

*“For the things that are seen are
transient, but the things that
are unseen are eternal.”*

2 Corinthians 4:18

God and the Paranormal

God and the Paranormal
The Christian's Guide to Ghosts, UFOs,
Sasquatch, Psychics, Miracles, and Other
Stranger Things

John Daniel McWilliams

Rose Rock Media

God and the Paranormal: The Christian's Guide to Ghosts, UFOs, Sasquatch, Psychics, Miracles, and Other Stranger Things

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Quick-Start Page

Some ways to use this book...

Good – Use as a reference text, locating sections with immediate relevance. In addition to the table of contents, an index and glossary are included for locating and understanding specific topics.

Better – For a framework introduction to the paranormal and the biblical worldview, read the following: 1-6, Appendix B, then selected chapters of interest.

Best – This book presents many principles used to understand the paranormal and its relationship to the biblical worldview. Much of the material builds on previous concepts. For the most effective use, read all the chapters in order.

Some general principles presented in this book...

The PICKLE PRINCIPLE... In a collection of alleged paranormal data, most or all the incidents may be explained by natural means, however, that doesn't preclude the fact that some incidents in the collection *could* be paranormal.

The EPHESIANS HYPOTHESIS (derived from Ephesians 6)...

- There is an unseen realm beyond the one in which we live.
- Spirits from that unseen realm are able to interact with our world.
- Our primary struggle is with fallen spirits from this unseen realm.
- Fallen spirits are evil, scheming, and set on doing us harm.
- We can and should be prepared to recognize and withstand these fallen spirits.

The COULD HE? WOULD HE? Test... When questioning whether God might be intervening supernaturally, first ask "Is this consistent with the nature of God?" If so, then ask "Is this typically the way God does it, or is there usually a more natural means?" *You may be witnessing something supernatural, but probably not.*

God and the Paranormal

PART I
A Tale of Two Realms

1

The Allure of the Supernatural

“...deep in the human heart there are these desires—to experience the supernatural, to escape death, to know love that we can never lose, to not age but live long enough to realize our creative dreams, to fly, to communicate with nonhuman beings, to triumph over evil.” Timothy Keller ¹

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

1 Corinthians 2:9

Fantasies, legends, fairy tales, myths—cultural universals that often tell the human story better than our history books. Some claim that our draw toward the eccentric, our yearning for the happily-ever-after, and our craving for mystery are crutches contrived for an aimless, nihilistic world. I believe differently.

Our Creator could have placed us as spirit beings hovering in the endless space surrounding him, ever in rapt communion with him, absorbed in his loving attention. But he didn't...

I have no doubt this would have worked idyllically, but in a burst of divine creativity, the Most High amazed his angelic observers. God embedded us, his image-bearers, in a Story—yet not as a mere afterthought. We were *specifically* designed to fit into the narrative, originating in the Creator's mind and playing out in a physical world. We can move, interact, imagine, sense, wonder, search, decide, and *live*

¹ Timothy Keller, *Hidden Christmas*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 25.

the Story. Much of Jesus's teaching was in a story form. He was certainly aware that humans understand truths housed within narratives more easily than we do strings of characters in a databank.²

Like our Designer (who even entered his own Story), we're plot-oriented beings, enjoying quests and creativity. We're attracted to things that are unique, remarkable, and beyond the normal. Things that are unseen, yet right alongside the Story seem to tug at our souls. This isn't some malicious remnant of the Fall. Rather, it's a dynamic part of our eternal, creaturely nature.

But unfortunately, like the rest of our bent traits, our imaginations have also been corrupted. We demand miracles while God values faith. We replace the truly supernatural with paranormal counterfeits. We seek a divine experience when what we need is a divine relationship.

Our culture, and Christians in particular, drift toward two extremes when confronted with the supernatural. Some seem embarrassed by biblical miracles and go to great lengths to provide naturalistic explanations. Others are lured by tabloid paranormal claims, far-removed from reality. So why another book on the paranormal? Why should Christians focus on such fanciful, sideline topics when there are so many urgent issues facing the church today?

I'll admit up front that I'm intrigued by the fringe. I like *Star Trek*. I wish there really were Klingons somewhere out there. I've watched every season of *Ghost Whisperer*, bad theology and all. I think somewhere there's a highland castle with my name over the door. I hope I stumble into Bigfoot someday.

Perhaps this quirkiness is the very thing that has driven me over the years to ponder things outside of traditional science, yet still with rational moorings. Yes, I am a scientist—at least I play one at work. And I contend that my science training has worked quite well to balance what would otherwise become fanatical obsessions. My research (both fun and serious) into paranormal phenomena has revealed three timely issues...

1. A significant number of Christians sidestep the biblical view of the supernatural. These believers either dismiss the supernatural

² Some define this as a *metanarrative*, a “grand story” that gives meaning to the workings of our universe. This view is consistent with Scripture but is not popular in today's postmodern philosophy (see glossary).

completely or embrace the secular, pop-culture mix of paranormal notions. Both extremes are enticements to a new brand of false theology.

I believe the Church has the responsibility of equipping Christians with tools to think cogently, not just about theology, but about all areas of engagement. We are urged to always be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”³ As a scientist, I would never propose that we refuse to explore the unusual. That would be a death knell for empirical science. Scripture describes a supernatural realm that is interfaced with our physical domain. We should have the freedom to examine the evidence, and whatever the phenomenon, right-thinking—biblical, logical, and informed—*will* lead to truth.

2. Culture at large, and particularly our mission field, have an incoherent, non-biblical view of the supernatural, and thus, reality in general. The Apostle Paul knew when he presented the gospel to the Athenians, he was addressing a group with a load of supernatural and philosophical baggage. Understanding and accommodating their worldview was crucial in effectively evangelizing them.

3. Beliefs have consequences. Erroneous and unexamined ideas about the supernatural have become a significant factor in our world’s misunderstanding of important concepts such as faith, ethics, and morality. Wrong-thinking about the paranormal leads even some believers away from biblical truth and into deception, fear, and despair.

In the following chapters, we’ll examine selected paranormal phenomena that are relevant to the biblical worldview. I don’t claim that the topics included are equally worthy of consideration. A few are trivial or “fringe” but nevertheless, metastatic in our culture. As my criteria for selection I asked: 1) Is the idea engaging a significant portion of the culture? 2) Does the idea affect worldviews? 3) Does the biblical worldview address the idea?

³ 1 Peter 3:15

The goal of this book isn't necessarily to legitimize or solve paranormal mysteries, although as a scientist, I make no apologies for presenting my own hypotheses when appropriate. My hope is that this discussion will inform and strengthen the biblical view of our Story, and ultimately magnify its Author.

2

Whatever Happened to the Supernatural?

“Traditional Christian teaching has for centuries kept the unseen world at arm’s length. We believe in the Godhead because there’s no point to Christianity without it. The rest of the unseen world is handled with a whisper or a chuckle.” Michael Heiser⁴

“The mind which asks for a non-miraculous Christianity is a mind in process of relapsing from Christianity into mere religion.” C.S. Lewis⁵

In the early 1800s, Thomas Jefferson created his own new and improved (in his view) harmony of the four Gospels.⁶ In one of the first cut/paste word processing operations (literally—cutting up a Bible and reorganizing it) Jefferson produced *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, commonly called “The Jefferson Bible.” He purposely omitted all miracles and supernatural references, concentrating on the moral teachings of Jesus. This has caused quite some criticism over the past two centuries, although Jefferson claims his objective was simply to use the work in his personal devotions. Whatever the intent, it’s clear that Jefferson was uncomfortable with the supernatural.

⁴ Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

⁵ C.S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 420.

⁶ *Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia*, www.monticello.org, 2019.

We would certainly expect the secular world to hold a wide range of beliefs about the supernatural.⁷ There are plenty of disbelieving naturalists on one end of the spectrum with glassy-eyed mystics on the other and everything imaginable in-between. It's disturbing, however, when Christianity's response, like Jefferson's, is to slice out those "embarrassing" miracles and narrow the focus exclusively to the physical.

While talk shows and paperbacks make millions peddling the supernatural, mainline Christianity seems to treat it as a pimple on the face of the gospel. Some pastors (and even entire denominations) tend to teach "around" the miraculous... "Surely there's a natural explanation to neutralize the awkwardness of a talking donkey (Numbers 22) or a natural reason for the delay of a sunset (2 Kings 20). When the Red Sea parted (Exodus 14) wasn't that just an exaggeration of the annual drought cycle? And that big fish story (Jonah 1)—isn't it just an allegory?"

Christian discourse today seems quite pleased to limit biblical supernatural elements to a nebulous deity, a naturalistic creation, and an allegorical resurrection. I believe this fragmented, schizophrenic perspective of the supernatural has seriously disabled the view of reality held by many Christians. Our hymns and creeds readily affirm a transcendent, intervening Creator, but on Monday, a vague once-upon-a-time creation event is more tolerable. We ease our "miracle-anxiety" with a clockwork, cause-and-effect physical universe that is comfortably explainable. When cornered by the supernatural, we often rush to make up arbitrary rules about it, then struggle to make them fit the visible universe. Bland, deconstructed scriptural miracles fit more smoothly into secular conversations, as we keep the supernatural at a safe distance, tucked far away in time and space.⁸ Michael Heiser rightly notes...

⁷ The TV series *The X-Files* offers a smorgasbord of paranormal scenarios. I'm not advocating binge-watching it all, but it does seem to be almost a metaphor for our current supernatural confusion. Throughout the hodge-podge collection of paranormal episodes, the viewer senses a common thread. Some believe, some don't, some "want to believe."

⁸ Another segment of contemporary Christianity pushes the view of the supernatural to the other extreme. In growing numbers, these believers pursue transcendent experiences as a regular component of worship. There is certainly nothing wrong with the Spirit-led desire for the miraculous, but not at the expense of balanced spiritual discipline. According to Heiser

...many Christians claim to believe in the supernatural but think (and live) like skeptics. We find talk of the supernatural world uncomfortable.⁹

It seems ironic that one could believe an almighty Creator spoke into nothingness and an entire universe sprang into existence, then doubt that the same Creator can create new limbs on a paraplegic. Can a Creator who designed the DNA of a vine, then swirled a solar system so that fruits grow in the sunshine of a balanced ecosystem, not be able to change molecules of water into molecules of wine? When God chooses to intervene miraculously, it's neither harder nor easier for him than creating the cause-and-effect universe in which he intervenes. To the motion of the smallest subatomic particle, he remains sovereign over his creation.

Our problems with miracles are directly proportional to problems with our view of God himself. As J.B. Phillips chided, “Your God is too small!”¹⁰ Yet this is occurring despite the most intimate indication of the supernatural. Within our very souls—our inner selves—we feel hopelessly entangled with the transcendent. We sense that the Story *must* have a sequel beyond the front and back covers of the present plot.

I don't follow the naturalists' line that this experience is merely the psychological result of some evolutionary survival trait. Scripture informs us that God has “set eternity in the human heart.”¹¹ The thought of an absolute “final page” is foreign to our spiritual DNA. We can understand a change from *this* to *that*, or *here* to *there*, but not *something* to *nothing*. One of the characters in the play *Our Town* sums it up...

We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars...

this group is “so busy seeking some interaction with [the supernatural] that it has become unconcerned with its biblical moorings...” In the end, contrived or exaggerated “miracles” lead away from scriptural truth as effectively as naturalism.

⁹ Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, p. 17.

¹⁰ J.B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1952).

¹¹ Ecclesiastes 3:11.

everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings.¹²

And certainly not to be overlooked, true believers have the very Spirit of God living within. In some incomprehensible, yet palpable way, his Spirit communicates with ours. God graciously provides the gift of an immediate connection to *his* supernatural realm.

Roots of Doubt

Much of our supernatural apprehension can be traced to the emphasis on scientism that emerged during the Age of Enlightenment.¹³ The shift from God-centered to man-centered paradigms in many different disciplines concentrated our thinking on material explanations rather than those unseen. Empirical thought became the preferred source of truth over mere faith and tradition...

The liberalism of [the nineteenth century] denied all of the supernatural elements of the Christian faith, including the virgin birth of Jesus, His miracles, His atoning death, and His resurrection. The supernatural was stripped altogether from Christianity.¹⁴

It's doubtful that many would want to rewind all the changes brought by the Enlightenment. Antibiotics are my first choice for treating strep. Yes, I pray for healing, but I usually don't have to resort to exorcising a spirit of sickness. And good scientific reasoning has clearly revealed much about the creation. Many scientists eagerly used the scientific method as a tool of theology. At the dawn of this Age of Reason, Johannes Kepler saw this new empirical science as "thinking

¹² Thornton Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, (U.S.: HarperCollins,1938).

¹³ As opposed to pure scientific methods and objective conclusions, scientism refers to the philosophy that advocates empiricism to the exclusion of other ways of knowing.

¹⁴ R.C. Sproul, "Christianity is a Supernatural Faith," www.ligonier.org, Nov 11, 2013.

God's thought after him."¹⁵ Nonetheless, the miraculous in large part has taken a backseat to the natural.

From 1985 to 2006, a group of Bible scholars and lay leaders met under the name *The Jesus Seminar*. Their objective was to determine which of the "Jesus accounts" in the Bible were true. The group of Christians essentially accomplished what Jefferson had done previously, namely, eliminating any associations of Jesus with the supernatural.

A more recent contributing factor has been the rise of the militant "new atheist religion" and their "deacons" within the naturalistic scientist congregation. A relatively small band of outspoken atheists has disproportionately muzzled many in academia, especially seminaries. Christian professors, scientists, pastors, and lay-thinkers, in general, are often bullied by the politically correct leanings of their peers. It's far easier to ignore biblical super-nature and dwell on social engagement.

To the dismay of leaders within radical atheism, most of those who identify as non-theist still seem to sense and believe in something beyond.¹⁶ But even though belief in the transcendent is widespread, a significant problem remains. Without a genuine relationship with the supernatural Christ of Scripture, unregenerate humans tend to seek some other path of transcendence, usually one without that old-fashioned sin-and-accountability stigma.

And adding to the confusion, many within mainline churches follow suit. They feel that the transcendent is undeniable, but distorted and human-oriented experiences seem to offer a better and easier way to pursue the supernatural.

One recent study revealed that belief in the biblical supernatural has no bearing on a person's belief in the non-biblical paranormal.¹⁷ In other words, the average American could believe in God *and* ghosts with no notable contradictions. Other polls regarding ghosts, UFOs, and

¹⁵ Johannes Kepler, "A letter to the Bavarian chancellor Herwart von Hohenburg," 1599. Likely a paraphrase of "Those laws [of science] are within the grasp of the human mind; God wanted us to recognize them by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his own thoughts."

¹⁶ John Templeton Foundation, "Towards a Psychology and Sociology of Atheism and Non-belief," www.templeton.org, 2019.

¹⁷ Tom W. Rice, "Believe It or Not: Religious and Other Paranormal Beliefs in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2003, 42(1), 95-106.

the paranormal in general, reveal that there isn't even a significant difference between believers and non-believers. Why do many Christians seem so hesitant to accept biblical supernatural events, yet dive headlong into the deception *du jour*? Both extremes undermine a truly Christian worldview.

How Many Miracles Do We Need?

If the truth about the supernatural is so important, why doesn't God accommodate? Wouldn't a few simple miracles here and there fill the churches? Why does it seem to be God's will to veil the supernatural? This "hiddenness" of God and the supernatural, in general, has long been a topic of debate among theologians. Although Scripture clearly assumes the veracity of the spirit realm, it gives but fleeting glimpses.

We might also ask whether God is obliged to reveal himself through supernatural intervention at all. It's clear in Scripture that faith is an important element of knowledge. In Jesus's story about the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man basically asked that his brothers might receive supernatural insight regarding the afterlife. Without mincing words, Father Abraham tells him "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."¹⁸ Thus, faith in God's Word should be sufficient.

Perhaps as Pascal says, faith is God's priority rather than sight: "In faith, there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't."¹⁹ Michael O'Neill states it well...

Although seeking miracles is often an attempt to quench an authentic thirst for the spiritual..., miraculous phenomena are not a substitute for absolute faith in God.²⁰

I believe that recovering a *balanced* scriptural view of the supernatural should be a high priority for the 21st-century Church. The supernatural realm and its interaction with this world are foundational

¹⁸ Luke 16:19

¹⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*.

²⁰ Michael O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015).

truths. Miracles have purposes beyond their immediate results. Even a cursory study of the supernatural events in both the Old and New Testaments show that there are no gratuitous miracles. All fit exquisitely within the narrative and serve to glorify God, encourage believers, and silence doubters. The Christian worldview must include an accurate doctrine of supernatural reality in order to maintain its relevance and effectiveness in a deceived world.

3

Supernatural Intrusions

“The Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle ... what is beyond all space and time, which is uncreated, eternal, came into Nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing Nature up with Him If you take that away, there is nothing specifically Christian left.” C.S. Lewis²¹

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Hebrews 11:3

As they rush to the ER at midnight, a father and mother pray for their son to be healed from a serious case of pneumonia. The medical team goes to work. All the modern treatments are employed. Within hours, the child’s breathing has improved. By the next morning, the doctor says the boy is out of danger. He is expected to recover fully.

Did God work a miracle? Did prayer change the course of the physical world? Did God “use” the treatments to heal the child? Our pat, Christian answer is *yes, all of these...*

What does it take to qualify as a miracle? Our English use of the word has become so diluted as to be practically meaningless. It was a miracle that she passed the exam... He miraculously made the goal at the last second... The beautiful newborn is such a miracle... The cancer

²¹ C.S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

is gone! What a miracle! But how often does God directly (supernaturally) intervene in our physical realm? Let's narrow our definition of a miracle.

Rare events, in general, aren't miracles. It's highly unlikely that a particular person will win a lottery. Yet in most lotteries, at least *one* person *will* win. If you win, it will appear to be a miracle from your perspective. But from the perspective of the rest of us, you just happened to be *the one*. Random events may appear to be miraculous even though they can be explained with normal statistics. Let's consider these mere statistical occurrences *non-miraculous*.

For our purposes, let's also exclude what I'll call *providential miracles*. In a sense, everything that happens is the result of God's intervention, since he sovereignly chose to *intervene* and bring about the entire system that is the universe...

Many people will talk about the miracle of a sunrise or of childbirth. Such references are generally well-intentioned, and individuals who say such things are certainly correct that God—because of divine providence—is involved in every sunrise and childbirth. But in the normal course of things, a sunrise or childbirth is not a miracle. God established the regular movements of planets and the process of human conception and childbirth, and any sunrise or birth occurring within such parameters is the result of God's ordinary providential working through means, not the extraordinary providence of miracles.²²

I would classify most answered prayers as providential miracles. God *could* (and sometimes does) intervene supernaturally to heal a sick child instantly, but he usually works through normal physical means such as medication or the body's own defenses. These cases, though not directly miraculous, are no less attributable to God and we should give him equal glory.

²² Tabletalk Magazine "Providential Working Through Miracles," www.ligonier.org, March 2017.

The most direct miracles, the ones we think of as truly miraculous, are qualitatively different. I would define a true miracle as *an event in which a supernatural agent suspends at least one physical cause in bringing about a particular effect.*

A miracle then has a direct, supernatural source. As creatures of imagination and adventure, extraordinary occurrences often lead us to otherworldly speculations. For the term *supernatural* Webster's gives us "...relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe." As a scientist, I might reframe this as *anything beyond that which my senses can detect or measure using the tools of science.*

Paranormal literally means "alongside the normal." It's commonly used interchangeably with the term *supernatural*, but in our discussion, let's define it more literally. I consider an event paranormal if its cause isn't explained by current science. Note the subtle difference when compared with the definition of *supernatural*. Paranormal allows for the possibility that the explanation *could* be caused by physical laws, but that not all physical laws might currently be known. In other words, a paranormal event might be supernatural or just *currently beyond* natural explanation.

