

Spiritualism Exposed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 9:5; Isa. 8:19, 20; John 11:11–14, 21–25; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 16:13, 14; Matt. 24:23–27; 2 Thess. 2:9–12.*

Memory Text: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (*1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, NKJV*).

Decades ago, stories surfaced about near death experiences (NDEs), in which people who died and were then revived gave incredible accounts of what they had seen and heard while “dead.” Millions now believe that these accounts are evidence that the dead are not really dead. This foundational belief of spiritualism is one of Satan’s most widespread and effective deceptions.

In fact, spiritualism began back in Eden with the serpent’s lie to Eve, “You will not surely die” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). This idea also lay at the root of one of the greatest spurious religious movements of the nineteenth century with the Fox sisters’ claim, later admitted to be fraudulent, that they could receive answers to their questions from spirits of the dead.

The aim of this lesson is to show that our only safeguard against Satan’s last-day delusions is a personal relationship with Christ and a solid grounding in the teachings of the Bible. This includes its teaching about death, regardless of what our eyes and ears and hearts might try to tell us.

* *Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 31–34 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, June 8.*

The Deadly Consequences of Spiritualism

The fable that death is really just entrance to a new stage of life is based on the concept of the soul's natural immortality. This pagan idea infiltrated the church early on as it moved away from its biblical foundations in an attempt to make its faith understandable to the wider Roman world. "The theory of the immortality of the soul was one of those false doctrines that Rome, borrowing from paganism, incorporated into the religion of Christendom."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 549.

“ ‘And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ ” (Matt. 10:28, NKJV).

What should this verse alone tell us about the supposed immortality of the soul?

The Lord forbade His people from involvement in occultism of any kind. They were not to tolerate among them “a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead” (*Deut. 18:11, NKJV*). Such people were to be stoned to death (*Lev. 20:27*). The punishment seems incredibly harsh, but it was designed to protect Israel from worshiping false gods.

Witchcraft is demonic. It seduces people into false worship and counterfeits a genuine relationship with God, but it can never satisfy the deepest needs of the heart. Spiritualism is at the heart of Satan's plan to take the world captive. But Jesus, by His grace and power, sets captives free from the chains of evil that bind them.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 7:7–9; and Isaiah 8:19, 20. What do these Bible passages teach us about death and communication with the dead?

Though unbiblical, the belief that the dead go right to heaven at death has been around for so long and is so firmly entrenched that it's very difficult for people to let go of it. People use a few texts that are taken out of context to try to justify the belief. But this false teaching leaves them with no protection against the deceptions Satan can foist on them, especially in the final crisis.

What has been your experience with trying to explain the state of the dead to other Christians? What, if anything, have you found effective?

Death in the Old Testament

Read Psalm 6:5, Psalm 115:17, 1 Kings 2:10, 1 Kings 11:43, and 1 Kings 14:20. What do these verses teach about the state of the dead?

The Old Testament does not teach the immortality of the soul. Nor does it teach that after death the faithful soar off to the bliss of heaven for eternity and the unfaithful descend to hell, where they burn for eternity. It teaches that death is a sleep. The book of Kings uses the expression “they rested [slept] with their fathers” to describe the death of the patriarchs. The Psalms call it the “sleep of death” (*Ps. 13:3; compare Ps. 90:5*). Referring to death, Job speaks of not awaking from sleep (*Job 14:12*). The psalmist adds, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (*Ps. 17:15, NKJV*).

When the Assyrian army was defeated and destroyed, the death of the soldiers is called their “final sleep” (*Ps. 76:6, CJB*). The idea of the dead as disembodied spirits hovering around to communicate with the living is not a biblical concept at all but pure paganism.

A failure to understand the truth about death leaves us open to the deceptions of Satan. “Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

Read Daniel 12:2 and Job 19:25, 26. What elements about the state of the dead are added by these verses?

Death is a rest in sleep until the resurrection. There are no disembodied spirits hovering around to communicate with the living. Although the pagans believed in a spirit world, the Israelites understood death as a sleep until resurrection morning.

