

REMNANT RADIO

“Are Ghosts Real? A Biblical View”

10.16.24 Episode: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RMm7ynvXCg>

1. Definition of a Ghost:

A ghost is typically defined as the disembodied spirit or soul of a deceased person that is believed to appear to the living, often in a visible form or as a shadowy figure. In folklore and popular culture, ghosts are thought to linger on earth due to unfinished business, unresolved emotions, or as a result of violent deaths.

Surveys reveal that nearly half of twenty-first-century Americans believe in ghosts, and a quarter of Americans claim to have experienced them directly. - A Magical World Matthew McGuire

2. Early Mythology About Ghosts:

In his study of Mesopotamian ghost lore, British Museum curator Irving Finkel establishes not only continuity of belief in the existences of ghosts but also congruence of belief about their attributes.

He explains that these phantoms of the dead "tend to be restless due to unhappiness, returning to a scene of their former life and seeking closure for injustice, cruelty or violence." Several millennia later, beliefs about the "unquiet dead" have not significantly changed. Finkel continues:

“One feature that often surfaces today is the truly ancient idea that ghosts return to the spot where they once lived, or where they had come to a premature end. They still are, it seems, unhappy or unable to rest, tied somehow to the 'scene of the crime' in an effort to assuage malaise or seek closure on injustice. This broad 'explanation' recurs so regularly in such widely differing contexts that it could be seen as a central component of the whole modern ghost tradition. What fascinates me is the overlap with the ancient Babylonian view at the beginning of it all.” - Irving Finkel

3. Biblical Foundation:

- **No explicit affirmation of ghosts:** The Bible does not clearly affirm the existence of ghosts as disembodied human spirits roaming the earth. Passages like Hebrews 9:27 suggest that after death comes judgment, implying that the dead do not linger on earth: “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”
- **Apparitions in the Bible:** While "ghosts" in the modern sense aren't directly supported, there are biblical accounts of apparitions or spirits. For instance:
- **Prohibition of speaking to the dead:** The prohibitions against speaking to the dead in Leviticus 19:31; 20:27 and Deuteronomy 18:9-11 imply that communication with the dead was seen as possible, otherwise, there would be no need for such a ban. These laws were aimed at preventing Israel from engaging in necromancy and related practices that were common in surrounding cultures. While the practice is condemned, the prohibition indirectly acknowledges the belief that contacting the dead could occur, which is why it is strictly forbidden as a violation of devotion to God.

REMNANT RADIO

- **Samuel's spirit** (1 Samuel 28): The Witch of Endor supposedly conjures the prophet Samuel's spirit, a debated and mysterious passage often cited by those wondering about ghosts.
- **Moses and Elijah with Jesus** (Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36): In the Transfiguration, Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah, who appear in a glorified form. This event, where they appear on the Mount with Christ, is often cited when discussing apparitions of departed individuals.
- **The Disciples May Have Believed in Ghosts (Matthew 14:26; Mark 6:49; Luke 24:37)** These verses suggest that the disciples may have believed in the existence of ghosts or had some cultural concept of spirits. When they saw Jesus walking on water, they did not immediately recognize Him and assumed they were seeing a ghost (Greek: phantasma), a term often associated with apparitions or supernatural beings. Their reaction of fear shows that they likely shared the common Jewish or Greco-Roman superstitions of the time, which included beliefs in spirits and apparitions of the dead. This indicates that even among Jesus' closest followers, belief in or fear of ghosts was part of their cultural context.
- **Peter's Angel (ie Ghost)** In Acts 12:15, when the disciples say "It is his angel" in response to Rhoda's claim that Peter is at the door, some scholars suggest this could be interpreted as referring to Peter's ghost. Some Second Temple Jewish literature hints at the belief that the righteous could become celestial beings, or angels, after death. This idea, seen in texts like the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish writings, reflects the possibility that "Peter's angel" could be understood as his ghost—his spirit now angelic after death. Therefore, the disciples might have believed that Peter had been killed, and what Rhoda saw was not Peter in the flesh but his angelic spirit or ghost, reflecting this early Jewish concept of the dead becoming angelic beings.
 - **1. Talmudic View - Equality with Angels:**
 - "The righteous are greater than the ministering angels, and even Israel, in general, is capable of becoming equal to angels and of resembling them." (Talmud, Shabbat 88b)
 - "Equality to angels can be achieved only after death. There is also the opinion that at the end of days, the righteous will rank above the angels and that the angels will learn the mysteries of heaven from the righteous." (Talmud, TJ Shabbat 6:10, 8d)
 - **2. Book of Enoch - The Righteous in Heavenly Glory:**
 - "But now I swear to you, righteous ones, by the glory of the Great One and by His kingdom, which I swear was created and shall not pass away... And the righteous will be luminous as the stars and will shine forth as celestial beings forever and ever." (1 Enoch 104:2-4)

REMNANT RADIO

▪ 3. Dead Sea Scrolls - Ascension of the Righteous:

- "They shall walk in perfection, for all the ages of eternity, in glorious company with the heavenly host." (1QS 11:7-8)

4. Ghosts in Apocryphal Writings:

- **Book Of Enoch** "And now, the giants who are produced from the spirits and flesh, shall be called evil spirits upon the earth, and on the earth shall be their dwelling. Evil spirits have proceeded from their bodies; because they are born from men, and from the holy Watchers is their beginning and primal origin; they shall be evil spirits on earth, and evil spirits shall they be called.