Our "Closed" Universe?

C. S. Lewis provides an interesting metaphor in his book *Miracles*.²³ He uses a fishbowl and bombs (as he was writing in wartime England) to illustrate his view of supernatural miracles. Allow me to update his model somewhat...

Recently, I happened to be watching my own aquarium at the very moment one of our minor earthquakes occurred. The jolt rocked the house only slightly, but the fish reacted violently, darting wildly about the tank. Now for all practical purposes, the aquarium was the fishes' universe. Glass walls bounded a limited space in which they could do whatever fish wanted to do, relative to the physical laws in that space. The Scientist Fish among them had access to a lot of data, but he was limited by the nature of his "universe." He had probably formed a more-

²³ C.S. Lewis, "Miracles," *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

or-less coherent set of hypotheses and laws based on the available data within the tank. The other fish came to him for explanations.

But Philosopher Fish might question some of fishdom's beliefs. What about the food that seems to magically appear in the upper waters each day? Explain that! And what about those bubbles? Yes, they come from the big tube, but where does that come from? And, hey, look at that glow coming from one of the solid walls. Sometimes it looks like vague shapes are moving beyond the wall.

Philosopher Fish might provide interesting talk, but most of fishdom didn't dwell on her concerns. A normal fish day would consist of events traceable to previous events within their physical universe. One fish might venture into another's territory and the intruder would be nipped. A shy fish could find a plant to hide behind. Bottom-dwellers would plow the gravel and successfully find food fragments. Life as usual.

But the earthquake movement... That couldn't be deduced from the laws and objects within the aquarium. Philosopher Fish would ponder, Science Fish would hypothesize, yet both would be hard-pressed to come up with a good natural explanation. Rumors of a miracle would begin to circulate, and indeed, the event did fit the definition of a miracle.

So here I sit, a being in the "super-nature" outside of the fishdom universe, with a virtually complete understanding of the event. If I could communicate with the fish I could clear up so many mysteries: *Your nature is just a smaller part of a much bigger nature! Things outside your world can and do affect your world! As long as you are fish in your fish realm, there will always be things you can't know for certain!*

From my perspective, there was no supernatural event. I had the ability to observe what Lewis called "the whole show." The brief turmoil in the aquarium was the result of a force beyond the fish universe, but it was no less causally related to a chain of real events than any of the day-to-day events within the tank. The only difference was that part of the chain was in another realm.

So, is it at least logically possible that our detectable universe is within a larger reality? This isn't a new idea by any means. Old and New Testament writers assumed such an arrangement, and since the

mid-1900s, even the staunchest naturalists have become open to the idea. Many astrophysicists propose that the Big Bang had a trigger that was outside of the observable universe. Whether in mathematics or physical reality, string theorists also must consider several dimensions of time-space that are somehow outside of or beyond our dimension.²⁴

The Gap

Yet even with full acceptance of realms beyond, there is still some uncertainty in designating an event as a miracle. As recently as the 1800s, most people believed the causal agent of disease was something supernatural. Viruses were far beyond detection by even the best science, but we now know that viral diseases are the result of very natural physical circumstances. Can we scream “Witch!” whenever a phenomenon is for the moment unexplained?

This has been called the *god-of-the-gaps fallacy*. Originally, the idea was a criticism by Christian thinkers aimed at “sloppy” Christian reasoning. It refers to the habit of wedging supernatural explanations into our gaps in knowledge. A classic example is Sir Isaac Newton’s appraisal of solar system motions. The brilliant and devout scientist had meticulously laid out the motions of the planets and comets with incredible precision...

The six primary Planets are revolv’d about the Sun, in circles concentric with the Sun, and with motions directed towards the same parts, and almost in the same plane...²⁵

However, he also noted that gravitational forces among these bodies would tend to deteriorate these perfectly tuned motions. How can the consistent, steady orbits be explained with so many variables bent on messing them up? Just apply God’s miraculous interventions as needed...

²⁴ Barton Zwiebach, *A First Course in String Theory*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Sir Isaac Newton, *Isaac Newton’s Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, comp. and ed. Alexandre Koyre and I. Bernard Cohen, rev. ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

But it is not to be conceived that mere mechanical causes could give birth to so many regular motions... This most beautiful System of the Sun, Planets, and Comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.

Newton was correctly convinced of the divinity that brought about the elegance of the cosmos, yet he believed the Creator had to constantly “fix” the gravitational errors that kept popping up. Later in the 18th century, Pierre Simon de Laplace refined Newton’s calculations and found that natural causes *could* account for the maintenance of planetary orbits.²⁶ So, did this remove God from the picture? Does it follow that all unknowns will eventually be explained by natural processes?

Clearly, discovering natural explanations for some knowledge gaps doesn’t prove a totally naturalistic universe. Even if every single link in the chain of events within our “aquarium” were to be derived, would that rule out the supernatural? The most austere Deists might believe that the universe operates like a complex machine, yet they still postulate a supernatural origin for the machine. Most modern theories of cosmology, specifically the origin of the cosmos, are *ad hoc* ideas that attempt to explain the complex, low-probability nature of our reality. Our “fine-tuned” universe appears to be too “purposeful” to have been brought about by anything other than an intelligent, powerful (supernatural?) source.

Even though the Bible is absolutely sufficient in revealing God and his word, God doesn’t limit us to this *special revelation*.²⁷ Paul tells us that God also reveals his supernatural character through *general revelation* as we observe his creation.

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20).

²⁶ Thus, Newton’s initial view might have been considered *paranormal* at the time.

²⁷ Theologians often use the terms *special revelation* and *general revelation*.

Nevertheless, *God does operate in some of the gaps...* We may not always know where this occurs, but we are assured that our physical realm will continue to provide evidence of the supernatural.

All in the Numbers?

Hume and other philosophers have argued that miracles are impossible to identify because of the limited statistics available.²⁸ In an oversimplification, he claims we can never know whether an unlikely event (miracle) is due to supernatural intervention or the laws of nature and probability.

In one sense, this is true. With the previous lottery example, even if we decreased the chance of winning to one in “the number of sand grains on earth,” there remains a statistical chance of winning by sheer natural laws. Thus, in theory, we can never *prove* empirically that an event had a supernatural cause. Lewis gave us a valuable construct for this uncertainty. He suggested we could address the problem by considering the “innate sense of the fitness of things”²⁹ regarding the alleged miracle.

Suppose it’s a hot summer day and your car dies on a deserted stretch of highway. You have a baby on board who is becoming restless and did I mention—you forgot the bag with all the baby paraphernalia! What will you do? Suddenly, a baby bag falls onto the road beside you. Unknown to you, a baggage compartment door on a passing plane had come loose, allowing a traveler’s bag to fall. The bag has diapers, water, and even toys! Then all at once, the sun begins to darken. Oh, you forgot that there would be a solar eclipse today? A cool shadow envelops the area as you give your baby a drink and change her diaper. As the eclipse ends and the baby sleeps, a large bus pulls up. It’s your college roommate who is now a famous rock star. She invites you into the bus and agrees to take you home.

Wow! What a coincidence!

Really? Is it possible for the bag to fall as described? Well, yes. There is a painfully small chance, but it could certainly have happened

²⁸ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, 1748.

²⁹ C.S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 396.

by natural means. And the eclipse? Eclipses are rare in any one particular place, but they happen *somewhere* with some regularity. It does seem like a big coincidence that your rock star friend just happened by, but that too is within the realm of natural occurrences.

Even if we consider the probability of all these events coinciding at a particular place and time (an *astoundingly* small probability!), we still must admit that statistically speaking, there is a chance. But let's face it—this was a miracle! And the reason we can (in faith) assume that is because of the “fitness” of the events. It isn't simply statistical reasoning that defines the miracle. The events occurred in a *context*—the context of your specific need. We intuitively know from the context, when a miracle has occurred. Skeptics might still balk, but appeals to purely statistical analyses fall by the wayside when viewed from a specific, unique narrative. Lewis explains...

...miracles must, of course, interrupt the usual course of Nature; but if they are real they must, in the very act of so doing, assert all the more the unity and self-consistency of total reality at some deeper level. They will not be like unmetrical lumps of prose breaking the unity of the poem; they will be like that crowning audacity which, though it may be paralleled nowhere else in the poem, yet coming just where it does, and effecting just what it effects, is (to those who understand) the supreme revelation of the unity in the poem's conception.³⁰

The story of Balaam's talking donkey (Numbers 22) is often cited as an example of the ridiculous nature of some biblical miracles. I must admit that this account did bother me at one time. Superficially, it seems somewhat on the silly side. Why would God make a donkey speak when he has the power to do any number of more convincing miracles? But God's Word is hardly meant to be taken superficially. The event *in its context* is rich with meaning.

³⁰ C.S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 355.

To summarize, Balaam was a pagan diviner through whom God was about to give a prophetic message to his people Israel. Can God use a pagan sorcerer as a mouthpiece? Would his message be true, comprehensible, and valid? For an answer, we need look no further than the miracle. Could God use a donkey to give a message? Apparently so. In case Israel, contemporary readers, or even Balaam himself ever doubted God's ability to speak truth through whomever he pleases, the case is now closed. Had God willed, the donkey could have just as easily proclaimed the message instead of Balaam!

Our previous definition of a miracle was from God's view. Let's now describe miracles and supernatural events from our limited perspective: *An event with exceedingly low probability, which occurs meaningfully within a specific context.*

Miracles Performed by Jesus

1. Five thousand fed (John 6:5-14).
2. Storm calmed (Matthew 8:23-27).
3. Demons sent into pigs (8:28-34).
4. Daughter of Jairus raised ((Matthew 9:18-26).
5. Woman healed (Matthew 9:20-22).
6. Paralytic healed (Matthew 9:1-8).
7. Leper healed (Matthew 8:1-4).
8. Peter's mother-in-law healed (Mathew 8:14-17).
9. Deformed hand healed (Matthew 12:9-14).
10. Evil spirit cast from boy ((Matthew 17:14-21).
11. Jesus walks on water (Matthew 14:22-33).
12. Blind man healed. (Matthew 20:29-34).
13. Demon cast from girl (Matthew 15:21-28).
14. Four thousand fed (Matthew 15:32-38).
15. Fig tree withered (Matthew 21:18-22).
16. Centurion's servant healed (Luke 7:1-10).
17. Demon cast from man (Mark 1:23-27).
18. Demon cast from mute man (Matthew 12:22).
19. Two blind men healed (Matthew 9:27-31).
20. Coin in fish's mouth (Matthew 17:24-27).
21. Deaf and mute man healed (Mark 7:31-37).
22. Blind man healed (Mark 8:22-26).
23. Miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11).
24. Widow's son raised (Luke 7:11-16).
25. Crippled woman healed (Luke 13:10-17).
26. Sick man healed (Luke 14:1-6).
27. Ten lepers healed (Luke 17:11-19).
28. Man's ear restored (Luke 22:49-51).
29. Water changed to wine (John 2:1-11).
30. Official's son healed (John 4:46-54).
31. Lame man healed (John 5:1-16).
32. Blind man healed (John 9:1-7).
33. Lazarus raised (John 11:1-45).
34. Another miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-14).

4

Paranormal Pickles

*“All that glisters is not gold—
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.”*

William Shakespeare

*“The skeptics have to be right every day, but the believers
only have to be right once.”* Nick Pope³¹

Modern information collecting has created a monster for paranormal researchers. The data are vast for most paranormal phenomena. For example, one UFO research group claims to have investigated 120,000 cases over the past fifty years³². When faced with the mountains of information the squeamish usually shelve the topic. Thus, my cucumber metaphor...

Years ago, my family grew cucumbers for a large pickle company. It was a small patch, but it kept us quite busy through much of the summer. For those unfamiliar with the art of cucumber cultivation, the pre-pickle fruit is the same color as the leafy vines, leaving them well-camouflaged during harvest. As hard as one might try to pick each cucumber at its peak (smallish, straight, and succulent), each pickle-picking reveals numerous “escapees” from previous days.

³¹ Nick Pope, former UK MoD Investigator, www.nickpope.com.

³² Ben Brazil “Irvine-based UFO Group Marks 50 Years of Watching the Skies,” www.latimes.com, June 26, 2019.

Cucumbers grow very quickly in the summer heat, and a fingerling missed one day could be almost watermelon-size two days later. It was amazing how many humongous or distorted fruits appeared in the daily harvest. The “monsters” had no market value, so they became chicken feed. Only a small proportion of the harvest was the small, quintessential, *pickles de résistance* that the picklers wanted. We watched anxiously as the sorting machine culled out the different sizes and shapes into the appropriate bins. Sadly, the pickup pile of potential pickles typically produced only a paltry portion of premium pickles for profit. Hence the *Pickle Principle*...³³

As previously mentioned, most alleged paranormal data are very large collections of *everything*. And by *everything*, I mean *everything*... Information that ranges from stupid to plausible... Obvious to unexplainable... Personal to widespread... Anecdotal to multi-documented... This is a major reason for the broad range of opinions regarding the phenomenal. If someone wants to show that ghosts are hoaxes, there are plenty of data points that will support that hypothesis. If another claims that only insane people see ghosts, there’s a pile of good evidence for that as well. For the skeptic, the scientist, or the true seeker, the “premium” paranormal scenario would be 1) well-documented, 2) from a reliable source, 3) researchable to some extent, and 4) in opposition to at least one physical law. Yet keep in mind, as much as we would like to find our pickles neatly sorted and canned—it won’t happen. *If* the authentic exists at all, it will be buried in a truckload of distracting “problematic pickles.”

To be clear, I’m not suggesting that a small number of genuine supernatural phenomena *will* be hiding in every data set. I could be wrong, but I’ll go out on a limb and say that out of all the cat owners who say their cat speaks to them in whole sentences, *not one of them* is experiencing something paranormal. (There’s probably a more psychological explanation.) *All the available data might support natural explanations.*

For our purposes, I propose three general classifications for miracles and other paranormal phenomena:

³³ Similar to the composition fallacy.

1. Mistaken identification.
2. Directed human activity.
3. Observationally accurate event.

Humans are quite prone to make *mistaken identifications*, especially in the midst of an unusual situation. Our brains purposely focus on some stimuli and ignore others. Part of the problem in discerning the paranormal is that it essentially is “alongside” the normal. It isn’t totally *opposite* or *un-normal*. There may be at least some element of reality associated with it, thus, something natural may be mistaken for something unnatural.

Directed human activity includes deliberate deception for a variety of reasons such as profit, power, malice, entertainment, or national security. We certainly don’t have to look far for examples of trickery and collusion being passed off as paranormal.

Observationally accurate implies that the phenomenon isn’t explained by one of the first two categories, although a supernatural cause isn’t *necessarily* being asserted. For example, in the case of a supposed miracle, this simply means that the observation corresponds in reality to the perception: “I saw a paraplegic person take up his bed and walk.” The observer actually observed (not necessarily interpreted) accurately. In a poltergeist account, the report may say: “A cup levitated over the tabletop for several seconds then dropped and broke.” Although this would be a very odd incident, loaded with all kinds of paranormal hypotheses, the observation itself doesn’t cloak a cause or motive. Often, phenomena are reassigned as more information is gathered. For instance, what appears at first to be observationally accurate may be determined a mistaken identification or vice versa.

The PICKLE PRINCIPLE

In a collection of alleged paranormal data, most or all the incidents can be explained by natural means, however, that doesn’t preclude the fact that some incidents in the collection *could* be paranormal.

5

The Ephesians Hypothesis

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 6:12

Rocket science must be complicated because I’m constantly reminded of things that *aren’t* rocket science. It’s complicated because there are so many variables that could potentially affect a rocket’s flight. What if a hypothetical rocket scientist forgot to take into account an important variable such as gravity? That would be disastrous.

Even a superficial reading of Scripture shows that the unseen realm is a significant variable in earthly events. We are biased toward the physical realm, though. It’s what slaps us in the face every morning and dominates our thoughts until our eyes close at night. The physical is *here and now*, the spiritual seems *somewhere and sometime*. But the Bible paints a spiritual realm that is just as real (if not *more* real) than the physical. When enemy troops were attacking and hope was running low, Elisha could see a reality that was invisible to his servant...

He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold,

the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:16-17).

Suddenly, the servant could see the vast supernatural army that was standing by, ready to intervene in the earthly battle. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of the same reality. At the end of a list of very practical, “earthly” teachings, he adds another item...

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Paul doesn't imply a transition in thought here. In the apostle's mind, a typical day involves visible, earthly activities intertwined with the invisible supernatural. His admonition indicates that God expects us to view the physical world in the context of the larger spiritual realm. The terms “armor,” “schemes,” and “wrestle” imply serious business. A battle rages whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. Moreover, the unseen is actually of greater concern since the true struggle is *not* with the “flesh and blood” of this world. Observable, physical events sometimes emanate from “darkness,” “cosmic powers,” and “spiritual forces of evil.”

Is this too disturbing? I was confronted by a good Christian lady once who told me “The Christian life is supposed to be peaceful and joyous. From what you're saying, I would be scared to get out of bed every morning!”

It's unfortunately true that the idea of demonic spirits sneaking around, spreading mischief in the physical realm is an anachronism to liberal theology. Many would prefer to leave these images on the frescos of some medieval cathedral. There's no doubt that the popular message from most pulpits is strictly one of peace and joy. I don't deny that these are the ultimate fruits of the Spirit's work in believers' lives. Yet the Bible unwaveringly demands that an understanding of reality *must* include an understanding of the realm beyond our earthly

perceptions. The formula must address all the variables. Our worldview is incomplete when data are limited to the material world, and the unseen enemy has free rein to engage us.

Let me be very clear before going further. I do NOT believe there is a demon behind every bush (although there is very likely a bush in front of every demon). I have no intention of sensationalizing the “dark side” in a paranoid witch-hunt. Even though the struggle is real, the outcome is already decided. The command to “be strong in the Lord” assumes that we *can* win. *If* we “put on the full armor of God,” we *will* “stand against the devil’s schemes.” Paul’s words are as much encouragement as they are warning.

Living with the Unseen

In the 19th century, Louis Pasteur had the idea that some diseases might be caused by particles too small to see. Many questioned this bizarre concept and refused to accept an unseen world. Pasteur reasoned that there should be a way to test this *hypothesis*. *If* these particles did exist, and *if* they did cause disease, and *if* they could be passed to others, he should be able to predict certain scenarios. For example, a person who had kissed a sick person would get the disease, but a person who stayed far away wouldn’t.

A simple definition of *hypothesis* is “a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical consequences.”³⁴ I think of a hypothesis as an educated-guess-starting-point for further investigation. A researcher looks at the available information and proposes a possible scenario that could explain it. *Testing* (validating) the hypothesis requires comparing real-world observations to the proposed scenario.

The set of propositions Paul presents in Ephesians 6 forms a very useful hypothesis for examining phenomena that may be connected to paranormal or supernatural beings. Consider the specific truths he offers...

³⁴ merriam-webster.com

- There is an unseen realm beyond the one in which we live.
- Spirits from that unseen realm are able to interact with our world.
- Our primary struggle is with fallen spirits from this unseen realm.
- Fallen spirits are evil, scheming, and set on doing us harm.
- We can and should be prepared to recognize and withstand these fallen spirits.

Assuming these propositions are true, we would expect this *Ephesians Hypothesis* to be testable in our physical world. In other words, we should be able to make predictions about how the unseen interacts with the seen—how the supernatural reacts with the natural. And, if the Ephesians Hypothesis is correct, we would expect it to have explanatory power with some phenomena, especially those that appear to have causes beyond the physical universe.