Though we mourn for the dead, think this way about those who die in Christ: they close their eyes in death, and then, regardless of how long it takes until Jesus returns, the next thing they know is the Second Coming. The first thought they might have at the resurrection is *Wow! Jesus really did come back soon after all!*

Death in the New Testament

Read John 11:11–14, 21–25; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51–54; and 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17. How do the New Testament writers' descriptions of death compare with those in the Old Testament?

Both the Old and New Testaments use the symbolism of death as a sleep. At least 53 times in the Bible, the word “sleep” is equated with death. The Bible writers concur that there is no conscious existence in an immortal soul that leaves the body immediately after death.

The New Testament adds another dimension, one already hinted at in the Old: the glorious resurrection at Christ's return.

The Gospels emphasize that eternal life is in Christ alone. All the demons in hell cannot rob believers of their assurance of eternal life. Christ conquered death on the cross. The grave can no longer hold its victims. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee that all believers will one day be resurrected from the grave at His return.

Look at these words of Paul: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:16–18, NKJV*). How does one make any sense of these verses if the dead, at death, already are in the bliss of heaven? What does Paul mean that they “have perished” if, in fact, they already are in heaven?

Instead, Paul's whole point is that Christ's resurrection is the foundation of our resurrection and that without the Resurrection, “your faith is futile; you are still in your sins,” and the dead remain in the ground, perished.

These verses fit in perfectly with other Bible texts about the hope we have in the resurrection at Jesus' return when we will receive the “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (*1 Pet. 1:4, NKJV*). If, however, the dead already are in heaven, why does Peter speak of an inheritance “reserved in heaven” for us? Clearly, New Testament believers eagerly looked forward to the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, and this hope inspired them to faithfulness in the trials of life.

Why is the resurrection such a powerful hope for the Christian faith? What if we had the cross but no resurrection? What hope would we have? Why, then, is the resurrection such an important part of our faith?

Spiritualism in the Last Days: Part 1

Read Matthew 24:5, 11, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:7–9; Revelation 13:13, 14; and Revelation 16:13, 14. What kind of deceptions will people face in the last days?

The devil will use “signs and wonders” and spectacular miracles to deceive multitudes just before the coming of Jesus. Commenting on the deceptive power of demonic spirits, Ángel Rodríguez makes this telling statement: “Their power of persuasion is to be found not in the content of their message but in the power of supernatural manifestations called ‘signs’ or ‘miracles.’ They perform/do (*poieō*) signs, thus appealing to the affective side of human beings rather than to their discretionary and rational abilities. The fact that these signs are performed by demons shows that the unifying force of the message of the three demons [dragon, beast, and false prophet] is spiritualistic in nature—God is not their source or origin. As the cosmic conflict approaches its closure, demonic power will enter the arena of human history in an unprecedented way. Spiritualism, whose very foundation is the non-biblical teaching of the immortality of the soul, will nearly take the world captive.”—“The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

Why is it dangerous to trust our emotions? What roles do they play, good and bad, in our faith experience? How might Satan bypass our thinking processes and appeal to our feelings?

“Satan has long been preparing for his final effort to deceive the world. . . . Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. . . . Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in His word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion. The people are fast being lulled to a fatal security, to be awakened only by the outpouring of the wrath of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 561, 562.

Our sole security is in Jesus and His Word. It’s not hard to see how millions, even billions, who do not understand the state of the dead could be swept away by delusions involving the idea that the dead live on after death.

Even now, what are some common deceptions that those who understand that the dead sleep are protected from?

Spiritualism in the Last Days: Part 2

Our hope of salvation is rooted in Christ. His bloodstained hands beckon us to accept the sacrifice so freely provided at infinite cost. Soon Christ will return to claim His own. Titus 2:13 calls the second coming of Christ “the blessed hope.”

Satan’s goal is to destroy this hope. He will perform miracles, signs, and wonders, anything and everything that could lead people away from Bible truth and salvation in Christ.

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). In the final struggle, Satan is going to do all that he can to prevent people from either keeping the “commandments of God” or having “the faith of Jesus,” or both. Hence, the need to be careful of any teaching that, even if accompanied by signs, wonders, and miracles, would turn us away from either of these two characteristics of the remnant.

Read Matthew 24:23–27; 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14; and 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12. What do these passages tell us about Satan’s deceptive power and manner of working?