9 As for the spirits of heaven, in heaven shall be their dwelling, but as for the spirits of the earth which were born upon the earth, on the earth shall be their dwelling.

10 And the spirits of the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle, and work destruction on the earth and cause trouble; they take no food, but nevertheless hunger and thirst and cause offenses.

11 And these spirits shall rise up against the children of men and against the women, because they have proceeded from them.

12 From the days of the slaughter and destruction and death of the giants, from the souls of whose flesh the spirits, having gone forth, shall destroy without incurring judgment - thus shall they destroy until the day of the consummation, the great judgment in which the age shall be consummated, over the Watchers and the godless, yea, shall be wholly consummated." -1 Enoch 15:8-12 (R. H. Charles Translation)

5. Ghosts in Christian History:

- **Gregory of Nyssa** (circa 335-394 AD), in his writings, noted that spirits of the dead, particularly those with unresolved ties to the physical world, might continue to appear near their graves:
 - "Some assert that around their graves, shadowy phantoms of the departed are often seen... the soul hovers regretfully over the place where its material is, and continues to haunt it." (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*)
- **Augustine of Hippo:** Augustine rejected the idea that human souls could wander the earth as ghosts. He believed that once a person died, their soul either went to heaven or hell, and any apparitions claiming to be a human spirit were likely deceptive demonic entities. Augustine stressed that seeking out or consulting such spirits was forbidden by Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).
 - "But among the heathen, learned and unlearned, there is so great a delusion in this matter that they imagine the souls of the dead to be present in sepulchers where the bodies are buried, and there to be propitiated by gifts and sacrifices, as if they could live with the dead, and those dead that are at rest. Nor can it be believed that the souls of the dead are at liberty to wander about wherever they please, but are retained in places suited to them by the merit of their lives, whether good or bad. But the spirits which are

REMNANT RADIO

seen by men, whether they appear in dreams or otherwise, must be held to be either angels, who, for some righteous purpose, have taken upon them the likeness of those whom we mourn, or else some spirits of the dead, either the good permitted to do so for the consolation of the living, or the wicked deceiving them to entrap them in pernicious error." (*City of God*, Book 21, Chapter 10)

- **Thomas Aquinas:** Aquinas explored the nature of spirits, angels, and demons in his *Summa Theologica*. He argued that while angels and demons could interact with the material world, the souls of the dead were confined to either heaven, purgatory (in Catholic teaching), or hell. Like Augustine, he was skeptical about the possibility of human ghosts but allowed that supernatural beings (demons) could sometimes imitate human figures to deceive people.
 - "It is clear that the souls of the departed are not permitted to leave their abode after death, save by the special disposition of divine providence, either for some man's instruction or for some work of divine power. For instance, as we are told in the life of the Fathers (Bk. IV, ch. 7), the soul of one Paschasius appeared to Gerontius, and informed him of the state of souls after death. But such like apparitions occur seldom, and by the special dispensation of God, nor is it in the power of souls themselves to leave their abode when they will." - *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 89, Article 8:
- **Martin Luther:** Luther had strong views against the idea of ghosts. He saw apparitions and hauntings as demonic deceptions. For Luther, ghosts were not the spirits of the dead but manifestations of the devil aiming to deceive people or distract them from faith in Christ.
 - "The Scriptures show plainly enough that the spirits of the departed do not wander among the living, nor do they appear to them. For the souls of the pious rest in peace in the hands of God, as it is written in the Wisdom of Solomon (3:1), 'But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.' On the other hand, the souls of the wicked are tormented in hell. No good or pious spirit ever appeared in such manner; it was always the devil or some wicked ghost, assuming the shape of the dead, to deceive the living. For God permits the devil to do this in order to test and try men, as we see in the instance of Saul and the witch of Endor, who conjured up Samuel." - *Table Talk*, entry DCCCLXVII,

6. Modern Theological Interpretations of Ghosts:

- **C.S. Lewis:** In *The Great Divorce* and other writings, Lewis explored the afterlife and spiritual entities but did not support the idea of ghosts as human spirits wandering the earth. He held that at death, human souls either moved toward God or away from Him, with no lingering on earth. Like many theologians, Lewis thought that "ghost" sightings were likely either psychological phenomena or, in rare cases, demonic activity.
 - "We must also remember that the closer we are to the truth, the more subtle the deceptions may be. The enemy does not only attack with obvious falsehoods; rather, he is a master of disguise, often masquerading as an angel of light. The more we believe that God is good, the more we must believe that the appearance of His enemies, who are not good, may be deceptive. For the very nature of evil is that it is a perversion of the good. Evil is not