Again, this isn't to say that every unusual or hard-to-explain phenomenon is supernatural. However, I do believe that *there is only one supernatural reality, as described in Scripture*. Therefore, if a supernatural cause is indicated, *it will necessarily be of the type described in Ephesians 6*—not some contrived reality, made to fit a particular phenomenon. Below are the full implications of the Ephesians Hypothesis. We'll refer to these often. In the following chapter, let's take a closer look at what Scripture reveals about this unseen realm.

Expanded Ephesians Hypothesis

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Presupposition: If a supernatural cause is indicated, it will necessarily be of the type described in Ephesians 6 and nothing else.

Ephesians 6 Principles

1. There is an unseen realm beyond the one in which we live.
2. Spirits from that unseen realm are able to interact with our world.
3. Our primary struggle is with fallen spirits from the unseen realm.
4. Fallen spirits are evil, scheming, and set on doing us harm.
5. We can and should be prepared to recognize and withstand these fallen spirits.

Other Scriptural Truths Supporting the Ephesians Hypothesis

- a) There is only one supernatural reality—the unseen spirit realm described in Scripture. If the supernatural is indicated, it will be of this type, and this type only. (John 14:6)
- b) Paranormal events will never be neutral. They are designed to lead the observer. (1 Peter 5:8)
- c) The inhabitants of the unseen spirit realm include the eternal, self-existent, triune God and the spirit beings he created. (Job 1:6)

- d) Biblical spirit beings can interact with the physical world. (Colossians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 10:20, 1 Timothy 4:1, Daniel 10:13, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, 2 Corinthians 2:11)
- e) Some of these spirits, including one of great power, rebelled against God. (Ezekiel 28:11-19, Isaiah 14:12-19)
- f) Fallen spirits are able to “lead” the thoughts of humans, as allowed by God. (2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Ephesians 4:26-27, 1 Timothy 3:6, 1 Corinthians 7:10, Acts 5:3, 1 Peter 5:6-10)
- g) Not all evil is directly caused by fallen spirits. Its source can be our own fleshly nature and the evil of the world system. (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- h) Rebellious, fallen spirits are able to possess and control non-believers, as well as animals. (Matthew 8)
- i) Satan, the leader of fallen spirits, has the goal of opposing God in any way possible. (2 Corinthians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 10:20, Zechariah 3:1, John 8:44, Matthew 4:3)
- j) Satan’s chief strategies are lies and deception. (John 8:44, 2 Corinthians 11:3)
- k) Satan and fallen spirits will use any means possible to deceive humans and lead them away from God and truth. In most cases, it’s in Satan’s interest to not reveal his true identity. Demons will manifest themselves to some, but maybe not others. (2 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Peter 5:8)
- l) Satan can appear as an “angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14)
- m) Fallen spirits have some ability to manipulate matter and energy. (Revelation 9, Job 1, Mark 4:39)
- n) Although Satan and fallen spirits have great power, the ultimate power is God. (1 John 4:4, Revelation 10:20)
- o) God in his love and omniscience often allows a temporary *lesser evil* in order to gain an eternal *greater good*. For example, in revealing sin, leading to repentance, or sanctifying believers. (Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Book of Job)

6

Dwellers in the Supernatural Realm

“Human history is seen to be not merely an account of human activities and events independent of spiritual forces, but a continuous interaction of spiritual and human personalities, in which demons play a prominent part.”

Merrill F. Unger³⁵

Before examining the alleged supernatural, let’s consider the supernatural realities presented in Scripture. The Old and New Testaments give brief but important glimpses of the divine entities who inhabit heaven with the triune God. These beings are often referred to as the “sons of God,” (Hebrew, *beney Elohim*) a term used only to describe direct creations of God. Sometimes the Old Testament designation for these creatures is simply *Elohim*, translated “god” or “gods” (depending on the context, it may be singular or plural).

Elohim is used over a thousand times to refer to the one God of Israel, but it can denote any lesser spirit being or group of spirit beings. The confusion in English translations is that *Elohim* isn’t necessarily a name, or even a reference to a specific set of attributes (omniscience, omnipotent, self-existent).³⁶ Rather, it speaks more of a being’s domain,

³⁵ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 181.

³⁶ Context tells when *Elohim* refers to “The God”. He is also called by his true name, YHWH (Yahweh, Jehovah, I AM) or *Elyon* (Almighty God). For an in-depth treatment see *The Unseen Realm*, by Michael Heiser.

and could be rendered “divine ones,” “heavenly beings,” or “dwellers in the supernatural realm.” It would be equivalent to calling me a “southerner.”

The Most High

“No one is like you, LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power.”³⁷ Sadly, even in Christian circles, this truth tends to become cliché. The words are so easy to say, yet the truth of them is unfathomable. I hesitate in my utter incompetence to write about God Almighty. How could a library of books begin to describe the unbounded Creator of all that is, much less a few paragraphs? The short answer is, it can’t. A.W. Tozer writes that the human mind will never “comprehend” God, but it can spend eternity “apprehending” him.³⁸ In this short section, we’ll limit our focus to truths about God that help us understand certain topics in this book.

Rather than a proof of God’s existence, the Bible begins with an affirmation: “In the beginning, God...” The Apostle Paul states that God’s handiwork around us is sufficient evidence for his existence. He further claims that the universe tells something of the Creator’s nature....

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

But God desired a closer relationship than mere acknowledgment. We know some of God’s other *attributes* (truths about him) only because he chose to *reveal* them to us through his Word...

God the Creator is transcendent, mysterious, and inscrutable, beyond the range of any imagining or philosophical guesswork of which we are capable—and hence a summons

³⁷ Jeremiah 10:6

³⁸ For an excellent introduction to God’s attributes see A.W. Tozer’s *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1961).

to us to humble ourselves, to listen and learn of him, and to let him teach us what he is like and how we should think of him.³⁹

Thus, any characteristic we assign to God from our own reasoning or wishful thinking is tantamount to idolatry since we're essentially "creating" a god in *our* image.

Thankfully, through the Old and New Testaments, God progressively revealed more and more of his nature. He is...

- Holy – Completely separate from and intrinsically unlike all else (1 Samuel 2:2).⁴⁰
- Triune – In a way we cannot comprehend, God is three persons in one essence. He revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit (Philippians 1:2, Titus 2:13, Acts 5:3–4).
- Personal – God is sentient, emotional, volitional—a being, as opposed to simply an ethereal, impersonal force (Exodus 3:14).
- Eternal – Without beginning or end (Hebrews 13:8).
- Unchanging – (immutable) God is always the same. Being perfect there is no need to change (Malachi 3:6).
- Self-sufficient – He needs nothing from any other source (Ephesians 3:20).
- Sovereign – He acts independently by his own nature to do as he pleases (Daniel 4:35).
- All-knowing – (omniscient) He knows everything that is or can be known (Isaiah 46:9-10).
- All-powerful – (omnipotent) He can do anything that is consistent with his other attributes (Jeremiah 32:17).
- Unbounded – (omnipresent) He is everywhere at all times (Psalm 139:7-12).
- Loving – He is perfectly devoted to the well-being of others (1 John 4:7-8).
- Righteous – There is nothing evil or imperfect in him (Psalm 71:19).

³⁹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 48.

⁴⁰ Verses given are examples among many others. See Tozer for more.

- Good – He is absolute goodness in all ways (Psalm 34:8).

In what has been called the Grand Miracle, the second member of the Trinity became a human like us. The New Testament tells of Jesus, the Son of God—God in flesh—who dwelled with us, then died as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus—God *and* man—not only gave believers eternal life, he showed us in a physical, “this-realm” body something of what the unseen, “other-realm” God is like.

What Can’t God Do?

It sounds very “churchish” to insist that God can do *anything*. He is, after all, omnipotent. We also describe him as unlimited, unbounded, absolute, and perfect.⁴¹ But are there things that God simply can’t do?

Immediately the old philosophy class argument comes to mind: *Can God create a stone so big that he can’t lift it?* The question itself reveals faulty thinking about God and his attributes. Even the word *attribute* is problematic when applied to God. When referring to a human, we can think of these separate components of who we are. But God by his nature has no “parts” (not referring to trinitarian Persons here). He is simple unity, indivisible. The attributes he has revealed serve in a small way to describe him in terms our human minds might understand.

Being a perfect unity, any one of his perceived attributes can’t negate or diminish any other attribute. For example, why can’t he simply pardon our sins just because he wants to? Because that application of his *mercy* would contradict his attribute of *justness*.⁴² God is also holy, or “set apart” from all his creation. This requires that he *not* be some things. He isn’t equivalent to anything he has created. God can’t be the same as something he created, so there are many things his nature forbids him from being.⁴³

⁴¹ I don’t use the term infinite because I consider his attributes qualitative rather than quantitative. Infinity implies too many paradoxes and mathematical problems.

⁴² Thus, Christ had to be sacrificed as an atonement.

⁴³ And his nature is not a separate force. It is *of* him. He is completely free from anything outside of himself.

God is also unable to do something that can't be done. This may sound like a limitation or just plain silliness, but it's really only a language problem. The stone-lifting enigma is a logical impossibility. In other words, it isn't logically possible for "A" to be "not A", or for $1 + 1$ to not equal 2.⁴⁴ In simplistic terms, logical contradictions and absurdities don't exist in reality, thus whether God can "do" them is a non-question. This doesn't mean that logic and mathematics are things that transcend God, but that logical consistency itself is based in the nature of God. Lewis states it very well...

You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to His power. If you choose to say, "God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it," you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words, "God can." It remains true that all things are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities... nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.⁴⁵

Scripture gives several clear truths about God's limitations. Hebrews 6:18 tells us that it's "impossible for God to lie." For him to be untruthful would be in opposition to his character. A comprehensive study reveals other impossibilities for God, such as changing, being unfaithful, acting unjustly, and anything else contrary to his nature.

I've made an effort here to emphasize God's limitations because in dealing with paranormal phenomena in the following chapters, the question will frequently arise: "But *couldn't* God do it that way?" Our knee-jerk response is usually "Of course. God can do anything." However, our conclusion must be based on the reality of God's potential actions and consistent with his revealed nature.

⁴⁴ Some add "at the same time and in the same sense," but God is actually outside of these parameters.

⁴⁵ C.S. Lewis, "The Problem of Pain," *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 561.

Could God send an angel to tell me a lie? No, his nature wouldn't allow him to lie.

Could God punish me for a sin for which Christ has already atoned? No, God is completely just.

Could God change from the Old Testament to the New? No, God may deal differently by his choice, but he's perfectly unchanging.

In addition to considering God's *nature*, we must also take into account his typical *mode* of operation. Within the limitations of his nature, God is utterly sovereign...

Whenever God acts, he acts in a way that pleases him... He is never backed into a corner where his only recourse is to do something he hates to do. He does whatever he pleases.⁴⁶

At the heart of this, though, we find that even in two similar situations, God isn't bound to deal identically. He is completely free and just in punishing the sins of one nation immediately and delaying punishment for the same sins of another nation. He is equally free to bless you and not bless me, *simply because he chooses*.

However, God created a universe that is orderly, consistent, and for the most part predictable. Scientific reasoning depends on this *repeatability*. Likewise, he reveals to us through his Word that he is generally quite consistent in his interactions with us.⁴⁷ For example, the vast majority of people who have ever lived have eventually died. Enoch, however, "... walked with God, and he was not, for God took him..."⁴⁸ God was sovereignly free to "break the rules" and allow his friend Enoch to bypass death. But I don't base my expectations on Enoch's uncommon experience. I expect to meet God by his usual mode. *Could* God take me, as he did Enoch? Of course! God is free to choose whatever he wishes, and there is nothing in his nature that would preclude it. *Yet, I must base my expectations on God's usual actions and not on the rarest of events.*

⁴⁶ John Piper, "The Sovereignty of God," www.desiringgod.org, Accessed Feb 19, 2020.

⁴⁷ Some make a distinction between God's *principles* and his *promises*. He always act according to his promises. Principles are more general, applying most of the time, but not always.

⁴⁸ Genesis 5:22.

Could God send an angel to answer one of my questions? Yes, but it's much more likely that he will use an earthly method.

Could God perform a miracle to solve one of my problems? Yes, but he will probably use normal, everyday means.

Could God give me a new revelation through a dream or vision? Yes, but it's *extremely* likely that he will simply show me a truth already in his Word.

So, as we offer solutions for various phenomena, our first step is to determine whether that proposition is in any way contrary to God's *nature*. If it isn't, then the next step is to determine whether the proposition is consistent with God's *usual mode of operation*... *Could he? Would he?*

As humans observing unusual events, our tendency will almost always be to assume we are observing the exception to the rule. We see ourselves as the outliers, the anointed, and the chosen. As we'll find, that's a dangerous starting point for discerning the paranormal.

The *COULD HE? WOULD HE?* Test

When questioning whether God might be using supernatural intervention, first ask "Is this consistent with the nature of God?" If so, then ask "Is this typically the way God does it, or is there usually a more natural means?" You may be witnessing a miracle, but probably not...

Angels and Others

When we think of heavenly beings, our minds immediately bring up angels. The word *angel* in Scripture literally means *messenger*. Scripture sometimes uses the term for human messengers, as well. Like the term *Elohim*, "angel" doesn't refer to a set of attributes, rather it's a job description. We commonly use the term angel to refer to all heavenly beings (other than God himself), but that might be too

simplistic.⁴⁹ The Bible is usually more specific in its terminology for heavenly dwellers. As mentioned previously, *beney Elohim*, “sons of God,” is the inclusive term for all the divine beings created by God. Angels are one type of *beney Elohim*, or more accurately, *angel* (messenger) is a role for some of them.

Divine beings are mentioned often in Scripture. There is no section devoted exclusively to describing them, but many of their characteristics are diffused throughout the Bible. For example, we know that they were created by God before he created the earth and that they are innumerable. They are immortal, possessing personality, intelligence, and volition. (Humans do *not* become angels when they die. Why can’t Hollywood get that right?)

Heavenly dwellers are spirits, yet they may enter the physical realm in some kind of visible body or can appear in ordinary human form. Presently, they are superior to humans in ability and intellect. There is also a hierarchy within the heavenly ranks. Three divine creatures are named in the Bible—Michael, Gabriel, and Lucifer. Michael is known as an *archangel* (high angel), implying that he outranks others. Before his fall, Lucifer was once an *anointing cherub*, apparently another high-ranking being. Scripture mentions other unnamed cherubim (plural), as well as other heavenly beings, known as *seraphim*.

Paul hints at other “types” or “job descriptions” of divine entities in Ephesians 6. He specifically refers to “rulers,” “authorities,” “powers of this dark world,” and “spiritual forces of evil.” We have no organizational charts given to map out the heavenly population or its hierarchy. It’s strictly speculation, but I feel the heavenly realm is much more diverse and complex than we realize. God’s creation of life on earth is so overwhelming I can only imagine that the eternal spirit realm is orders of magnitude more spectacular.

A Divine Council?

Many passages in the Old Testament have God speaking in plural pronouns—*we*, *our*, *us*. Some see the trinity in these references, which is certainly consistent with God’s revealed nature. Others have

⁴⁹ Although in the OT, the “angel of the Lord” might be referring to the 2nd person of the Trinity.

suggested that this is a “majestic” use of plurals, as when the queen asks for her tea: “We’ll be having our tea now.” At times, though, members of this plurality are clearly distinguished from the Most High. Micaiah’s vision depicts a scene in which Yahweh is allowing a “committee” of spirits to participate in the handling of an earthly incident...

And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’” (1 Kings 22:19-21).

The *divine council* isn’t a new idea. Jewish Old Testament tradition and early church leaders acknowledged a supernatural assembly with Yahweh God as its head. As we have seen with other concepts, when the supernatural becomes *too* supernatural, a more “earthly” view is often substituted. Also, some take the idea of God conferring with other entities in heaven to be demeaning of the sovereign God or even polytheistic. The accusation is that it seems too much like Mormon cosmology or the Norse Valhalla.

However, Jewish and early Church teachings on the divine council never implied numerous self-existent beings, equal to or nearly equal to God. Unlike similar beliefs among their pagan neighbors, the Israelites were adamant about the absolute holiness and superiority of Yahweh above any of his created council members.

Why would God need a divine council? Couldn’t he govern heaven alone? It’s ultimately the same question as “Why does God need anything?” He doesn’t... Yet in his perfect, sovereign will he delegates authority and assigns tasks to his creatures. It seems that in the same way God allows his earthly children to make decisions and carry out his plan, he similarly involves his heavenly population.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Lewis explains God’s propensity to delegate: “He allows soils and weather and animals and the muscles, minds, and wills of men to co-operate in the execution of His will. ‘God,’ said Pascal, ‘instituted prayer in order to lend His creatures the dignity of causality.’ But not only

The membership of Yahweh's divine council is debatable. Whether it consists of all the sons of God or only a select few is only conjecture. As previously mentioned, we do know of several roles filled by spirit beings such as angels, seraphim, cherubim, rulers, powers, thrones, and authorities.

The Rise and Fall of Lucifer

Originally, Lucifer was good, powerful, and flawless since God isn't the source of any evil or imperfection. His created beings, however, have the freedom to choose. In one of the most catastrophic and incomprehensible events in cosmic history, Lucifer, one of the *beney Elohim* used his freedom to oppose his Maker. Bible scholars see this passage as referring to Lucifer...

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you... You were on the holy mount of God; You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you (Ezekiel 28:12-15).

The details are scattered and at times cryptic, but Lucifer's primary sin seems to be pride. He set his mind to be "like the Most High..."

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star,⁵¹ son of the dawn!... You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly... I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

prayer; whenever we act at all He lends us that dignity. It's not really stranger, nor less strange, that my prayers should affect the course of events than that my other actions should do so." He goes on to say that God's will hasn't changed, it has only been accomplished through the wills of his creations. C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Harvest Books), 8-9.

⁵¹ *Morning star* also translates as *lucifer* or *shining one*.

Most theologians assume that this fallen entity corresponds to Satan (the *accuser*) and to the devil (literally, *slanderer*).⁵² Jesus addressed this being as “Satan,” thus, I’ll follow his example.

Liberal theology portrays Satan as merely an impersonal “force of evil.” Alarmingly, only 26% of Christians believe he even exists.⁵³ Satan is often viewed as merely the “personification of Evil” in collective humankind. Scripture, however, leaves absolutely no room for this notion. The Bible reveals him as personal, powerful, cunning, and single-mindedly bent on opposing Yahweh God by any and all means.

Some are surprised to learn that Satan actually does “rule” this physical world. In God’s all-wise justice system, Adam legally relinquished dominion of the earth to Satan. This is how Satan could rightfully offer Jesus earthly authority over nations in the wilderness temptations. Indeed, one of the Deceiver’s titles is “Prince of the Power of the Air.”⁵⁴ Billy Graham aptly describes Satan’s reign on Planet Earth...

Since the fall of Lucifer, that angel of light and son of the morning, there has been no respite in the bitter Battle of the Ages. Night and day Lucifer, the master craftsman of the devices of darkness, labors to thwart God’s plan of the ages. We can find inscribed on every page of human history the consequences of the evil brought to fruition by the powers of darkness with the devil in charge.⁵⁵

However, be very clear about this... *Satan is not the opposite of God.* As great as he is in many respects, he has never been God’s equal in any sense. Satan is a finite creation of the Most High. God is sovereign, self-existent perfection. Satan isn’t omnipresent. He isn’t omniscient. He isn’t omnipotent. He operates only within the bounds

⁵² The term translated *Satan* is literally “the satan” (the *accuser*) and is a “role” rather than a name.

