jesus took it seriously. You should take it seriously as well.

The short answer:

Spirit appearances of loved ones are often the product of grief-driven imagination. Real spirit appearances (of dead people, angels, or Jesus) are very, very infrequent in the Bible. We should not expect to experience them. Actual ghosts and spirit-appearances are most likely demons in disguise. The Bible clearly speaks of the reality of demonic activity and that it is deceptive, deceitful, and dangerous. Speaking of the greater power of Jesus Christ in a true believer versus the power of Satan, the Bible states, "Greater is He who is in you than he (Satan) who is in the world," 1 John 4:4 (see also John 15:4-5 & 17:23, Romans 8:10, and Ephesians 3:17). The danger from Satan and evil spirits is real. It is imperative that each of us first seek the safety of Christ by believing in Him to become God's child. A true child of God can be oppressed by demons and spirits, but cannot be possessed by them. A true believer has the power to make demons and spirits flee. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you," James 4:7-8.

The longer answer:

Satan is real. Satan was spoken of as a real being by Jesus, by the Apostle John, by the Apostle Paul, by all the New Testament authors, and in seven Old Testament books. Satan is not a manmade, mythical figure. He is real. Satan is powerful. He is the "*ruler of this world*," John 12:31 and he is the "*prince of the power of the air*," Ephesians 2:1-2. There is a vast spiritual world. There is more than just physical, human life on earth.

Satan is real and dangerous. Satan has sinned since the beginning, 1 John 3:8. He was a murderer from the beginning, John 8:44. He is a source of false teaching (including that of churches that deny his power), 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Satan and his demons (evil spirits) can harm people. Jesus cast out many harmful demons. The New Testament mentions them many times, Matthew 7:21-22, 8:16-34, 9:33-34, 10:1-8, 12:24-45, and Mark 1:22-39, 3:9-27, 5:1-20, 6:7-13, 7:25-30, 9:17-40, and Luke 4:31-36, 6:17-19, 7:21, 8:2, 9:37-50, 10:17-20, 11:14-26, 13:32, and Acts 5:16, 8:7, 19:12-16, and 1 Timothy 4:1, and Revelation 16:13-14, & 18:2. These Biblical references document how real and dangerous demonic forces can be.

Satan is a deceiver. Spirit appearances may be imagined. However, the Bible describes Satan as a dangerously deceitful, scheming, and lying being. He is a deceiver, 2 Corinthians 11:3. Satan is a schemer, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. He is a liar and the father of lies, John 8:44. In spirit form, he and his demons could easily take on the form of a dead person to deceive a living relative or friend. A spirit-appearance of a dead person might seem to be reassuring that they are in some way still alive ... and reassuring that there actually is a life after death. However, the high probability that such appearances are demons in disguise is frightening. The Bible states that Satan and demons disguise themselves as good and benign beings. "*Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds*," 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

Are there appearances by good spirits ... good ghosts? The Bible speaks strongly against anyone trying to speak to the dead directly or via mediums and spiritists, Deuteronomy 18:10-12. Speaking to the dead is called *necromancy*. Israel's King Saul sought to speak to a dead prophet, 1 Samuel 28. That was such a grievous sin that God took his life, 1 Chronicles 10:13-14. Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. His disciples saw them. Those two key Old Testament men had been dead for centuries. However, that was Jesus who met with them ... and He, being God, could know that they were not disguised demons. We, as regular men and women, are to have nothing to do with mediums, spiritists, speaking with the dead, séances, spells, ghosts, and any other manifestation of the occult. Spirits of the dead that appear to us are most likely demons in disguise. That is a frightening possibility ... real, but frightening. Have good spirits ever appeared to people? Yes, such appearances have happened and are documented in the Bible as described below. However, they happened very, very seldom. Moreover, they are never presented in God's Word as normative in the lives of regular people.