REMNANT RADIO

original; it is derivative, parasitic, and therefore its most dangerous aspect is its mimicry of good. We are not surprised to find that what is truly evil may appear in forms that seem benign or even comforting, for evil thrives on pretense. Thus, it may well be that what people interpret as 'ghosts' are demonic deceptions, disguises crafted to mislead us into confusion or fear, or even into a false sense of comfort. The spiritual world, much like the physical, contains both light and dark. Just as not all that glitters is gold, so not all that appears spiritual is from God...

...This, then, is the danger: that we accept without question what seems to be supernatural merely because it is beyond our understanding. The devil is not above using the mysterious to deceive us. We are called, therefore, to test every spirit, as Scripture instructs (1 John 4:1), to discern its source and whether it is truly from God. To do otherwise is to risk being led into error, allowing our fascination with the supernatural to overcome our reliance on the truth of God's Word. Not all that is paranormal should be trusted or welcomed with open arms, for deception is a hallmark of the evil one, and he will use every means at his disposal to lead us astray." (*Miracles*, Chapter 7)

- **N.T. Wright:** Wright emphasizes the biblical view of bodily resurrection and rejects popular notions of disembodied spirits remaining on earth. In his writings, Wright underscores that Christian hope is in resurrection, not in a shadowy existence as a ghost. Wright attributes many ghost stories to psychological or cultural explanations rather than actual supernatural events.
 - "The Christian hope is not about leaving this present world and 'going to heaven' but about the resurrection of the body into God's new creation. The interim period, while the dead are 'asleep in the Lord,' is a time of rest and refreshment, not a time of wandering around as disembodied spirits. Paul speaks of being 'with Christ, which is far better,' but this is not the final state. It is a restful and conscious presence with the Lord, while we await the great day of resurrection. When God finally acts to renew and restore the whole of creation, He will raise His people from the dead to live in it as fully embodied beings, not disembodied souls." (*Surprised by Hope*, p. 183)
 - "Popular Christian imagination still seems haunted by the old idea of 'souls in heaven' and 'spirits floating around.' But the New Testament is quite clear: the Christian hope is bodily resurrection. The early Christians did not believe that the souls of the dead were floating around waiting to be reunited with their bodies. Instead, they believed in a period of rest and peace with the Lord until the final day, when God would transform the present world and give His people new, glorious, resurrected bodies to inhabit it. Stories of ghosts are often just misunderstandings or psychological projections, influenced more by cultural folklore than by biblical teaching. What matters is that in Christ, death is defeated, not as an escape from the body, but as the transformation of both body and soul." (*Surprised by Hope*, p. 145)

REMNANT RADIO

- **Wayne Grudem:** Grudem, in his Systematic Theology, argues that humans do not return to earth as spirits after death. He sees the biblical passages referencing the fate of the soul after death as final, thus dismissing the possibility of human spirits appearing as ghosts. Any supernatural experiences of “ghosts” are, for Grudem, likely to be demonic in origin.
 - "At death, the souls of believers go immediately into God's presence and experience conscious fellowship with Him, while the souls of unbelievers are in immediate conscious punishment. Paul speaks of this clearly when he says, 'to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord' (2 Corinthians 5:8), and Jesus also said to the thief on the cross, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). There is no hint in Scripture that the souls of believers or unbelievers remain on earth or are given any ability to linger. Rather, there is a clear division between the realm of the living and the dead. There is no scriptural evidence to suggest that human souls remain on earth after death or are allowed to wander. Any such experiences of 'ghosts' or appearances of deceased people should be interpreted as demonic deceptions designed to mislead or terrify people. These apparitions are not the spirits of deceased individuals but are often a work of the enemy, using fear and confusion to lead people away from truth and toward superstition." - (Systematic Theology, Chapter 41, p. 816)
 - "The Bible teaches clearly that people do not return to the world of the living after death (Heb. 9:27). We see this truth reinforced again and again in Scripture, where after death there is either rest with the Lord or separation from Him. This is why Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) teaches that there is a great chasm fixed between the righteous and the unrighteous after death, with no passing between the two. Therefore, when someone claims to see a 'ghost' or some apparition of the dead, it is much more likely that the appearance is the work of a demonic spirit seeking to deceive and create fear. These spirits are not the souls of the dead, for once someone has died, their fate is sealed. We must be careful to discern and to reject superstitious interpretations of such occurrences, knowing that God's Word provides clarity on the finality of death and the fate of souls." (Systematic Theology, Chapter 43, p. 828)"