⁵³ The Barna Group, Ltd, “Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist, Research Releases in Faith & Christianity,” April 13, 2009.

⁵⁴ Ephesians 2:2.

⁵⁵ Billy Graham, *Angels: God’s Secret Agents*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1975), 70.

that God has set.⁵⁶ Martin Luther called Satan “the ape of God.” Yet in ways we cannot completely understand, God sometimes allows and uses the evil Satan wreaks to accomplish his own righteous ends. Despite his temporary rulership of the earth, our Enemy has already been judged by God. His destiny is set. At a point in the future, Satan will receive his final sentence and be banished forever. Jesus will then take his rightful throne as King of Kings.

Anytime we focus attention on Satan, even to arm ourselves against him, there is a risk—not specifically from him, but from our own inquisitive nature. Lewis warns...

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. [Demons] are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.⁵⁷

It’s crucial that we as children of God understand our position in Christ. As we study paranormal phenomena and their potential connection to the Evil One, we should never overlook the promise we have been given...

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

A Fallen but Formidable Army

Satan has an army of supernatural cohorts. There are several scriptural references to unrighteous “sons of God” who, like Satan, stand in opposition to the Most High. The exact origin of these evil *Elohim* isn’t spelled out in detail. We can be sure God doesn’t create evil, and there are no beings that he didn’t create. Thus, any spirits who oppose God are “fallen” in the literal sense. Several passages indicate that Satan and possibly his followers fell from their states of

⁵⁶ See Job 1-2

⁵⁷ C.S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1942).

righteousness before the creation of the earth (or at least humans). Some scholars believe that another cohort of beings may have fallen around the events of Genesis 6:1-4. Still another theory is that several other sons of God turned against the Most High sometime after Babel. Whatever the case, the practical results are the same: *A large number of evil entities now dwell in the unseen, supernatural realm.*

The term *demon* applies to at least some of these fallen beings.⁵⁸ As with the righteous angels, there is a hierarchy among the fallen ones. The highest level might include the “princes” referenced in Daniel 10. These high-ranking beings appear to be assigned to entire nations. Paul lists some of the other titles in Ephesians 6. The exact command structure isn’t given, but as mentioned, these roles include “rulers,” “authorities,” “cosmic powers in this dark world,” and “spiritual forces of evil” in heavenly places.

If you have trouble accepting the literal, scriptural view of demons, you might tend to tune out at this point. Scripture, however, doesn’t leave the option open to debate. Bible scholar Charles Ryrie says bluntly...

To deny the existence of demons is not skepticism; it only displays ignorance. To be unrealistic about their power is foolhardy.⁵⁹

In attempts to point out the futility of following Satan, medieval artists set the stage for casting him as an idiot and buffoon. That might have worked with dark-age congregations, but today It’s hard to take seriously an imp with a red suit, pointy tail, and pitchfork. I’m sure Satan doesn’t mind the caricature. Is there a more effective way to work covertly than to be deemed unthreatening or nonexistent? It’s even better when those who *do* believe in demons are labeled as illiterates and fanatics.

⁵⁸ Scholars suggest that demons could be 1) the disembodied spirits of a pre-Adamic race, 2) the offspring of unions between human woman and rebellious *elohim* (Gen. 6), or 3) angels who rebelled with Satan. Merrill Unger aptly assured that their origin is not as critical as the fact that “they are evil and harmful spirit personalities, that in their fellowship there is no safety, and that against them continual warfare must be waged.”

⁵⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Chicago: Moody, 1999).

And clearly, Satan, demons, hell—all the negatives—are the lowest of priorities in liberal theology and much of modern Christian academia. These topics certainly put a damper on seeker-sensitive strategies. Yet the Bible makes no apologies for its portrayal of evil beings. Every New Testament writer warns against Satan and his lies. Unless you happen to be reading from the Jefferson Bible, why would Jesus spend so much time, effort, and prayer dealing with Satan and his demons if they were imaginary or unthreatening?

Spirits in the Earthly Realm

So, does this angelic realm (including righteous and fallen) contribute to our discussion of the paranormal? I believe it does so in a significant way. Randy Alcorn summarizes the biblical view...

This is reality, not myth—we are actually being watched, hovered over, and whispered to, not only by God and righteous angels, but also by fallen angels, demons.⁶⁰

Are there angels at work today? Although some would say the Holy Spirit could now fill their role, there is no indication that God has stopped using his divine messengers. The better question might be whether that which appears to be angelic activity is as it seems.

Scripture reveals that righteous angels can and do interact with humans. The New Testament records several angelic appearances.⁶¹ In their true form, they seem to have a fearful effect on observers. (Thus, their typical first words: “Fear not!”). But we’re also told that angels might look quite human. Lot’s angelic visitors seemed to have human form, and Hebrews 13:2 advises that sometimes we might meet angels and not be able to distinguish them from ordinary people.

⁶⁰ Randy Alcorn, “What Role Can Satan and Demons Have in the Life of a Believer?” www.epm.org, November 5, 2018.

⁶¹ Angelic appearances: Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25), wrestles with Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32), with Gideon (Joshua 5:13-6:27), the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-30), leads Peter out of prison (Acts 12:1-19), Gabriel speaks to Mary (Luke 1:26-38), tells the disciples Jesus will return (Acts 1:1-11), announces birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-20), announces Jesus has risen (Matthew 28:1-10).

But could the opposite also be true? Could a being appear as a righteous angel and not be one? According to Mohammed, an angel claiming to be Gabriel appeared to him in a cave and gave him verses for the Quran. Similarly, an angel named Moroni guided Joseph Smith to artifacts used in the founding of Mormonism. I'm also reminded of the hundreds of tabloid headlines and best-seller books that describe modern-day angelic visits, bringing proclamations of peace and goodness. Talk show guests joyfully spread the "new gospel" they received from an angel. Obviously, these are godly angels—right?

On the contrary, we're soberly cautioned that Satan "masquerades as an angel of light."⁶² So an observer might perceive a manifestation of Satan as a benevolent, helpful entity. The implication is that demons can do the same. What an ominous, yet important fact! *An entity with a friendly, helpful demeanor could be a deceiver...*

Thus, our impressions of an entity might be totally wrong. If a demon manifests itself, it could (and probably will) appear to be a godly angel. Indeed, who would stick around and listen to a demon who appeared to be evil and scary? Then how can we possibly discern between the true and the deceptive? God's Word provides a tool.

...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for 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, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:1-3).

This isn't a quick-fix garlic-necklace for warding off evil spirits. "Testing" a spirit might require much time digging deeply into Scripture and parsing biblical principles. It would be even more effective if that preparation was preemptive. Equip yourself for the test in advance. Know God's Word well enough to recognize deception in its *inception*.

⁶² 2 Corinthians 11:14

The notion that fallen angels other than Satan might appear as angels of light brings us back to a point mentioned earlier. Satan isn't omnipresent, or everywhere at once, as is God. It's assumed that his multi-location work is aided by his fallen minions. If the original angelic multitudes were innumerable, then a third of them would still be a great number. (Perhaps there are enough to assign a few to each person on earth?)

Also, in the New Testament, we often find that demons can *inhabit* some humans. A classic case is found in the Gospel of Luke...

When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me," (Other accounts add the phrase "before our time.")

Jesus then asked for his name.

And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. (Luke 8:27-33).

Often called demon *possession*, this passage provides important insight into the nature and work of demons. They certainly changed the man's behavior, presumably having complete control over his actions. The parallel account in the Gospel of Mark adds that the man could break chains with superhuman strength when people tried to bind him. Also, the demons not only recognized the man, Jesus, they readily admitted his divinity.

Undoubtedly, Jesus wielded the authority to do as he willed with the unclean spirits. This large group of demons (possibly thousands judging by the name *Legion*) knew their ultimate destination. They

begged not to be cast into the Abyss at this particular time. The full meaning isn't clear, but Jesus postponed their sentencing and allowed them to enter the pigs.

Jesus cast demons out of many people during his earthly ministry. In most cases, the demons were the source of some physical or mental malady. When Jesus referred to a demon, there is no indication that he was using a metaphor or euphemism. He spoke of *real, spirit personalities*. One wonders why this phenomenon doesn't seem as prevalent today. Are some physical and mental afflictions still caused by demons?⁶³ The very question conjures Hollywood images of witch burnings and exorcisms. Theologians suggest that demon activity might have been more concentrated during the ministry of Jesus. Or perhaps demon expulsions best illustrated Jesus's authority over Satan.

Arguably, our perspective of demonic activity could be skewed. Many missionaries report that "possessing demons" are alive and well. The accusation by skeptics is that demon possession is directly proportional to the lack of modern scientific knowledge. But according to Unger, the phenomenon is more correlated with the lack of Christian influence in a region.⁶⁴ Demonic activity does appear to be more straightforward and obvious in cultures that would respond to that manifestation. Perhaps demons, seeing disbelief in the biblical supernatural find new, more appropriate ways to engage the "enlightened" population. Unger writes...

With the crude savage, Satan may best accomplish his purpose as a "roaring lion," inspiring dread and base fear, but with the cultured and educated, in a so-called Christian society, he can often work more effectively when disguised as "an angel of light."⁶⁵

⁶³ Clearly much mental illness has organic, physical causes. People with any symptoms of mental illness should always consult a pastor, Christian psychologist, and/or medical professional. Nevertheless, this doesn't preclude the fact that some cases could be like those of Jesus's day.

⁶⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 82-83.

⁶⁵ Unger, 82-83.

The question often arises as to whether a demon can inhabit a Christian. There is no biblical account of this, although believers can certainly be influenced and tempted. Scripture assures: “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, I don’t believe the indwelling Holy Spirit would ever have a demon for a “roommate.” That being said, the Bible consistently warns Christians to guard against Satan and demonic spirits. Any part of our lives not controlled by God’s Spirit is certainly vulnerable to demonic influence.

How Do Satan and His Cohorts Affect Us?

Our objective here, however, isn’t so much to debate the extent of demon activity but to note its characteristics revealed in Scripture. I believe the following truths have relevance in examining other paranormal phenomena...

- The biblical accounts involved *real* demons. There is no hint that Jesus was merely accommodating the mistaken beliefs of the crowds.
- Demons *can* inhabit humans and express their will through the hosts.
- Indwelling demons can influence a person’s thoughts, perceptions, behavior, and even their physical abilities.
- Demons respond to authority and can do nothing unless God permits it.

Jesus summarized the Enemy’s *modus operandi* quite succinctly...

He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

⁶⁶ 1 John 5:18

Satan's forte, his go-to strategy, his primary skill—LYING. I believe this is possibly the basic axiom in understanding many paranormal phenomena. Although spirits *could* appear to us in some physical sense and *could* possess humans and animals, I think these phenomena are less common than more indirect interactions. As Jesus stated, Satan is adept at manipulating minds with untruth.⁶⁷ It's unclear as to whether he can know the exact thoughts of humans. I have my doubts. Nevertheless, after all these centuries, he's certainly an expert on humans. He has a *summa cum laude* Ph.D. in human psychology, and he knows what we do and say. At the least, he has a super-educated guess at what we might be thinking.

We do know that Satan (and demons) can somehow “place” thoughts. Not full-blown mind control, his manipulation seems to be more along the lines of “suggestion.” It has been described as a “whisper” or an “impression.” Since it's usually so subtle, and it's within a person's own thoughts, Satan's urgings usually don't seem foreign. Here is the shortlist of ways in which Satan does this to people in the New Testament...

- Hindering (1 Thessalonians 2:18).
- Tempting (Matthew 4:10, 1 Corinthians 7:5).
- Keeping from truth (Mark 4:15).
- Causing to say things (Mark 8:33).
- Placing lies in the mind (Acts 5:3).
- Causing sickness (Luke 13:16).
- Performing signs and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Does Satan have the ability to play more tangible mind games? Early church leaders believed he could. Augustine wrote...

What men can do with real colors and substances the demons can very easily do by showing unreal forms...⁶⁸

⁶⁷ When I say that Satan does this or that, I realize that it more likely is a demon that is involved. Satan is not omnipresent, and it's unlikely he spends much of his time on insignificant me. There are plenty in the lower ranks to do his bidding.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 18:5.

Luther added...

Satan then is well able to affect all the senses so that a man would swear he did see, hear, touch, a thing which notwithstanding he doth not...⁶⁹

I would argue that true followers of Christ cannot be *utterly* deceived, but there are plenty of nonbelievers around, influenced by fallen spirits and ready to engage believers. Likely, there are many Christians susceptible to Satan's lies by way of deceived leaders, parents, or spouses.

I believe another important principle when dealing with paranormal phenomena is the fact of "virtual reality," not in the technological sense but in the human mind. Sometimes the mere *belief* in a phenomenon alone can be highly effective in the work of the Evil One. Satan's whispered commands may need no physical substance: "Fear this ghost... listen to this psychic... ponder this UFO..." How many lives have been affected by simply dwelling on supernatural possibilities?⁷⁰

The question also comes up as to whether Satan can manipulate the material world of atoms and energy. Scripture does indicate the possibility. When Jesus calmed the storm in Mark 4, he "rebuked" the storm verbally. Some take the storm to be an act of Satan. A clearer, "behind-the-scenes" example is in the book of Job. God permitted Satan to test the righteous man, Job. Besides manipulating the minds of two terrorist groups to attack, Satan directly used material means to wreak havoc on the man. He caused fire to fall and burn Job's sheep. Then, he used a mighty wind to collapse the house on all Job's children. In a final intimate and very physical attack, Satan inflicts Job with painful sores. Clearly, Satan can use matter and energy but take note—*only as God permits*.

A related question is whether fallen spirits can clothe themselves in physical bodies as Paul describes our spirit-body duality. In other words, can demons take on a physical body (not simply inhabit a

⁶⁹ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ This is a danger in any focused study of the paranormal, but the believer has this proven promise "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

preexisting human body) and interact in our physical realm? We'll address this more fully in our discussion of Genesis 6. [p. 317]

Unpacking the Ephesians Hypothesis

As we examine paranormal phenomena, we'll consider the Ephesians Hypothesis along with any other viable explanations. Investigations of alleged paranormal events shouldn't begin by assuming a supernatural source, but the option must *not* be pushed aside merely because that view might be unpopular in contemporary thinking. This should especially apply to Bible-believing Christians. Biblical language scholar Michael Heiser writes...

My contention is that, if our theology really derives from the biblical text, *we must reconsider our selective supernaturalism and recover a biblical theology of the unseen world.*⁷¹

He goes on to say that this doesn't mean every scriptural narrative involves supernatural elements. But accurate interpretation must recognize that the inspired writers understood and accepted the reality of a supernatural realm.

Scripture plainly portrays Satan as a formidable enemy. He isn't the impish clown of medieval lore, aimlessly vexing humans for his demons' amusement. Unfortunately, this is the strawman the secular world ridicules when Christians discuss the reality of the Enemy. Lucifer was created "the anointed cherub," wise and powerful. He retains some of those traits, thus, his plans are well-ordered and precise. All that he does is intelligent, purposeful, cunning, and targeted to a specific end. Any deception that can advance his plan becomes part of his immense arsenal. I believe we may say, without paranoia or sensationalism, that anything our feeble minds might conceive of as a means of deception, Satan has already exploited it. Paul warns that we should *expect* to experience Satan's attacks...

⁷¹ Heiser, *Unseen*.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

An extremely important concept regarding demons and the paranormal is that *anything goes*. Satan isn't bound to any code of ethics in his work (although he certainly is limited by the permissive will of the Most High). If fear works in deceiving an individual, then fear it will be. If frivolity can lead away from God, then Satan will use frivolity. If one step back brings two steps forward, then he might appear to lose temporarily. If scientific reasoning can carry the lie, then scientific reasoning will be played to the utmost. The diversity (or apparently random chaos) we observe in truly paranormal events might be explainable when the Deceiver has a diverse arsenal and this win-at-all-costs motto.

I suppose that a deceiving spirit would be just as satisfied for their victim to believe in a ghost, ET, monster, or fairy as any other fable that would lead them away from truth and faith. Yet again, we certainly must not make the mistake of seeing the demonic in every incident. We inhabit fallen, fleshly bodies navigating in a sinful world system. There's plenty of evil to go around without blaming everything bad or strange on Satan. This extreme has led to all types of paranoia and fanaticism in the church and has likely served Satan quite well in the ensuing confusion.

But the other extreme is perhaps more dangerous. I can't find any scriptures that advise us to "chill out and stop being so alert!" Instead, we are continually urged to be battle-ready. This isn't passive advice. It's a strategic call to arms against a real and imminent enemy. An accurate, balanced view of the supernatural has always been important, but it's vital today as post-modern misinformation proliferates, even in churches.

Test the Spirits

Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

A presupposition within this verse is that at least two types of spirits exist and that they interact with this physical world. Some spirits are from God. Some are not. The command to “test the spirits” implies that their natures and motives are discernable, yet not necessarily obvious. There is absolutely no expectation in Scripture that even the most mature believers will be immune to false teaching and deceptive spirits. Our modern culture demands that we stay open-minded and tolerant toward new ideas. There is a bit of general truth in that, but a balanced stance will maintain a degree of skepticism and discernment anytime a new “message from God” confronts us.

Tozer provides several questions to ask when encountering a “new” message, miracle, prophecy, or doctrine...

1. How does it affect my concept of God and my attitude toward him?
2. How has my attitude toward Jesus been affected?
3. How does it affect my attitude toward God’s Word?
4. What is its effect on my self-life?
5. How does it affect my relation to and our attitude toward our fellow Christians?
6. What is its effect on my attitude toward sin?⁷²

These guidelines are good, but they assume a working knowledge of the components. This is why we must “vaccinate” ourselves and our families with the solid spiritual disciplines of Bible study, repentance, purity, and prayer. We must proactively possess true concepts about God, Jesus, Scripture, and sin. Unless we have made the effort to “hide God’s Word in our heart” we are vulnerable to any spirit that attempts to communicate.

⁷² A.W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God*, public domain.

Hollywood, Heaven, and Hell

The primary job of the entertainment industry is to entertain, and arguably they do that adequately. Its depiction of heaven, hell, and the Bible, in general, follow that corporate mission. A quick search of the IMDb site gives *Blockers*, *Lucifer*, *Supernatural*, *Angel*, *The Good Place*, *Constantine*, *Hellboy*, *Legend*, and *Good Omens* just to name a few. Generally, these storylines offer fictional and unrealistic concepts of the supernatural. But I expect Hollywood to act like Hollywood. Poetic license is their right and no one expects (or should expect) them to produce deep theological treatises.

On the positive side, some of them at least present a supernatural (albeit cliché) view of reality as opposed to cold naturalism. However, they tend to miss the biblical mark considerably, usually offering a dualism in which the forces of darkness are on equal ground with the Most High. Good and Evil are presented, but it's often difficult to tell which is which, and the finale could go either way. God himself is almost always portrayed as a fallible, selfish, tyrannical, neurotic, or wimpish "superhero."

My concern is that many, including believers, build their worldview on the media's representation of these fictional supernatural elements. (I was once told by a student that she believed she was a Christian because she watched most of these shows regularly.) Ideally, I believe Christians, especially young people with developing worldviews, would be better off not immersed in this type of media. If these must be a part of our entertainment, we should attempt to turn the situation into opportunities to discuss genuine, biblical supernatural concepts.

PART II

Parsing the Paranormal

7

Signs and Wonders

“Is not the gospel its own sign and wonder? Is not this a miracle of miracles, that ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish?’ A truthful Saviour ought to be believed. He is truth itself. Why will you ask proof of the veracity of One who cannot lie?” Charles Spurgeon⁷³

“We all have Naturalism in our bones and even conversion does not at once work the infection out of our system.”