Appearances of Jesus. The Bible states that no one has ever seen God the Father, John 1:18 & 6:46. When God appeared to people in Old Testament times, it was Jesus, in pre-incarnate (pre-flesh, pre-Bethlehem) form, Genesis 16, 18, 21, 22, 31, 32, and Exodus 3, Joshua 5, and Judges 6 & 13. *The Angel of the Lord* in the Old Testament refers to Jesus pre-incarnate. Jesus appeared to the Apostle Paul as recorded in Acts 9. None of these appearances were ever doubtful to the ones who experienced them. Each was an unquestionable appearance of God. Such appearances were not frequent ... and not to regular people in routine life. These were appearances of Jesus to very special people in Biblical history such as Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and the Apostle Paul. If you think that Jesus appears to you, be very careful. Such appearances are very uncommon. Be careful, the one appearing to you may not be Jesus. The Bible warns us. *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world,”* 1 John 4:1-3. Warned in this Biblical passage, you should ask of any spirit-appearance, *“Do you confess that the God-man Jesus Christ of the Bible has come in the flesh from God?”* Jesus was resurrected with a physical body to an imperishable life. Jesus appeared to Thomas and said, *“Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”* Thomas answered and said to Him, *“My Lord and my God!”* Jesus said to him, *“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed,”* John 20:27-29. You might ask the one appearing to you as Jesus to show his wounds to you. Jesus had a physical body after His resurrection. After it, He ate with His disciples, Luke 24:36-43. Be aware and alert ... the one appearing to you may be an impostor. Do not hesitate to test any spirit or spirits. When you do, that one appearing to you supposedly as Jesus, or as a dead relative, will most likely disappear.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah. Jesus, taking three Disciples with Him, met with Moses and Elijah on a mountain, Matthew 17:1-8. None of the people present at this special event were regular people. The three Disciples were Peter, James, and John ... original Disciples of Jesus and among the authors of the New Testament. Moses and Elijah had been dead for centuries. Moses authored the first five books of the Bible, led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, and received the Ten Commandments from God. And Elijah was one of the most significant Old Testament Prophets. Moreover, Jesus was there. Jesus was the common denominator in this and in all of the appearances described in the paragraph above.

An appearance of a dead prophet. Israel's King Saul sought to speak to the dead prophet Samuel, a man he had known. Saul and Samuel were not regular people. Saul was the first King of Israel and Samuel had been a prophet, a judge in Israel, and the one who anointed David to be King. Saul sought to contact Samuel through the medium of Endor, 1 Samuel 28. Apparently, the spirit of Samuel did appear and speak to Saul. That terrified King Saul ... and seems to have terrified the medium as well. Should we seek to do any similar thing? No! Saul's doing this was such a grievous sin that God took his life, 1 Chronicles 10:13.

Appearances of dead people immediately after Jesus died. Immediately when Jesus died on the cross, *"The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"* Matthew 27:52-54. These were not spirit-appearances. The Bible states that they had bodies. It could have been that these people were simply brought back to life ... very recently dead and miraculously resuscitated back to life to die again later. This could have happened while Jesus on the cross (the apparent several-verse context of Matthew 27:50-60) or after His resurrection (looking at just the single verse, Matthew 27:53). Or secondly, they could have been resurrected (more than resuscitated) to an imperishable life after His resurrection on that first Easter Sunday. They could not have been resurrected until after Jesus had been because He was the first to be bodily resurrected from the dead to an imperishable life, I Corinthians 15:20-24. At some point, possibly on that Easter morning, they were transported by Jesus to Heaven. In either case, they were not simply spirit-appearances ... they had bodies. This very unusual happening is not an example of the spirits of dead people appearing to the living.

Do people become angels after they die? No! Angels are real. The Bible mentions them over 280 times from Genesis to Revelation ... interestingly, never as female. The Biblical words for *angel* mean *messenger*. "The Angel of the Lord" (20% of the Bible's usages of *angel*) refers to Jesus, God's ultimate messenger, Hebrews 1:1-2. The other usages of *angel* in the Bible refer to created spirit-beings. Angels are different from mankind, Romans 8:37-38, I Corinthians 4:9, 6:1-3, & 13:1, and Hebrews 1:13-2:18. Dead people do not become angels. If a dead relative appears to you as an angel, it is neither an angel nor your relative.

Standing against demonic forces. The Bible exhorts us to pay attention and to be on the alert. We are to stand strongly against demonic forces. *"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith,"* I Peter 5:8-9. *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"* Ephesians 6:10-17.

The promise of safety. Satan is specifically limited in his attacks on God's children. *"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you,"* James 4:7-8. Those who are believers in Christ are told that when they resist Satan, he flees.