In the last moments of time, Satan will enact his final deception: “Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons. The spirits of devils will go forth to the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to fasten them in deception, and urge them on to unite with Satan in his last struggle against the government of heaven. By these agencies, rulers and subjects will be alike deceived. Persons will arise pretending to be Christ Himself, and claiming the title and worship which belong to the world’s Redeemer. They will perform wonderful miracles of healing and will profess to have revelations from heaven *contradicting the testimony of the Scriptures*.”

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour’s advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13–15.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624 (emphasis supplied).

Why is understanding the truth about how Christ returns, as well as the state of the dead, so important in order not to be deceived?

Further Thought: A recent book by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven*, is premised on the idea that, at death, the dead remain alive in some kind of conscious existence, with “near death experiences” (NDEs) being used as part of the “proof.” One example: “Another girl, who had an NDE during heart surgery, said she met her brother in the afterlife—which surprised her because she didn’t have a brother. When she later recovered and told her father, he revealed to her for the first time that she did, indeed, have a brother, but he had died before she was born.”—Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2021), p. 69. Strobel struggles, however, to harmonize the idea of an immediate afterlife with the clear biblical teaching that only when Christ returns do Christians receive their final reward.

We have been warned: “Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.

“Just before us is ‘the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.’ Revelation 3:10. All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome. Satan ‘works with all deceivableness of unrighteousness’ to gain control of the children of men, and his deceptions will continually increase. But he can gain his object only as men voluntarily yield to his temptations. Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth and are striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defense. ‘Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee’ (verse 10), is the Saviour’s promise. He would sooner send every angel out of heaven to protect His people than leave one soul that trusts in Him to be overcome by Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What subtle spiritualistic influences might Satan be using to influence the mind? What role does mass media play?
- ② How would you share your faith with a friend who just lost a loved one and believed that this person was in heaven? What is appropriate to say, and what is not appropriate?

Unreached Town in Nigeria

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The Nigerian town of Umuacha is located at a strategic crossroads. The town boasts a big market that attracts daily crowds from neighboring towns. But it lacked a Seventh-day Adventist church.

The absence of an Adventist church was astonishing because Adventist churches had been established more than 70 years earlier in all of the surrounding towns. Even the headquarters of the Adventist Church's Aba North Conference was located nearby. But Umuacha had no church.

Why?

The first church opened in Umuacha more than 80 years earlier, and it resolved to be the only church in town. As the years passed, however, townspeople sold their land to outsiders who, in turn, constructed their own churches. The oldest church accepted the newcomers, but all declared that Adventists, who worshiped on a different day, would never be welcome.

Adventist churches in the neighboring towns struggled to reach Umuacha. When they sought to organize evangelistic meetings, no one would give them a meeting place. Hopes were raised when the church in nearby Mba conducted a two-week evangelistic meeting outside the town and afterward opened a branch Sabbath School. But the Sabbath School closed after only three months. Later, Mba young people held Bible studies that brought several Umuacha families to the Mba church on Sabbaths. But the families stopped attending when their neighbors threw stones at them.

In 2021, the Aba North Conference laid new plans for evangelistic meetings in Umuacha but again struggled to find a site. One landowner agreed to host tent meetings but then abruptly changed his mind. Additional attempts provided unsuccessful that year and in 2022. It seemed hopeless.

Then a church member, Christian, made a new attempt to find a site. While searching, he met Chilaka, the owner of a school.

"You who are running around, what are you looking for?" the school owner asked.

"It seems that I am looking for you," Christian replied.

After a discussion, the school owner offered the property for the meetings. Christian gratefully accepted.

For a month, Adventist preachers proclaimed the Word of God in Umuacha. They were joined by a medical team that cared for the sick. In the end, 29 precious souls were baptized. Then someone donated land, and an Adventist church opened in Umuacha.

"Today, the church is progressing to the glory of God," said Caleb Uchenna Onyendi, evangelism director for the Aba North Conference.

God's timing is perfect, he added, pointing to Exodus 9:5, which says, "Then the LORD appointed a set time, saying, 'Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land' " (NKJV). The Lord did just that in the town of Umuacha.