C.S. Lewis⁷⁴

How do modern-day miracle claims fit within our previous classification system? Excluding providential events, we’ll consider only direct miracles—*events in which a supernatural agent suspends at least one physical cause in bringing about a particular effect within a logical context.*

As we examine modern-day miracles, we once again are faced with the extremes of those who shun the supernatural and others who find the miraculous under every stone. This is especially true in the Church. At one end are those who believe that having to “own up” to the

⁷³ C. H. Spurgeon, “Except Ye See Signs and Wonders, Ye Will Not Believe,” *Morning and Evening*, September 2nd, Evening.

⁷⁴ C.S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

miracles in the Bible is an obstacle for engaging the secular culture. Part of this mindset could also come from the fear of being associated with the other extreme. This group expects, and actively pursues miracles as a staple of worship and life in general. They tend to view the previous group of believers as spiritually cold and unresponsive.

Are Modern Miracles Biblical?

The basis for both extremes relies primarily on their view of New Testament *gifts of the Spirit*...

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12: 8-10).

Both groups agree that in the early church, some were given the spiritual gift of miracles. In the context of the work of the Church, miracles validated the message of the gospel. Although these signs ostensibly benefitted the recipients in some way, in no case was this the precipitating cause. People were better off after Jesus healed them, but the miracle-working of Jesus was primarily for the purpose of establishing his authority and messiahship. When John the Baptist asked whether he was truly the Messiah, Christ responded, “Tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised...”⁷⁵

The connection between miracles and evangelism is explicitly noted many times in the New Testament. When Peter heals Aeneas (Acts 9:34-35), Luke writes, “...the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.” Luke also comments on Tabitha being raised from the dead, “It became known to all Joppa, and many

⁷⁵ Matthew 11.

believed in the Lord.” Referring to these purposeful, directed signs, John MacArthur says...

A sign is to point to something. [New Testament miracles] were signs authenticating a divinely-commissioned teacher. When God supernaturally—superhumanly—suspended natural law and acted in human history, He did so as a sign, to point to a teacher who was speaking for Him.⁷⁶

The question, however, is whether these *charismata* (spiritual gifts such as miracles, tongues, and healing), common at the time of the newborn Church, are still being bestowed on Christians today. *Cessationists* maintain that signs and miracles ceased when the New Testament scriptures were accessible by local congregations [p. 207]. Warfield explains...

God the Holy Spirit has made it His subsequent work, not to introduce new and unneeded revelations into the world, but to diffuse this one complete revelation [the Bible] through the world and to bring mankind into the saving knowledge of it.⁷⁷

Many scholars believe the phenomenon of the *charismata* tapered off gradually, perhaps into the 4th century. Miracles may have been useful in isolated areas and specific situations. Early church leader Augustine wrote...

For when the [Church] had been diffused and established through the whole world, these miracles were no longer permitted to continue in our time, lest the mind should always seek visible things, and the human race should be chilled by the customariness of the very things whose novelty had inflamed them.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ John MacArthur, “Does God Do Miracles Today?” *Sermons 90-56*, www.gty.org, August 11, 1991.

⁷⁷ B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1918).

⁷⁸ Augustine, *On the True Religion*.

Later, Augustine revised this belief saying that he had witnessed some miracles that were of the New Testament type. However, he noted that these were not comparable to those of the Apostles and Jesus.⁷⁹ The point here is that there wasn't the blanket acceptance of miracles in the early centuries that some would have us imagine.

Today's Pentecostals and other charismatic congregations believe that the gifts never completely ceased. Most Pentecostal groups trace their modern origins to evangelical revivals in the U.S. and Britain during the 19th century.⁸⁰ The common belief was that the Church had grown cold over the past two millennia and that God was once again pouring out his Spirit. Today, these groups, anticipating Christ's imminent return, believe that charismata are bestowed when Christians experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Worldwide, Pentecostalism is one of the fastest-growing portions of Christianity. The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) churches are a more recent charismatic movement with a strong emphasis on reestablishing the early church traditions, including supernatural signs and wonders, apostolic governance, and extra-biblical revelation.

Some other evangelicals deny that miraculous gifts ceased after the apostolic age.⁸¹ However, many of these do not see these events as standard practice for the church. John Piper argues that modern miracles are possible, but they must conform to Paul's example...

Miracles were no contradiction of the theology of the cross which Paul proclaimed and practiced, since they were performed not in a context of triumphant success and prosperity, but in the midst of the distress and vilification he was obliged to endure.⁸²

MacArthur has a more limited view of contemporary miracles as a standard part of Church experience...

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Retractions*.

⁸⁰ The term *Pentecostal* refers to the bestowing of gifts on the early church at the Day of Pentecost gathering.

⁸¹ C. Peter Wagner and John Piper are mainstream evangelicals who believe the charismata have not ceased.

⁸² C. K. Barrett, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 321.

His power has not diminished in the least since the days of the early church... if God chooses to do something miraculous, He can do it. I am convinced that most of the miracle signs and wonders—if not all—being claimed today in the charismatic movement, have nothing in common with what we know about biblical miracles. They don't fit the biblical criteria.⁸³

Miracles and Catholics

The Catholic Church (CC) has historically experienced its own brand of miracles.⁸⁴ Not only are supernatural events a significant factor for a large number of constituents (one billion Catholics worldwide), the phenomena have become part of the culture in general. Many non-Catholics are aware of particular alleged miracles and have incorporated them into their worldviews to some extent.

As a Protestant (and Evangelical) I admittedly have some views that vary significantly from the teachings of the CC. My intention here isn't to debate or demean specific doctrines or members, but to address the nature of miracles associated with Catholics. I'll depend primarily on sources within their documents.

The CC's understanding of the supernatural is in many ways more clearly defined than that of many evangelical groups. As a doctrine, they expect that supernatural signs will be used by the Holy Spirit in the development and sustenance of faith...

That the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵

⁸³ MacArthur, "Does God Do Miracles Today?"

⁸⁴ I use the term Catholic Church (CC) to refer to most of the rites in general. The examples and quotations are primarily from the Roman Catholic Church, since it's likely recognized by more readers.

⁸⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Dei Filius* 3

Indeed, denying the possibility of supernatural intervention by God would place one out of communion with the Church...

If anyone shall say that miracles are impossible, and therefore that all accounts regarding them, even those contained in Holy Scripture, are to be dismissed as fables or myths; or that miracles can never be known with certainty, and that divine origin of Christianity cannot be proved by them; let him be anathema.⁸⁶

Thus, a practicing Catholic would anticipate that miracles would be common among their billion members. They are quick to note that a true miracle already occurs with each individual communion event...

Miracles big and small surround us, including the greatest one that happens every hour of the day in every country of the world: the Eucharist, bread and wine transformed into Christ's body and blood...⁸⁷

The CC emphasizes that supernatural interventions are meant to be signs or revelations pointing to a truth greater than the outcome of the particular miracle. It also has a logical way of classifying miracles at the base level. The system shows a clear differentiation between biblical miracles and those performed later...

The miracles of Christ and the subsequent works of the apostles in his name come down to us through Sacred Scripture, which is considered to be *public* revelation, as it's valid for all time and meant for all. Miracles and messages received after the death of the last evangelist, John—even extensively studied and Church-authorized spiritual insights given to history's greatest saints—are considered *private* revelation.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Vatican I, Session 3: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, www.papalencyclicals.net, Accessed Feb 24, 2020.

⁸⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, no. 5.

⁸⁸ Michael O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015).

Thus, all the miracles recorded in the Bible are *public revelation*, as are all other truths found in Scripture. Catholics, as well as conservative Protestants, would agree on this aspect. The questions, however, concerns *private revelation*. As previously discussed in an evangelical context, are these signs needed in post-apostolic times? Pope Benedict XVI believes they are...

Private revelation is an aid to [faith in the Scriptures], and it demonstrates its credibility precisely because it refers back to the one public revelation.⁸⁹

As for relevance to present-day believers he goes on to say that personal revelation can...

...introduce new emphases, give rise to new forms of piety, or deepen old ones. It can have a certain prophetic character and can be a valuable aid for better understanding and living the Gospel at a certain time...

Despite the popular view that the CC actively exaggerates molehill events into mountains, Catholic leadership is well aware that a miraculous claim is very likely not a true miracle. In fact, church leaders wisely note that presumed miracles may become a distraction to religious practice...

Excessive, obsessive expression of belief by the faithful in miraculous phenomena is not only the reason the Church is methodical and cautious in approving any occurrence as authentic but also a primary impetus for performing any investigation in the first place. The unspoken goal of such examination is to prove that nothing supernatural is occurring at these places, in order that the faithful might return to a more authentic and grounded practice of their faith.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Post-synodic Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, no.14.

⁹⁰ Michael O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015).

In light of the flood of miracle claims in the 1900s, the Vatican's CDF created a document laying out guidelines for discerning private revelations.⁹¹ The *Normae Congregationis* was approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978 and gave local bishops the responsibility of investigating the events. It also provided criteria for discerning supernatural intervention as summarized by O'Neill...

- The facts in the case are free of error.
- The person(s) receiving the messages is/are psychologically balanced, honest, moral, sincere, and respectful of Church authority.
- Doctrinal errors are not attributed to God, the Virgin Mary, or a saint.
- Theological and spiritual doctrines presented are free of error.
- Moneymaking isn't a motive involved in the events.
- Healthy religious devotion and spiritual fruits result, with no evidence of collective hysteria.⁹²

Should a private revelation fail any of these criteria, Catholics are required to recognize the decision of the ecclesial authority and not regard the event/object as authentic. Interestingly, a church authority may reject the actual revelation, yet still, sanction the public veneration surrounding the event. In other words, the miracle may be false, but any good fruits resulting from the event (increased faith, repentance) are considered acceptable. If a private revelation is discerned to be genuine, it's deemed *constat de supernaturalitate*.⁹³ At this point, church members may believe the revelation, however, this doesn't mandate an obligation to do so.

Currently, healing miracles are also being scrutinized more closely within the CC. For example, the alleged healings at the holy site in Lourdes, France are reviewed by a medical committee before accepted as authentic. Dr. Franco Balzaretto says...

⁹¹ The CDF (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith) document *Normae Congregationis* (Norms of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Manner of Proceeding in Judging Presumed Apparitions and Revelations) was a secret document, revealed on the Internet beginning in 1994)

⁹² O'Neill, *Exploring*.

⁹³ Latin for "It is established that this is something supernatural."

The methodology of our committee is very rigorous. If some elements go missing then a file is kept and archived in some cases. We are limited when [*sic*, rather “to”] declaring whether healing is not scientifically explicable. We are doctors. Our committee only declares a case a miracle only after an extensive study has been conducted.⁹⁴

He goes on to explain that in order for a miraculous cure to be authenticated, it must be 1) clear, 2) instant, 3) complete, 4) permanent, and 5) demonstrated with medical documentation before and after. The healed condition also had to have been serious and unable to be cured by normal means.

Alleged Catholic miracles are quite diverse, many drawing media attention even among non-Catholics. One of the most common is a *Marion apparition*. Catholic theology claims that Christ’s mother, Mary, was assumed bodily into heaven, thus she is able to manifest herself spiritually (or bodily) in order to aid the Church. The list is long of church-authenticated visitations by Mary. A *visionary* may literally have a vision of the Virgin, hear a spoken voice, see a seemingly physical apparition, or visualize an image of her in an object.

Perhaps the most well-known Marian apparition occurred in Fatima, Portugal in the summer of 1917. The apparition known as *Our Lady of Fatima* appeared to three young children on six different occasions, on the 13th of each month. The children claim to have been told many things by Mary and an angel, including her request to “pray a lot, a lot for the sinners and sacrifice a lot, as many souls perish in hell because nobody is praying or making sacrifices for them.”⁹⁵

The apparition informed the children of a final miracle to come on the next October 13th. It was reported that up to 100,000 people may have gathered at the site that day. In what is also called the *Miracle of the Sun* many claimed to have seen the sun radiate colorful beams while shooting back and forth across the sky. Others say they saw nothing unusual. In 1930, the local Bishop declared the Fatima events “worthy

⁹⁴ “The Miracles of Lourdes: What Criteria Are Used by the Church to Recognize Them?” www.romereports.com, Accessed 10 Aug 2020.

⁹⁵ John De Marchi, *The Immaculate Heart*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952).

of belief." John Paul II had great respect for Our Lady of Fatima, regarding an incident in his life...

At that time I experienced mortal danger and suffering, but also the great mercy of God. By the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima my life was given back to me.⁹⁶

Other manifestations of Mary haven't been as well-received by the CC. Leaders bemoan having to deal with the pareidolia of those seeing holy images in everything from clouds to potato chips.⁹⁷ Often artworks of Mary or one of the saints are reported to have blood or tears oozing from the image...

Of these images of our Holy Mother, some have been identified as being miraculous. It is not that the statue or painting is miraculous of itself, but it does seem that Our Lady favors certain of her replicas and often honors the requests of those persons who visit them to express their needs and their love for her.⁹⁸

The Genuine Article

The skeptical side of me says that people are notoriously bad at discerning miracles. Certainly, God can and does work miracles whenever and however he chooses. Yet I'm guessing a large proportion of modern miracles fall into the *mistaken identification* category, the majority of these being merely statistical phenomena. *Events of low probability may simply happen, given enough time and a large pool of events.* I've personally witnessed charismatic events in which participants are very likely experiencing something more akin to psychology than to phenomenology.

⁹⁶ Consecration of the Church of Our Lady Fatima, Homily of John Paul II, *June 7, 1997.*

⁹⁷ A boy in Miami found the image of Mary on a grilled-cheese sandwich. His mother sold it on Ebay for \$28,000.

⁹⁸ Joan Carroll Cruz, "Miraculous Icons," Excerpted introduction to *Miraculous Images of Our Lady*, www.the-miraclehunter.com, Accessed Feb 2, 2020.

We might also expect some miracles to be hoaxes. In churches alone (Catholic and Protestant), we have witnessed scandals engineered for the profit or prestige of the parties involved. These we'll classify as *directed human activity*. This doesn't necessarily have to involve deliberate trickery. An overworked sitcom example... Suppose you witness a murder, then later see the victim walking around in good health. Oh, what you didn't know was that you had observed a group rehearsing a scene from a play. From your perspective, though, it seemed a "miracle" had occurred.

At this point, I probably seem quite cynical. I've bashed miracles and accused some of my brothers and sisters of deception. I would argue that Scripture commands us to be discerning. Miracles are rare. As one wise person said, "That's why they're not called *normals*."

But now perhaps we can more effectively examine that small group that remains—those miracles that occur with very low probability *and* that exist within a context of real narratives and events. Instead of starting with modern miracles, let's see how truly *bona fide* miracles—those performed by Jesus—display unique characteristics.

In chapter 9 of John's gospel, Jesus heals a blind man. We are told this man has been blind since birth which implies that his condition was long-term, incurable by conventional treatment, and well-known by the community. Even today with modern technology, there is little chance that total blindness can be cured, so his restored sight was an extremely low probability. There might be statisticians who still claim that the event is improbable yet possible by normal means. But there is more involved in this miracle.

As with the baby bag example, the context of this miracle is more convincing than the mathematics. Consider the big picture... A rabbi claiming to be God happens to come across the blind man. The local group of religious leaders needed to learn a spiritual lesson. Twelve disciples needed training in the supernatural. A community (who had spent years dealing with the blind man and knew him well) needed faith in a Savior. And possibly most significant, God had decided a couple of decades earlier that a baby would receive a defect so that all of this could come together at a particular place and time.

In another well-known miracle, Jesus feeds thousands with a basket of fish and bread. Skeptics are quick to dismiss this account

simply because it's *too* miraculous, so it's a good example to cite. I believe it would require an even greater miracle to fake or cause misidentification of this event. The probability of fooling one person might be calculable, but I would assume close-up sleight-of-hand involving twelve servers and multiple thousands pushes the limits of probability.

Once again, several components within a context take even a low probability to the next level... A situation occurs in which thousands of people have a physical need. Twelve disciples need more hands-on instruction. A crowd of sinners at a particular time and place need faith in a Savior. God desires an example that will inform for centuries and glorify him for eternity. Now that's a miracle!

Discerning a True Miracle

Are modern miracles non-existent or just extremely rare? I believe I can say with certainty that true miracles are at least rarer than most people imagine. But I would never want to be in the position of boxing God into a quota, based on my flawed human reasoning. I believe the "safest" approach would be to hold the miracle in question up to the light of genuine New Testament miracles. Here are some characteristics of the miracles recorded in Scripture. This isn't meant to be a checklist, but rather a qualitative model that reveals by its uniqueness the counterfeit.

- Biblical miracles were easily and naturally attributable to God. Although God may have used people as channels, there was never a question as to the source.
- Obviously, the recipients of miracles benefitted, but biblical miracles were intended *primarily* for the benefit of the observers. Furthermore, the ultimate benefit was the spread of the gospel.
- Other than enhancing their authority to spread the gospel of Christ, miracles did not benefit the one performing them.
- Miracles did not contradict Scripture in any way, nor did they add information to Scripture.

- The results of a miracle were immediate and permanent (for the life of the recipient).

Compared with biblical accounts, many modern “miracles” fall miserably short on one or more of these points. Believers must guard against “Godless myths and old wives’ tales” that ultimately lead away from God rather than bring him glory. God can and will use miracles as he pleases, but he doesn’t need the assistance of even our well-meaning stage shows.

The Everyday Supernatural

We tend to think of supernatural events as rare, spectacular, and far-removed in time, and that's true in a sense. But in addition to our miraculous creation and God's providence, we experience interfaces with the supernatural continuously in the here and now. Just to list a few...

- Our efficacious prayers resound in the supernatural realm, leading to effects in the physical universe. (1 John 5:14, James 5:16)
- The Holy Spirit translates our crude prayers into effective and powerful communication with the Father. (Romans 8:26-27)
- The Spirit guides and informs us. (Luke 12:11-12, 1 Corinthians 2:13)
- The Evil One and his cohorts scheme to “devour” us, as Christ protects us. (1 Peter 5:8, Luke 22:31-32)
- As Satan “accuses” and “slanders,” Christ stands before the Father as our immediate Advocate. (Job 1:9-10, 1 John 2:1-2)
- Our moment-by-moment faithfulness in this realm determines our eternal rewards and responsibilities. (Matthew 6:19; 16:27; 25:21, 1 Corinthians 3:8, 2 Corinthians 4:18)

8

Ghosts and Other Things that Go Bump in the Night

*“There’s more of gravy than of grave about you,
whatever you are!”* Ebenezer Scrooge

*“...People are destined to die once, and after that to face
judgment.”* Hebrews 9:27

Poltergeist, phantom, shade, wraith, spook, bhut, yurei, specter, banshee. The names reflect the diversity of cultures that have entertained the idea that some essence of life continues after death. The belief is rooted somewhere in the shadows of our prehistory. From Gilgamesh’s encounter with his dead friend, Enkidu, to A&E’s *Ghost Hunter* series, belief in the spirit world intrudes into our world endemically. According to a 2009 survey of U.S. adults, 18% claim to have personally experienced a ghost. About a third say they have felt in contact with someone who has died.⁹⁹

The media abounds with entertaining depictions of ghosts and the afterlife. We get fascinated—they get rich. According to the general storyline, at death there is a lighted tunnel through which a spirit is compelled to pass, otherwise, a popular modern psychic explains...

⁹⁹ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009.

A ghost is created when, at death, the spirit either sees the tunnel and turns away or refuses to acknowledge the tunnel in the first place, with the result that it gets caught, outside of its body, between our dimension and the dimension of The Other Side.¹⁰⁰

This ghost recipe is essentially a throwback to some very ancient ideas. By the Middle Ages, some in the church had compromised a hefty portion of the pagan folklore of earthly spirits. This doctrine of purgatory did much to shape our western ghostly traditions. As the doctrine was refined over the next few centuries, a “Christianized” explanation for those restless spirits was popular...