That is God's promise. That promise is given only to the children of God. Satan cannot harm the child of God who resists him. The path to safety is simple. Become God's child and then you can resist demonic forces. Satan can hold others captive, 2 Timothy 2:24-26, but he cannot hold a child of God captive. When someone becomes God's child, he or she is rescued from the domain of darkness, and is transferred into the Kingdom of God, Colossians 1:13-14.

Acquiring that safety. Our safety is only as children of God. No one is God's child because he or she was raised in a Christian home or attended church. Each person must become God's child by believing in Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior. *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God,"* John 1:12-13. Once you have believed in Jesus, you have the power to stand firm against demonic forces. Until then you do not have the power to resist victoriously. There is a great phrase in Colossians 1:27, *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."* Being a true Christian is your being in Jesus and His being in you. Satan and demons are in the world. However God's promise to His children is, *"Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world,"* 1 John 4:4.

Safety beyond the grave. The Bible states that everyone will live forever ... the question is *where?* By believing in Jesus, we have three great promises ... the one who believes (1) *has eternal life*, (2) *does not come into judgment*, and (3) *has passed out of death into life*, John 5:24. There is a spiritual life on this earth that is beyond physical, human life. Demon and spirit activity is proof of that. In addition, there is an eternal life beyond our temporal lives. Jesus said to Martha, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* John 11:25-26. That same question can be asked of each of us ... *"Do you believe this?"* When we have believed in Jesus, we are truly children of God. Then, as His children, we are safe from all demonic forces in this physical life on earth ... and safe beyond the grave on into eternity.

A personal note from the author. I am not obsessed with the demonic. However, I do know that Jesus took all of this very seriously and therefore, I do as well. I have encountered the demonic in my life more than a few times.

At first, one encounter may seem coincidental. Once when my wife and young children were at home, I was in a nearby city teaching about Satan. An example that I mentioned was that of Satan using lightning to destroy Job's servants and sheep, Job 1:16. During the exact time that I was teaching that lesson, lightning struck my home. Was it a coincidence?

Another encounter happened at a home near New York City. As I entered through the front door, I felt an evil presence in that place. It felt strangely odd and oppressive. I watched as others came through the door. Each person's demeanor visibly came down after crossing the threshold. As each person entered, smiling faces turned somber ... and laughter slipped into silence. I had been in that house many times before without any such manifestations. I wondered why this was happening on that particular evening. The woman of the home interrupted my thoughts by calling me into her kitchen to meet a friend ... a practicing witch.

In another instance several years later, a demon-possessed man attended a conference in which I was the Bible teacher. I was an English-only foreigner at that conference. Not speaking their language, I depended on translators. The demon-possessed man had been excommunicated from the Church of Satan. To be re-instated, he needed to acquire blood from a particular young Christian woman who was at the conference. On a Friday evening, in the back of a crowded church, he was groaning like an animal and sweating profusely. I began an exorcism through an interpreter ... because the possessed man and I spoke different languages. In the name of Jesus, I told him (in English) that he must “*confess that Jesus has come in the flesh from God,*” (from 1 John 4:2). I expected the interpreter would translate for us ... my words to the man and then his response to me. Instead, the demon in the man instantly responded in perfect English, “*I never will!*” I know that the powers of Satan and evil spirits are real. But I know that the power of God is greater. Later that evening, the demon was driven out of that man. Then the man became a true child of God by believing in Jesus. All of this is very serious and dangerous. Do not take this lightly ... it is real.

Your action plan:

Demonic activity is a real and present danger. Stand firm against it. “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places,*” Ephesians 6:10-12. If you are personally experiencing spiritual appearances of any kind, or are troubled by demonic forces in any way, the two steps below will show you the path to safety and freedom.

Step 1. Begin by visiting www.911GOD.org to learn how to be safe in this life and safe beyond the grave. Visit that site to learn how to be sure about your relationship with God ... to learn how to *believe in Jesus*. That is the one and only starting point.

Step 2. When you are sure that you are God's child, you may want to contact the author of this site at the email address below for further help.

This eSeeker answer, copyright 2014 et al., may be copied, linked, or posted unchanged, but only with this source and copyright statement attached ... and only for free, or at-cost, distribution. It is from www.eSeeker.org and is produced by www.ActsOneEight.org. Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. For further information, or to suggest a question, please e-mail contact@eSeeker.org. You may contact the author of eSeeker at John@JohnDMorris.org. To be sure of your relationship with God, please visit www.911GOD.org.