Because if they die truly repentant in charity before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for sins committed and omitted, their souls are cleansed after death by purgatorial or purifying punishments...¹⁰¹

Since few were likely to achieve these “worthy fruits,” multitudes of suffering souls could now be postulated, moving in and out of the earthly realm, striving to purge their sins and gain entrance into heaven. Soon, any person dying with unfinished business was believed to be doomed to haunt their former habitation, obsessed with some desire for “closure.” Proponents of this view attempt to provide a coherent theory of how all of this works. But, when we extract the general doctrine espoused, it seems to be a fuzzy, pop-culture pantheism in which the deceased person (soul) never quite has a clear idea of what’s happening.

What Does a Ghost Look Like?

The title may seem to beg the question, yet it seems that many people are perceiving something. In his early book on the paranormal, G.N.M. Tyrrell explains...

¹⁰⁰ Sylvia Browne, *Life on the Other Side*, Penguin Books, Ltd. 2000

¹⁰¹ Second Council of Lyons, 1274.

“Do you believe in ghosts?” is one of the most ambiguous [questions] which could be asked... “Do you believe that people sometimes experience apparitions?” the answer is that they certainly do.¹⁰²

The term “apparition” is perhaps more appropriate here since it speaks of an *appearance* or *event*. “Ghost,” however, implies a personality. To reiterate part of the rationale for this book, in some respects, what a person experiences is often more significant than what happens in reality. This is in no way a bow to relativism, but rather the acknowledgment that our perceptions and beliefs about an event are what most affect our worldview.

I’ll suppress the strong temptation here to tell a string of ghost stories. There are plenty of Internet sources for anyone reminiscing campfires and s’mores right about now. Instead, let’s examine the commonalities among ghostly phenomena.

Tyrrell did his research on the paranormal during the first half of the 20th century. With degrees in math and physics, his studies do seem to be well-documented and systematic. He also claims to have included only “reputable” witnesses in his studies. From his large case file, Tyrrell created what he called the “perfect apparition.” This was a theoretical “collage” of the cases he had studied. These features are common, but not necessarily present, in each incident. For Tyrrell, the perfect apparition, “while standing beside a normal human being,” would exhibit the following ...

- Both would appear equally real and solid.
- The apparition could be viewed from any distance or angle chosen.
- The apparition might speak to us or respond, but not at length.
- If a mirror were present, both figures would be reflected.
- Both figures would cast shadows.
- If the apparition was wearing a rose, we might smell it.

¹⁰² G.N.M. Tyrrell, *Apparitions*, (New York: Collier, 1953, e-book 2018).

- We would hear sounds associated with a real person (shuffling, stomping).
- We might feel its touch, and it would turn its head to follow our movement.
- In addition to clothing, other accessories might be present, such as a cane, watch, suitcase, or even a pet.
- The apparition might manipulate real objects.
- If we tried to hold on to the apparition, we might feel it or our hands might pass through it. We might feel a “coldness” near the figure.
- In time (seconds to a half-hour), the apparition would fade, vanish, or pass through a wall.

In my research of ghostly reports, Tyrrell’s insight also seems to coincide with the majority of modern perceptions of the phenomenon. We’ll use these claims in future comparisons.

Bible Ghosts

Those who pursue ghostly experiences often point to the book of 1st Samuel as biblical evidence.¹⁰³ Amid battle with the Philistines, King Saul isn’t getting an immediate response from God, so he decides to take matters into his own hands. Saul goes to the neighborhood medium and convinces her to channel the ghost of the departed prophet Samuel. The Endor medium does her act but seems terrified when the “ghost” of Samuel actually appears. The spirit’s first words are “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”

Theologians differ over the interpretation of this incident. Some claim that the spirit was merely a demon impersonator of Samuel. The spirit gives a stern rebuke to Saul which does sound as though he is still prophesying for God. Another view is that in a rare act, God allowed Samuel’s spirit to be brought from Abraham’s bosom¹⁰⁴ for a special

¹⁰³ The word for “spirit” in the Bible denotes “wind” or “breath”. Depending on the translation, it may be rendered “ghost” or “spirit”. The KJV uses the term “Holy Ghost” for the third person of the trinity.

¹⁰⁴ Abraham’s bosom is a term used to designate the place where the spirits of Old Testament saints resided temporarily.

pronouncement to the ungodly king. In either case, Samuel wasn't hovering around waiting to be summoned. This appears to be a unique situation and in no way a justification for the concept of ghosts, channeling, or necromancy. Scripture expressly forbids any attempts to contact the dead...

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 (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

The New Testament references ghostly spirits, but only in the context of colloquial beliefs. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, their mistaken assumption was that it was a ghost.¹⁰⁵ Also, when Peter was miraculously released from prison, those hiding in Mary's house mistakenly believed at first that his appearance was his spirit.¹⁰⁶

However, nowhere does Scripture indicate that we remain on earth or connected to this physical realm after death. The consensus of God's Word is that at death we instantaneously enter eternity either with Christ in heaven or separated from him in hell. Taken literally, Jesus's account of the rich man and Lazarus implies that returning to the physical world isn't just rare, it isn't allowed.

Our Dual Nature

Despite the multitude of erroneous beliefs, most of us with a Christian worldview readily accept the idea that there truly is a consciousness that transcends death. The Bible is quite clear about the continuity and destination of human souls. Indeed, that is the hope of Christianity! Our point of contention concerns the *nature* of the

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 14:26

¹⁰⁶ Acts 12:15

afterlife. In one of the clearest descriptions of our supernatural composition, present and future, Paul settles some of our deepest concerns...

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life... We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord... and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-8).

Paul says that I inhabit my body just as I might dwell in a tent. I am not simply a physical machine as Darwinian evolution would predict. Only my “tent” is earthly. Whatever electrochemical mechanisms are at work in my brain, and however they interface with my real, conscious self, that “me” isn’t totally equated with my physical body. In other scriptures, that nonmaterial component is identified as a soul or spirit. *I don’t have a soul, rather I am a soul who lives in a body.*

Then Paul mixes in an even more intimate metaphor. I am *clothed* with a body. And, it’s conceivable that I could remove the “clothing” and still be a conscious entity. He quickly adds, though, that that would not be the ideal situation. Although God and his angels may exist as pure spirit, he has made my spirit to best reside in a body.

If it concerns you that your physical body might not have a very long shelf life, not to worry! In the future, our painful, deteriorating “clothing” will one day be replaced with new apparel. Although we can’t fully understand the details, our new suits will be of an immortal type, fit for eternity.

Ghosts in the Machine

Secular psychology attempts to link the belief in ghosts and the afterlife to our psychological denial that this current life must end. I have to admit that thoughts of my death aren't entirely pleasant, even though my faith anticipates a heavenly home. A wise Christian mentor once told me: "I don't fear death, just the painful stuff immediately prior to it."

But like most of my Christian brothers and sisters, I think my belief in the afterlife goes beyond an "animal" fear of finality. We all have a common aversion to nonexistence, in part due to that inner sense of eternity mentioned earlier. Our souls seem to know intuitively that our true selves are even now transcending physical time and space, though our bodies are connected to this physical realm.

As expected, when serious investigators attempt to organize the data on ghostly events, the results are often so skewed and dissimilar that scientific conclusions are difficult. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to apply the Pickle Principle...

Experience and intuition tell us that many of the phenomena are likely *mistaken identifications*. It doesn't require occult rituals or exotic equipment to see a ghost. As Ebenezer Scrooge observed, his specter was likely "an undigested bit of beef... a fragment of an underdone potato." Would anyone doubt that many ghostly sensations are reported by those who might be under the influence of alcohol, insomnia, a midnight movie, or some other altered mental state? I won't bore you with the list of self-inflicted, Saturday-night apparitions claimed by a guy in my college dorm, but it happens.

It's also possible, if not likely, that another large portion of hauntings is the result of *directed human activity*—or in this case hoaxes. Who doesn't enjoy a good ghost story? And if it brings in tourists and book deals, all the better. Hollywood has shown us that ghostly deceptions aren't only easy, but they are also entertaining. I haven't watched years of *Scooby Doo* for nothing.

The Pickle Principle tells us that even if these explanations are found to dominate, it doesn't necessarily follow that all the occurrences are of this type. This is a form of the *composition fallacy*, in which the whole is assumed to be the same as a smaller portion. Obviously, that

isn't always the case. And, an *appeal to ignorance* argument is equally unproductive. The statement “*No one has ever proven that ghosts exist, so they must not be real*” is just as invalid as “*No one has ever proven that ghosts do not exist, so they must be real.*”

Scientists also know that it's easier to falsify a hypothesis than to verify it. For example, how would we verify the statement “There are no ghosts?” If we searched every place on earth, a skeptic could still claim “You looked at the wrong time” or “You didn't look on Mars.” In any practical sense, the statement cannot be verified. But if one, single genuine ghost could be observed, then that statement is effectively falsified.

We also might consider whether our definition of *paranormal* might fit here. Could apparitions be some strange physical phenomenon that is yet to be explored? The army of modern-day ghostbusters who attempt to detect paranormal activity through “ectoplasmic” gadgets and electromagnetic fields would certainly think so. Some claim ghosts are the result of some yet-to-be-identified “life energy.” Proponents often suggest that with more research, the physical nature of spiritual phenomena might be determined.

But let's explore another alternative. Given that the vast majority of ghostly encounters are likely mistakes and hoaxes, is it possible that some of the remaining incidents *could* be explained supernaturally (strictly as *biblical supernatural*)?

Are Ghostly Phenomena Consistent with the Ephesians Hypothesis?

Could the sensory phenomena associated with spirit encounters fall under the purview of demons? Scripture warns that fallen spirits are able to lead thoughts and alter perceptions. Sights, sounds, and smells are no challenge for an entity able to deceive human senses. Add to this the propensity of humans to embellish and imagine, I wouldn't be surprised if “ghostly haunting” is just an entry-level job for aspiring demons.

It's also important to remember the context of any paranormal phenomenon we witness. The Ephesians Hypothesis operates within a narrative. Consider the general “theme” of ghostly encounters. Does

this phenomenon *usually* encourage people? Do ghostly messages facilitate the spread of the gospel? Do the spirits give praise to the God of the Bible? Do you feel more sanctified or less when you think of ghosts?

On the contrary, when we look at the unexplained incidents of ghostly encounters, the general mood seems to be fear, foreboding, and malice. There might be a few “innocent” encounters, but even with those, the effect is usually to lead away from the biblical worldview. Also, the messages channeled through spirits seem to have a common thread. Here are some general implications that emerge from reported ghostly communications...

- Ghosts are dead humans.
- Several possible paths might be taken after death.
- Ghosts are not very happy. They are confused or striving.
- The afterlife is a vague, irrational realm.
- Reality is New Age, mystic, occult, or pantheistic.
- Biblical views of the afterlife are wrong.

Undoubtedly, ghosts fail to support the Biblical view of the supernatural. We might ask whether demons have anything to gain by deceiving the living. Is there a good reason to impersonate the dead? One possible answer...

As servants of Satan and enemies of God, they would have every reason to cast doubt on God’s Word and its warnings about future judgment. Getting people to believe in ghosts automatically forces them to reject key Bible verses. ¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, ghosts seem to be a diverse species. They might appear to be purposeful, confused, happy, impish, miserable, erratic, angry, scared, scary, friendly, innocent, funny, or violent. If they are supposed to be those once living, how does their apparent afterlife experience line up with the biblical view? If Satan’s purpose is to oppose God, diminish

¹⁰⁷ Rick Barry, “Do You Believe in Ghosts?” July 1, 2010. www.answersingenesis.org

faith in his Word, and deceive believers, what better way is there? Ghosts defy all that Scripture says about Heaven and Hell.

Let's back up a step. If demons *would* present themselves as ghosts, *could* they? Does the Ephesians Hypothesis have explanatory power with regard to what people experience? Incidents involving alleged ghosts are not dissimilar to the Scriptural portrayal of the supernatural. Ron Rhodes notes...

People sometimes genuinely encounter a spirit entity—though not a dead human. Some people encounter demonic spirits who may mimic dead people in order to deceive the living. Many who claim to have encountered such spirit entities have some prior involvement in the occult.¹⁰⁸

Granted, demonic spirits can influence human thoughts and perceptions to some extent. But what about *poltergeists* (literally, “noisy ghosts”)? There seems to be a categorical difference between mental deception and actual interaction with the natural world. As discussed in an earlier chapter, there is scriptural evidence that demons can at times manipulate physical objects. Could poltergeist activity be correlated with demon activity? Apologist John Ankerberg believes it's possible...

...the poltergeist phenomenon and its occult connection offer strong empirical evidence for the demonic nature of these spirits. In fact, we know of no poltergeist case that cannot be accounted for on the basis of this theory. We believe the demonic theory is rejected today simply because mediums, parapsychologists and others don't like it.¹⁰⁹

And obviously, physical evidence is more convincing than mere sensory phenomena. “Noisy ghosts” might be more effective deceivers than the ephemeral ones as the evidence isn't simply personal experience.

¹⁰⁸ Ron Rhodes, *The Truth Behind Ghosts, Mediums, and Psychic Phenomena*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon, *Ghosts/Part 1*, 2005, www.jashow.org

Given these observations about ghostly encounters, let's compare some common characteristics with scriptural revelations about the spirit world in the Ephesians Hypothesis...

1. Those who witness apparitions experience sensory-rich phenomena that seem to have physical reality. Demons are able to affect human perceptions, and to some extent manipulate physical objects.

2. Apparitions vary in appearance and behavior. Satan works in ways most effective with the individuals being deceived.

3. Ghosts seem to circumvent physical laws. They appear, disappear, and pass through solid objects. Demons reside in another realm but can interact with ours. Their non-physical manifestations would not be subject to physical laws. Nor would they necessarily be detected by cameras or other devices, unless they wish.

4. Ghostly phenomena tend to lead away from Scripture and deny God's truth and the biblical worldview. The objective of fallen spirits, as given in Scripture, is to oppose God.

5. Ghosts seem to possess knowledge about the life of the alleged deceased (from which they're supposedly derived) and about loved ones, associates, etc. Neither Satan nor demons are omniscient, but they obviously have observed earthly events (possibly in greater detail than humans) and have insight into our affairs.

6. Apparitions are flirtatious yet elusive. It's in Satan's best interest for his deceptions to be alluring yet mysterious and generally untestable.

The take-home lesson from ghosts is that *Satan will do whatever it takes* to oppose God's Word and deceive his children. He is serious about his goals regardless of our interpretations. Ghostly phenomena (and many other paranormal phenomena) allow deception to be customized. There is no one-size-fits-all in the Deceiver's repertoire. An informed biblical worldview allows us to discern his schemes in

whatever disguise they appear. We'll examine ghostly phenomena in greater depth later.

Goblins, Gremlins, and Ghouls

How could we discuss the paranormal beings without considering those childhood nemeses from under the bed? We have seen that fallen spirits may appear as “angels of light” and will use any means within their power to deceive, destroy, and lead astray. The relevant question here is: Would they have anything to gain by presenting evil, threatening, and malevolent images? Childhood imaginations are creative enough, and I pray God gives excess grace to children by protecting them from actual demonic encounters. So, the specific adult question is: *Would demons have anything to gain by presenting themselves as demons?*

We'll examine spirits as objects of worship later. For now, let's limit our view to spirits as objects of fear. If any good aspect of *daemonophobia* (fear of demons) can be found, it might be that at least the victim's worldview acknowledges the supernatural realm. Demonic encounters are very similar to ghostly ones (after all, they have a common source), except in the latter, spirits may pretend to be *other than* their true malicious selves.

“Evil spirits” are another indigenous belief in cultures worldwide. The Christian worldview doesn't deny these entities in principle. Like flood and creation events, it's likely that cultural memory has transmitted these foundation truths from the Eden. Children may worry about goblins and boogymen, but adult history records a continuing obsession with jinn, wendigo, daimonia, Oni, ifriti, and Nun'Yunu'Wi. As we'll see later, it may be difficult to differentiate perceptions as biological or paranormal.

In areas where animism, shamanism, and folklore already have a strong grip on people's imaginations, evil spirits seem to be more likely to manifest themselves. Psychologists readily dismiss these accounts, since the experiencers already have that component in their belief system. I believe it could be interpreted differently. Could demonic manifestations be more common in shamanistic cultures because they are most effective there? The same phenomenon in the backyard of a

naturalistic skeptic would be counterproductive for a demon. It would actually provide the observer with evidence for the supernatural.

Our unfamiliarity with demonic activity in post-modern America isn't a good indicator. Christian missionaries provide ample verification that demonic phenomena are common where paganism is the tradition...

It's one of those bullet points under the spiritual warfare topic that seesaws between a conversation killer and an otherworldly fascination that seems too mystical to engage... Although demon possession is a topic the US church usually skirts, it's one that's readily engaged by other cultures. ¹¹⁰

The good news in the midst of this dark reality is indeed *the* "good news." The most hideous and pervasive demon activity is no match for the truth in the gospel message. Demons can work only where there is ignorance of Christ's work.

¹¹⁰ Caroline Anderson, "Demon Possession, Missions, and the Power of Jesus's Name," www.imb.org, 13 Oct 2017.

9

The Occult

“The most dangerous spiritual guide is the person who is 95 percent true to the Scriptures. Remember, it is not the truth that hurts you: rather, it is the evil.” A.W. Tozer ¹¹¹

“I’m telling you, the Devil is very smart. He’s not going to come out with the horns and the tail, he’s going to come in as the slickest car salesman you ever saw.” Alice Cooper ¹¹²

“Occult” literally means “hidden.” The implication is that certain knowledge is hidden from humans and that we would be better off knowing it. More specifically, “God has information and we want it now!” We’ve already looked at the precursor to this idea when Adam and Eve decided to access forbidden knowledge.

Occultism may include several phenomena—fortunetelling, necromancy, magic, or spiritualism. It has close ties to several other ideologies, such as New Age and certain world religions. The occult is a much more complicated system than the image most of us have of a mysterious Gypsy dealing tarot cards in her caravan or an Armani-clad TV mentalist. The huge proportion of charlatans and con artists in the craft lead many to dismiss the entire subject. However, the biblical worldview must encompass the big picture...

¹¹¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Crucified Life*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, compiled 2011), 189.

¹¹² Michael W. Chapman, “Alice Cooper, Christian: In Many Songs I’m ‘Always Warning About Satan’,” cnsnews.com, 29 Sep 2015.

Not all occultism is genuinely satanic. Human greed and self-seeking account for much of it... Yet Satan stands ready to pounce upon his victims who exhibit interest in the occult, for it is his domain.¹¹³

In defense of some psychics, I don't believe they are all willfully deceptive. Hucksters are always drawn to fame and easy money, and the psychic career field is overflowing with opportunity. However, we must not be led to believe that all psychic phenomena are human trickery. The Pickle Principle would suggest that some psychic phenomena could genuinely be supernatural. Unger warns...

Although much that passes for present-day spiritualistic manifestation is pure chicanery, nevertheless, that real communications from the spirit-world are at times received, cannot for one moment be doubted, if both Scriptural and non-Scriptural evidence is to be given credence.¹¹⁴

I hope the reader is beginning to notice the principle that things appearing to be random, chaotic, and diverse aren't always indicative of a lack of strategy.

Séances and Psychics

If you're having a feeling of *déjà vu*, relax. Paranormal phenomena tend to overlap at many points. But considering their source, should we be surprised?

Séances involve conjuring a spirit (presumably of a dead person) for obtaining supernatural information. Thus, we've just connected ghosts, divination, psychic channeling, and necromancy.¹¹⁵ Typically, the medium (a human channel through which the spirit is contacted) manipulates some type of life energy (participants joining hands for the

¹¹³ C. Fred Dickason, *Angels Elect and Evil*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 221.

¹¹⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 157.

¹¹⁵ A dangerous combination, as King Saul might attest.

energy flow) which psychically summons the entity. The spirit either speaks through the medium or performs some poltergeist gymnastics.

The easy part of analyzing this phenomenon is that it's likely 90% fraudulent. I would suspect there are plenty of demons who would like to jump in with some really deceptive messages, but most mediums have enough illusions and stage tricks to carry the sessions without supernatural assistance.

Unfortunately, this type of trickery can lead people to believe that all supernatural phenomena are fake. If genuine supernatural incidents do occur during a séance such as automatic speaking and writing, clairvoyance, and poltergeist activity, these are well within demonic purview. And realistically, Satan can use fake séances as well as supernatural ones in leading participants into error.

As for the other pursuits of career psychics [see p. 213 for psychic phenomena in general], my intuition says even fewer are genuinely supernatural. (Again, the Evil One can often capitalize on an individual's *belief* in a phenomenon as well as its actuality.) Human minds are easily manipulated, especially when vulnerable and convinced there is a psychic solution to a problem. As Obi-Wan so wisely noted, "The Force can have a strong influence on the weak-minded." Successful psychic con artists are experts at what they do. A skilled "psychic entertainer" can play technology, old-fashioned manipulation, and cold reads like Paganini on a Stradivarius. Bottom line—whether a psychic phenomenon is genuine or fake, it isn't an option for the obedient follower of Christ.

Spiritualism

An intuitive and experiential fact is that Satan seems to work diligently where God is working greatly. Many had come to faith during the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s. In the eastern U.S., where the gospel was spreading rapidly, another ideology began to emerge. In a counterfeit of God's outpouring of his spirit, some were turning to Spiritualism, a religion built around communication with the spirits of the deceased. Based on earlier works by "psychic scientists" Emanuel Swedenborg and Franz Mesmer, spiritualism taught that human spirits, when freed from the body gained great wisdom and

abilities, and that these entities could be very beneficial if handled properly. Although using the methods of the typical psychic (seances, psychic readings, trances), spiritualists raised the practice to a religion.

Spiritualism eventually became a popular movement with around 8 million members by the beginning of the 20th century. Adherents were typically upper-class and included notables such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Edison, Mary Todd Lincoln, and Pierre and Marie Curie. Their “gospel” was spread mostly by lectures given by the more prominent members.

Spiritualism had a significant influence on 20th-century North America, informing many modern supernatural beliefs. Its concepts spread “innocently” yet stealthily through the entertainment media of the Victorian age through the early 1900s.¹¹⁶ There are still practicing spiritualists today, however, the rhetoric has been toned down considerably, and most proponents work through established New Age and occult groups.

Witches, Warlocks, and Wicca

Witchcraft or simply the *Craft* is yet another ideology with roots beyond written history. As with most ancient belief systems, there are diverse forms under the same name, so someone will protest at any attempt to define it. When Christians speak of witches, Salem Massachusetts is the bludgeon used to beat us back down into a guilty heap. Few see (or admit) that the atrocities were actually an example of what happens when Satan’s lies twist true scriptural principles.¹¹⁷

One commonality among witchcraft groups is the practice of magic in all its variations—spells, necromancy, incantations, etc. Witches and warlocks (masculine) may employ *natural* magic forces or *personal*

¹¹⁶ Some popular spiritualist fiction from the era: William Dean Howells, *The Undiscovered Country* (1880); Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1886); Bolesław Prus, *Pharaoh*, (1895); H.G. Wells, *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, (1900); Hamlin Garland, *Tyranny of the Dark* (1905); Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Land of Mist*, (1926); George S. Kaufman, *You Can't Take It with You* (1936.); Muriel Spark, *The Bachelors* (1960).

¹¹⁷ There is evidence that the girls accused of witchcraft were suffering from the toxicity of ergot fungus in the grains they processed. Symptoms include hallucinations and erratic behavior. The 19 were eventually hanged, not burned at the stake.

magic granted by supernatural entities. Generally, witchcraft is more on the practical side, not overly concerned with where powers are derived. Regardless, everything about witchcraft is condemned by Scripture...

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 (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

The media certainly makes the Craft seem alluring, and if rebellion or peer acceptance is the objective, sorcery is just the thing. In the widespread popularity of witchcraft, some question the “sincerity” of contemporary witches since so many, especially adolescents and teens, are caught up in the practice more as a fad. The common excuse is “They’re not really into it—just curious.” But exactly how closely must one follow Satan to be considered a follower? Satan is probably as pleased with witch and warlock wannabes as he is with the hardcore practitioners.

In the 1950s, a retired British government worker pulled together several ancient occult ideologies and created *Wicca*. Intended as a modernized, more “user-friendly” form of witchcraft, Wicca has evolved into many different subgroups called *traditions*. With few centralized elements, local *covens* within a tradition are free to “customize” their beliefs. New members must undergo ritual initiations with a coven and may rise to a third-degree priest or priestess.

Primarily a European and North American phenomenon, Wiccans may be polytheistic or pantheistic, however, most traditions tend to be *henotheistic*, with a male-female dual godhead. Most Wiccans describe themselves as *neo-pagans* rather than witches and deny any association with Satanism. Their rituals center around pagan ideologies and involve equinoxes, solstices, lunar cycles, sexual perversion, and Samhain (Halloween). Wiccans take full advantage of modern social media with many apps, websites, and a robust cyber-presence. The dangers of Wicca are the same as for witchcraft in general, except perhaps they are more subtle. The Wicca Rede (creed), “If ye harm none, do what ye will” places a friendly façade on a belief system condemned by God.

Satanism

Perhaps the ultimate irony in all creation—worship of a being whose aim is the destruction of the worshipper. A.W. Tozer taught that all false religions begin with an erroneous idea about God. The Satanist, like Satan himself, believes the lie that God can be placed on an even plane with another. But then, *deceiver* is Satan's niche. It's what he does best. Thus, the follower of Satan sees him as an alternate, yet equally valid choice among deities.¹¹⁸

What does Satan think about Satanism? Is it his ultimate goal to gain the worship of humans? I couldn't begin to guess the mind of the devil, but what is revealed of him in Scripture leads me to think this isn't the case. At some point in epochs past, glory may have been on his agenda, but for now, I believe his single-minded goal is to oppose God by deceiving, blinding, confusing, discrediting, and destroying his image-bearers in any way possible. Whatever best supports this objective will be his strategy. I believe Satan is just as pleased in trapping a Christian with pornography as he is in producing a Satanic priest. He is equally satisfied leading those who believe he is a myth or those who worship him faithfully. Satan invented the term "result-oriented."

However, there remains among his schemes a place for those who choose to offer him worship and allegiance. Satanism began with the angelic rebellion in heaven, but the modern rebellion officially began with the founding of the Church of Satan (1966) and the publication of *The Satanic Bible* (1969). These were the work of Anton LaVey, a burlesque musician in San Francisco. LeVay cited his developing cynicism of religion, as he witnessed the hypocrisy of Christians attending his bawdy venues.

It's interesting that LaVey was an atheist, dismissing the idea of God, Satan, and the supernatural in general. For him, Satan was simply a good symbol for his rejection of religion. His teachings in *The Satanic Bible* were mostly hedonistic, promoting freedom from our guilt and inhibition over sensuality. LaVey's rock-star popularity, though,

¹¹⁸ I differentiate between Satanists who believe Satan is opposed to God, and worshippers of Lucifer who see him as equally good or part of some pantheistic godhead (more of a New Age stance).

spawned a myriad of other Satanic cults and ideologies. As with witchcraft, the attitude of “anything goes” permeates modern Satanism, and any group can identify themselves as “satanic.”

Satanists have been accused (at times rightly so) of animal mutilations, vandalism, arson, and even murder. The frenzy of satanic activities in the 80s and 90s was so widespread that many law enforcement agencies began to downplay or ignore the phenomenon. I would never attempt to excuse Satanism, but any mass-murderer or pervert can *claim* to be a Satanist. And again, sin is sin. *The appearance of a random babel of beliefs is no indication that a single-minded strategy isn't being carried out.*

We could study a long list of gruesome, evil, and paranormal accounts of Satanism, but I don't believe the Enemy deserves the attention. We know his capabilities. For the Christian, perhaps our focus shouldn't be on analyzing and categorizing Satanism, but in realizing who stands behind all sin and lawlessness. The Father of Lies can and will use organization, disorganization, fear, shock, normal, and paranormal, yet we have the promise “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Halloween and Holy Days

I don't celebrate New Year's Day... Don't judge me... I have nothing against those who enjoy crowds in sub-zero wind watching a large ball drop. That's all three hours past my bedtime. And as a teacher, New Year's Day means vacation time is over and I have to rewrite several misdated checks. Other holidays are higher on my list—Christmas, Resurrection Day, our anniversary, my birthday, Independence Day, Memorial Day.

Theoretically, holidays (holy, “set apart” days) are designated as remembrances of something important. This has been the traditional Judeo-Christian view. Similar to holy *places*, holy *times* aren't inherently holy, rather their “set-apartness” points to the truth behind them. This is why Paul could advise...

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:5).

How one acknowledges, obeys, and conveys godliness to others is more important than the particular date. Yes, God does command to acknowledge certain days (*e.g.* the Sabbath), but the emphasis is always on the truth behind the act, not the innate value of the time period. This isn't the view of many pagan holy days.

The tradition of Halloween is an example. To the Celtic pagans (my ancestors), October 31 (*Samhain*, pronounced *sau-wen*) was the last day of summer. For them, winter began on November 1 as well as the solemn preparation for the approaching cold, dark, dangerous days with no fresh vegetables. In addition to physical stress, Samhain was believed to be a time in the solar cycle at which the veil between the natural and spirit realms grew thinner. Portals would open and the spirits of the dead, along with demons, could walk the earth for a short time.

Samhain night was *All Hallows Evening*, a time to remember, respect, and often to appease spirits. You never knew which ghost might come to visit. It could have been Uncle Angus whom you accidentally ran over with your oxcart. To protect your family, you could build a big fire, put spooky carved gourds around your house, or disguise your family as ghouls and goblins.

Times were hard for the Celts and there apparently were lots of miffed ancestors and angry dead townsfolk to contend with on Halloween. Often, in the confusion of the night, all manner of evil was tolerable. It was a good time to knock off your irritating neighbor who played his bagpipes late at night. Just blame it on a ghost. Sexual perversion was common, since apparently devils can make you do just about anything, and it isn't your fault.

In the 17th century, Pope Gregory decided enough with demonic holidays in the empire. To avoid messy skirmishes, he instructed missionaries to keep the holy days, but try to put a Christian spin on them. So, along with many other pagan holy days and rituals, Halloween was "Christianized." The holiday was now All Saints Day (Nov. 1), a time to respect believers who had passed on. Scary stuff was

still used to keep demons from spoiling the festivities. The unbelievers, however, maintained the old ideology.

Eventually, the day became All Souls Day (Nov. 2), a time to pray dead saints out of purgatory. Needless to say, Luther and his cohorts didn't like that idea. The Protestants taught that all pagan practices were anathema. As for North America, the Puritans and most other colonists didn't celebrate Halloween (or Christmas). All Souls Day was brought to America by Catholic groups. Most of our modern Halloween customs and iconology came with the Irish-Scottish migrations of the 1800s.

A puzzling relationship exists between many Bible-believing Christians and Halloween. As a child, we celebrated Halloween. I enjoyed scaring people, especially girls. I also remember a twinge of cognitive dissonance when I reflected on ghouls, witches, skeletons, death, and evil in general, but hey, it was just for fun!

If I had a choice, I think I might erase Halloween from the calendar. When I consider the reality of Satan and the devastation he causes—disease, suffering, hatred, sin, death—it's difficult to justify frivolous representations of his domain, regardless of how innocent we attempt to make them. We don't have to search very far in Scripture to find commands to “abstain from every appearance of evil.”

Yet I realize other faithful believers disagree with my trepidations. Some suggest that Christians should actively “take back what Satan has claimed, and sanctify it for the Kingdom.” There is some truth in this, but can something be so corrupted that we should just trash it all and start over with something new?

Others claim that Halloween celebrations are a good way to evangelize unbelievers. I've seen this work, but only when the iconology doesn't contradict the gospel it's intended to convey. I question the effectiveness of presenting Christ's love while ghosts are chainsawing zombies in the background.

As Paul instructed, the way in which holidays are celebrated should never be a dividing issue among believers. We are, however, responsible for our decisions, especially their effects on others. Our ultimate goal is always, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Voodoo and Santeria

I've included these in this chapter since they are culturally associated with the occult. Both Voodoo and Santeria are considered religions or at least belief systems. They are similar in many ways, Voodoo having French origins and Santeria Spanish. This discussion will be very general since both beliefs have little written, organized tenets.

These are *syncretistic* religions, meaning the beliefs are a mixture of ideas from other religions. Voodoo and Santeria developed as African slaves were brought to the islands southeast of the U.S., where their African polytheism merged with mostly Catholic Christianity. They are considered monotheistic now since both profess a single transcendent, unapproachable deity. Contact with the divine, though, is accomplished through lesser deities which are believed to be angels, demons, or dead humans. The Catholic concept of saints is an easy fit for followers.

Voodoo and Santeria are highly individual and experiential, so there is a broad range of associated beliefs and practices. New revelation can come to any practitioner, and communities may have their own unique tenets. Members practice many forms of the supernatural, including divination, magic, spells, curses, and omens. The voodoo doll or effigy is a well-known aspect of syncretic magic. Animal sacrifices are common in many communities. In several sects, the worship of Satan is accepted since he is considered one of the sub-deities and is equally able to cooperate with those who summon him.

It isn't difficult to see that Voodoo and Santeria believers don't worship Yahweh God of Scripture. Practitioners actively seek spirit engagement; thus, manifestations of demonic activity are common. There is a trend among young people to dabble in the mysteries of the two religions. However, for the Christian, God's admonitions against magic and divination are unwavering.

10

Bigfoot and Friends

The account of trapper Bauman from Theodore Roosevelt's book *The Wilderness Hunter*...

About midnight the thing came down through the forest opposite, across the brook, and stayed there on the hillside for nearly an hour. They could hear the branches crackle as it moved about, and several times it uttered a harsh, grating, long-drawn moan, a peculiarly sinister sound. Yet it did not venture near the fire...

[The next morning] Bauman could see nobody; nor did he receive an answer to his call. Stepping forward he again shouted, and as he did so his eye fell on the body of his friend, stretched beside the trunk of a great fallen spruce. The footprints of the unknown beast-creature, printed deep in the soft soil, told the whole story... While thus waiting, his monstrous assailant, which must have been lurking in the woods, waiting for a chance to catch one of the adventurers unprepared, came silently up from behind, walking with long noiseless steps and seemingly still on two legs... It had not eaten the body, but apparently had romped and gamboled around it in uncouth, ferocious glee, occasionally rolling over and over it; and had then fled back into the soundless depths of the woods.

Bauman, utterly unnerved and believing that the creature with which he had to deal was something either half human or half

*devil, some great goblin-beast, abandoned everything but his rifle and struck off at speed down the pass.*¹¹⁹

With place and name changes, tens-of-thousands of similar (but not as deadly) incidents have been reported in the US. Bigfoot creatures are the “poster-monsters” in a larger group of mysterious alleged creatures known as *cryptids* or “hidden animals.” Those who research these alleged unusual species take the title of *cryptozoologist*.

Granted, the existence of strange, undocumented animals doesn’t inform our worldview to the degree of other unusual phenomena, nor does it necessarily rise to the level of paranormal. However, an overview of cryptids provides a good mental exercise in logic. Many of these same principles can be applied as we look at other phenomena. Also, there are important connections to the Christian worldview related to certain alleged cryptids. Furthermore, Bigfoot and other cryptids just can’t seem to keep their noses out of the paranormal—at least in pop culture. We’ll examine these more bizarre ideas in the next chapter.

“Unusual” is certainly a relative term when speaking of earth creatures. We are blessed with about 8 million different species right now, not counting many more that are extinct. When I thumb through any children’s animal book, I’m still amazed by some new creature of which I’ve never heard.

Sightings of *very* unusual animals are part of our folklore heritage. We can assume that a large portion of these might be misidentifications and exaggerations, although they are likely based on some facts. I can imagine a drunk sailor mistaking a sirenian for a mermaid. Things chasing you always look bigger and fiercer in the rear-view mirror.

Cryptozoology at Work

I’ve spent a lot of time admiring the awesome diversity of plants and animals on our little planet. In all my trekking, I’ve yet to discover

¹¹⁹ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893), 258-261.

a new species. Cryptozoologists (CZs) are typically pushed to the fringes of mainstream biology, but I certainly understand their passion. It would be amazing to find an undocumented species of daisy, but imagine coming across a strange, new large mammal. It makes me want to go Sasquatch hunting!

Perhaps the most significant difference between CZs and general zoologists is in their methodologies. Field zoologists usually search for new species by conducting a broad survey of a habitat with eyes open for anything new and interesting.¹²⁰ CZs, however, use *targeted* searches for a particular species that has been reported anecdotally.¹²¹ This is still a valid method, given the reliability of the initial observations. In fact, it isn't uncommon for a conventional zoologist to narrow a search to a specific animal or plant that someone might have reported.

Classified Cryptids

It's unfortunate to see all cryptids lumped together and dismissed as a group. Here again, we see an example of a kind of *composition fallacy*. There's a range of "believability" among cryptids, and it wouldn't be good science to judge all by a few (or *vice versa*). As with other phenomena, reports are mountainous, and it helps to look at the data in their proper categories. I'll use a system with four *types* based on Arment...¹²²

*Type 1 Cryptids... Organisms similar to living, documented species but with significant physical differences. Some new species are classified as cryptic species (not to be confused with cryptids).*¹²³ These are populations that look so much like another species, no one ever noticed that they were different. For example, it was discovered in 2014 that there could be several different species within the single species we

¹²⁰ Sometimes call a bio-blitz, many people sweep through an area and record every species they find, sometimes collecting a new species.

¹²¹ Cryptids are said to be *ethnoknown*, as opposed to species which have already been documented.

¹²²Arment, *Cryptozoology*, 16.

¹²³ Although is this a real difference? Had someone reported that a new species of giraffe might exist, before the difference was found, it would have been a cryptid.

now call giraffes. This was a highly technical determination, based on mitochondrial DNA, so it was difficult to tell just by looking.

Would a Bigfoot, by its composite description, fit into this category? Are they simply large primates similar to other large primates except taller and more bipedal?

Type 2 Cryptids... Organisms similar to living, documented species, but "out of place" geographically. A common cryptid story from the southern U.S. is the existence of large black "panthers."¹²⁴ This cryptid has been reported for decades but are assumed to be misidentified feral cats. There are several habitats with cougars (mountain lions, pumas), although a true black specimen has never been documented. We now know that jaguars do range into the U.S. from Central America.¹²⁵ We also know that black sports of the animal are part of the population. It wouldn't be unheard of that some of the millions of people in the southern U.S. might encounter a black jaguar.

Also, the possibility of feral animals could dispel some of the mysteries. I know of at least a dozen local individuals who raise exotic species as a hobby, some of which would make headlines if encountered in the local woods. A group of hominid sightings in Florida seems to indicate an animal similar to an orangutan. Could cryptids such as Bigfoot fit within this category? If a Sasquatch was seen in the Congo, might it be interpreted differently?

Type 3 Cryptids... Organisms similar only to extinct documented species. Recently, sightings of thylacines (Tasmanian tigers) have been increasing "down under." Thylacines were one of the largest predatory marsupials to stalk Australia and Tasmania. In the late 1800s, the government placed a bounty on the animals due to their threat to livestock. The last living animal was documented in 1933. Some zoologists accept the possibility that a breeding population could be

¹²⁴ I don't have many of my own anecdotal tales of the "paranormal" except that I did see a large black cat in 1972. It crossed the road in front of me in an isolated area late one night. The cat was as long as my VW and was totally black I got a good look from thirty yards, and as others have said so scientifically, "I know what I saw!"

¹²⁵ Hilary Hanson, "One of the Only Wild Jaguars Known to Roam the U.S. Is Believed to Have Been Killed," www.huffpost.com, June 23, 2018.

surviving in remote areas. With numerous recent reports of thylacines, especially in Tasmania, it would seem the existence of this species isn't as improbable as some other cryptids.

There is precedent for fossil species to be discovered extant. In 1938 a fisherman's catch included a fish that had been previously identified through its fossils. Thought to have become extinct 60 million years ago, the lobbed-fin coelacanth was discovered off the coast of Africa. This situation does raise the question as to whether the potential existence of other extinct species is only a quantitative difference.

Is the length of time from extinction to the present a significant factor in evaluating the tenability of a particular cryptid? The age of the earth (universe) is an in-house discussion among Christian apologists and scientists. There is a consensus *that* God created. The debate is over *how*. Briefly, old-earth (long-day) proponents maintain that the universe is the billions-of-years-old that most secular naturalists claim. An old-earther would say that God has used evolution over the eons to bring the creation to its current state, and the "days" mentioned in Genesis 1 metaphorically refer to long time spans. Young-earth (short-day) creationists believe that God created the universe in the six, literal twenty-four-hour days as described in Genesis 1. Thus, young-earthers see the earth as 10,000-years-old, give or take.

I won't argue one way or another here, except to say that the two views offer different starting assumptions regarding some cryptids. For example, some would entertain the possibility that *mokele-mbembe*, a creature reported in the Congo, is a small quadruped dinosaur in the brachiosaur group. Its composite description is essentially that of the brachiosaur species, for which we have ample fossil remains. No one doubts that these animals existed in the past. Mainstream science and old-earthers, however, have problems with the idea of extant dinosaurs. The last of the dinosaurs supposedly became extinct sixty million years ago. The chance that a particular species (as a larger breeding population) could still be alive after millions of years would be considered very slim.

But the possibility increases significantly if the period is shortened to only thousands of years. In fact, a literal, young-earth view would

place humans with dinosaurs in the original creation anyway.¹²⁶ Old earth Christians, as well as secular scientists, find this notion unpalatable. The standard complaint is that a literal six-day creation would require too many events beyond our current observations of the physical world (miracles?).

Many scientists use a timeline, based on billions of years of evolution, and many solid Christians accept this view. Science is rightly established on the *principle of uniformity*, which states that “the present is the key to the past.” In other words, the most logical reasoning begins with discovering how the present world works. We then extrapolate back into history. This is, indeed, good science. It becomes problematic, though, when it leads to the exclusion of events that we don’t observe in the present or recorded history.¹²⁷

The issue comes up when considering the biblical account of a worldwide flood. Since we’ve never witnessed such an event, geologists tend to assume that the earth’s features must be explained by processes active today. For example, the current processes of erosion could have produced the Grand Canyon, given enough time. But wouldn’t a major, “non-uniform” event be able to accomplish the same erosion in a shorter time? Once again, our ultimate answer might depend on *whether our worldview accommodates miracles and the supernatural*. The bottom line for our present discussion is that the existence of these paleocryptids isn’t as problematic for young-earth creationists as they are for proponents of a vastly older universe.

Type 4 Cryptids... Organisms that are not similar to any single known species, living or extinct. In my opinion, this category is a no-brainer. I enjoy nature series and documentaries, but they usually give skewed

¹²⁶ There is no doubt that huge, scary, reptilian monsters have roamed the earth. I stand in awe when visiting the forty-foot-long, *Acrocanthosaurus atokensis* skeleton at the Museum of the Red River in Idabel, Oklahoma. I try to imagine this creature stomping through my backyard. The visual effects on Jurassic Park really drove home how real these creatures were. The bottom line is, fossil remains of dinosaurs and many other creatures provide the only data we have on these animals. All else rests on interpretation.

¹²⁷ The philosophical debate is between *uniformity* and *catastrophism* (the term here means “out of the ordinary”, not necessarily destruction). Young-earthers agree that uniformity is a good general principle, but they accept at least three major catastrophes in earth’s history—the creation, the fall, and the flood. Each of these involves supernatural elements.

views of earth life. In an effort to showcase the diversity of species and animal oddities, they often skip over the commonalities and patterns among the totality of species: Vertebrates are based on a quadruped design... Out of thousands of fish species, they all are variations of the same fish body... One-cell eukaryotes have virtually the same organelles... It's *extremely* uncommon to see a species with features *totally* different from any other.¹²⁸

What about animals with a combination of physical structures from several species? Some animals seem to possess the features of another group. For instance, the platypus seems to have a beaver's tail, a duck's bill, and a chicken's egg-layer. Closer examination, however, shows that no rules were broken and that this composite view is just a human artifact. Other related mammals can produce eggs (different from bird eggs), just like the platypus. Several aquatic mammals possess flat tails. And that duck bill—more like hairless lips than a bird beak. As weird as it seems, the platypus is just another variation on an earth-animal theme.

I think, however, the believability line is crossed when *chimera*-type cryptids are suggested. A chimera is a proposed composite of two or more unrelated animal *forms*. In Greek mythology, the original Chimera had a lion's body with an actual goat head protruding from its back and a snake for a tail. What moves this chimera to the crypto-trashcan? It is not that this is just totally weird. Simply, *the creature doesn't fit the pattern of an earth animal*. A real goat head and a real snake fused onto a lion is inconsistent with the rest of zoological anatomy.¹²⁹

Throughout history, much folklore has been based on chimeric creatures. The discovery of a living unicorn would thrill a lot of people and pump millions in revenue into the notebook/backpack industry, but would it be impossible? Perhaps not. If a unicorn is a horse with a horn, we already have them in Africa. Rhinos are in the order *Perrisodactyla*, as are horses. They clearly have a type of horn and a "horse-ish" form. Even better, a fossil form more resembling an actual horned horse was recently discovered in Siberia.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Evolutionists might attribute this to a common lineage—Creationists to a common Creator.

¹²⁹ Although, in a later chapter we'll see how modern science may twist this rule of chimeras.

¹³⁰ Andrei Shpansky, Valentina Aliyassova, and Svetlana Ilyina, "The Quaternary Mammals from Kozhamzhar Locality," *American Journal of Applied Sciences*, October 2, 2016.

There are eight references to unicorns (*remim*) in the Old Testament. They are mentioned in lists with other known animals, so the argument isn't whether they existed at the time but to the specific animal in the mind of the writer. Various translations offer them as wild oxen, antelopes, or other horned beasts. Some contend that the biblical unicorn was a rhino, but why make up a new name for the known animal? From living types and fossils, we know of at least 50 different species of rhino-like creatures, some more like horses than the modern ones. I'll side with every adolescent girl in the world and say it—there were unicorns at one time. Furthermore, I would be highly intrigued by the discovery of a living unicorn, but it wouldn't alter my worldview.

Ah, but let's add feathered bird wings to a horse. Still possible? I have a problem with Pegasus. Yes, birds have bird wings, but they're not mammals. Bats are mammals and they have wings. Could Pegasus be like an oversized, mammalian bat? There's that earth-pattern problem again. Four-appendage-flyers exist, but two wings on Pegasus plus four legs equal six appendages. Six-legged insects are okay, but the earth-pattern doesn't support six-appendage vertebrates—period. (Let's not even start on the feathers.)

Jackalopes? An antlered bunny? I have my doubts—especially since no hint of headgear is known for that species. Merfolk? The anatomical awkwardness alone can rule them out. Faeries? Tiny, cute people, a very distant maybe, but definitely not with two extra wing-appendages. I believe the improbabilities of Type 4 cryptids are intuitive to most people—at least to adults.¹³¹

¹³¹ Interestingly though, chimeras also play into modern genetic technology. It surprises most people to learn that we have produced many chimeras in the past decade—even some human/animal combinations. Although it sounds like science fiction, these chimeras are often used in researching human transplant options.[see p.330] During very early embryonic stages, cells from different species may be combined to produce a new organism with cells from both donors. In one project, human cells were combined with sheep cells and successfully grown to maturity. The technology is limited only to the imagination of the scientists and laws that might add restrictions. At some time in the future, Pegasus might be an option.

Are There Undiscovered Species?

Cryptologists often pick on paleontologist George Cuvier, who announced in 1812 “There is little hope of discovering new species of large quadrupeds.”¹³² Within a few years, explorers found gorillas, pygmy hippos, giant pandas, Komodo dragons, and several new antelope species. So he was a bit premature in his prediction, but 200 years later—surely we’ve found all there is to find. Perhaps not.

Between 1993 and 2008, zoologists discovered 408 new species of mammals—10% of the already known species.¹³³ As expected, new rodent species made up 174 of these, but there were larger mammals as well. There were 11 new hooved mammals (Artiodactyla) documented. Surprisingly, 55 new species of primates were on the list. Of the total mammals, 55 families added a new genus.

In 2003, zoologists were surprised to discover a population of new primates in the jungles of Tanzania. This new species *Rungwecebus kipunji*, is related to baboons. Regarding the discovery of kipunji, *Smithsonian Magazine* deemed it...

...astonishing for a large primate to be discovered in the 21st century in a heavily populated corner of East Africa, where human beings have been kicking around for as long as we have been human.¹³⁴

Although not as well-publicized as discoveries of the past, field zoologists are currently cataloging more species from more habitats than ever before in what some call a “new age of discovery.”¹³⁵

Most of the undiscovered animals in the world obviously aren’t mysterious sea giants or hulking ape creatures. The majority (as they are discovered) will likely be microorganisms, insects, small mammals,

¹³² Martin Rudwick, *Georges Cuvier, Fossil Bones, and Geological Catastrophes: New Translations and Interpretations of the Primary Texts*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹³³ Gerardo Cebados & Paul R. Ehrlich, “Discoveries of New Mammal Species and Their Implications for Conservation and Ecosystem Services,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 2009, 106(10), 3841-3846.

¹³⁴ Richard Conniff, “Meet the New Species,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, www.smithsonianmag.com, August 2010.

¹³⁵ M. Donoghue & W. Alverson, “A New Age of Discovery,” *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden*, 2000, 87(1), 110-126.

and such. In fairness to the cryptozoologists, this is one reason cryptids are often sensationalized. A hiker chancing upon an undocumented mosquito species isn't likely to discern the difference, even on close inspection, thus this species will never be noted as a "cryptid." But clearly, a seven-foot hairy humanoid running across the trail might stand out as something unique. Cryptids by definition must be conspicuous enough to deserve observation and subsequent storytelling.

A Closer Look at Bigfoot

Accounts of Bigfoot and other cryptohominids such as Yeti, skunk ape, hairy man, grass man, and Sasquatch date back at least hundreds of years and seem endemic. About a third of the 23,000 sightings in North America are concentrated in the Pacific Northwest. The rest are dispersed in clusters through forested and wetland areas. Descriptions vary somewhat from one "community" to another, yet individual sightings in a particular locale seem to be consistent.

Cryptid investigation generally starts with two questions:

- Could this creature exist?
- Could this creature exist *here*?

Could a creature such as Bigfoot exist? I like to use the "what-if-I'd-never-seen" test on cryptozoological icons. For example, what-if-I'd-never-seen a platypus? Can you imagine trying to convince your friends that you saw a hairy mammal with a duck's bill and venom claws, and it laid eggs like a bird?

What-if-I'd-never-seen a gorilla? I must admit, gorillas are awesome, especially if I happened to meet one in the woods and I had never heard of such.¹³⁶ My description of the creature would definitely arouse the cryptozoologists. But are gorillas qualitatively different from Bigfoot? Except for the feet and a few other deviations, not so much.

¹³⁶ Gorillas were identified relatively recently (1847). Prior to that, tales about cryptid "ape-men" in the area were common.

Objections to cryptohominids are based more on *time and geography* than on *morphology* (a Type 1 cryptid).

Think of an encyclopedia page picturing the range of families within the primate order. Would an image of a Bigfoot on the page seem inappropriate to an unbiased observer? Primate researcher Jane Goodall doesn't think so...“Well, now, you'll be amazed when I tell you that I'm sure [Bigfoots] exist.”¹³⁷ Her view is based on her expertise with primates and the assumption that a Bigfoot is a primate.

Sasquatch by Any Other Name

Legends of Bigfoot-type creatures have arisen independently in many cultures. The descriptions seem to be variations on a theme. Is this evidence for a real animal or simply our shared archetypes?

- Orang-Pendek – Sumatra.
- Yowie – Australia.
- Grassman – Ohio.
- Skunk Ape – Southeastern U.S.
- Barmanu – Pakistan.
- Momo – Missouri near the MS River basin.
- Yeti – Himalayan Mountains.
- Urayuli – Alaska.
- Chuchuna – Russia.
- Fouke Monster – Southwestern Arkansas
- Mappinguari – South America.
- Oily Man – Malaysia.

Most honest skeptics don't oppose the notion that a cryptohominid *could* exist in North America. Instead, the rational argument might be that given...

- ...limited territory,

¹³⁷ September 27, 2002, NPR, *Talk of the Nation: Science Friday*.

- a limited number of anecdotal sightings (considering the large population of people over many of years),
- that we have lots of sightings of other animals (even big ones),
- the lack of convincing physical evidence (photos, tracks),
- that a cryptid would likely mean a group of cryptids...

...*does* a cryptohominid in this area seem likely?

The disagreement will always be somewhat skewed, however. Science is much better at *falsifying* than *verifying*. Skeptics must disprove each bit of evidence found. “Believers” in Bigfoot need only produce one undisputable piece of evidence. But the onus is on the believer to find good evidence. Every datum of unproductive evidence adds to the weight of the skeptic’s position, as does the passage of time.

So, Bigfoot—thumbs up or down? I remain somewhat uncommitted, leaning toward “yes.” *Something* unusual is being seen by many. And, there is no reason a large primate *couldn’t* live in North America. To some, the preponderance of sightings in the northwest could be explained by the ice bridge that once existed between northern Asia and Alaska, allowing migration of Asian primates.¹³⁸ This could provide a genetic link to the alleged Yetis and known large primates.

If an American primate exists, it would probably look somewhat different from known primates, and it would be adapted to its particular ecosystem. It would have to have a breeding population (unless it’s the last of its kind and on the way to extinction), and that would require a large territory. Extremely large areas can be found in North America. When I fly over the boundaries of southern Arkansas and Oklahoma, I’m impressed by the hundreds of square miles of state park and forestry land, with only sporadic human activity. Some areas are so dense and inaccessible that one could easily imagine a group of secretive animals that would rarely have contact with humans. A fact that adds a degree of validity to Bigfoot sightings is that the majority are in coniferous

¹³⁸ Fossils of 9-foot *Gigantopithecus*, a hominid similar to an orangutan in body structure, have been discovered in Asia.

forests.¹³⁹ Cryptozoologists speculate that conifers may provide food (high-protein conifer seeds) or year-round canopy cover.¹⁴⁰

Some Evidence Supporting the Existence of Large American Hominids

(In fairness to my Bigfoot-chasing friends and those who claim to have encountered one.)

- Numerous sightings by reputable people.
- Consistent descriptions that seem to differ by regions. For example, in OK/AR, Bigfoot is 7-feet-tall and dark brown. In Southeast US, he's consistently reported as shorter and reddish.
- Concentrated in conifer forests (year-round food and cover) as opposed to deciduous forests where energy food is scarcer.
- Evidence of groups rather than individuals.
- And interestingly, a significant number of reports consistently describe the detail of an overwhelming, putrid odor associated with Bigfoot.

Bigfoot has unquestionably become a folk hero across North America. It would be naïve to think hoaxes aren't some part of the phenomenon. We know some incidents have been staged. Once again, it would be equally naïve to designate all Bigfoot evidence as contrived. The range and nature of the surroundings at the sites seem to speak against this as an all-inclusive explanation. In my locale, hoaxers

¹³⁹ Proponents claim that if reports are hoaxes or mistaken identity, we would expect sightings to be equally spread over all forest types.

¹⁴⁰ I've pondered the possibility of large hominids in my area (southern OK and AR). I tend to make comparisons with our bear population, estimated to be around 2000 (about one per 5 sq.mi.). Obviously, there is habitat and food for this population. Most CZs assume Bigfoot would have similar omnivore diets. Bear encounters are relatively rare in this territory. If a hominid population of, let's say, 20 existed here, we might extrapolate an extremely low incidence of encounter. My point is, the idea of a Bigfoot group in the area wouldn't be "outrageous." There are still many unknown variables: shared niches, competition with bears, hibernation, avoidance of humans.

tramping through the woods in a hairy suit would quickly become rarer than most cryptids.

We might also predict that as the human population increases and habitat decreases, the likelihood of documenting a cryptid increases. Proponents argue that that is exactly what is occurring. Sightings are increasing due to expanding human activity. Of course, a cryptid can never be scientifically verified without a body or a genuine DNA sample.

A Closer Look at Sea Monsters

Sea monster stories have been around as long as there have been sailors. It's easy to blame the stories on long periods of isolation, monotony, or a bottle of rum. But the ocean is a really big place. We landlubbers forget the immensity of the ocean habitat. Almost 70% of the earth's surface area is ocean, with a total volume that is staggering. If mysterious creatures do exist in the ocean, they have over 300 million cubic miles in which to hide. The deepest regions are over six miles below the surface—far beyond our present abilities to explore adequately.

And admittedly, *monster* is a difficult term to nail down. What-if-I'd-never-seen a whale, for example? I can't imagine a more stereotypical "monster." An animal that could wreck a ship with one tail flip, then swallow the crew!¹⁴¹ Squids and octopi are even scarier. We now know of one species of squid that grows to almost fifty feet, making it a perfect candidate for a monster movie or the fearsome Kraken. If perchance I ever encounter a bona fide sea monster, would it be qualitatively different from these?

We seem to have become "monstered-out" on those denizens of the deep, though. In the past century, most of our folklore has turned toward smaller lake monsters. Since few of us venture onto the high seas often, lake-shore picnics provide a much better opportunity to spot an aquatic (freshwater) beast.

¹⁴¹ Although most species are plankton feeders.

The most popular aquatic cryptid is undoubtedly the Loch Ness Monster, or Nessie. With 99% Scottish blood coursing through my veins, my official stance has to be that Nessie is real. Unofficially, however, I'm allowed to ask questions.

Is Nessie a Dinosaur?

For all practical purposes, Nessie's descriptions are those of the dinosaur *plesiosaur*. The unspoken issue for many scientists is that the existence of a modern-day dinosaur would contradict evolutionary and old-earth systems of dating.¹⁴²

But if we set aside the dating problems, is it even possible for large water cryptids to survive in the places reported? Here again, habitat and potential for human interaction are major factors. Lakes are *much* smaller in volume than the ocean. Some claim that Loch Ness has features that make it a suitable location for the monster. It does have an outlet to the North Sea. The possibility has been offered that the lake might simply be something of a breeding area for the creatures that normally hide in the depths of the ocean. That would explain the inability to corner Nessie with very intense searches. Also, the extended range could provide the required habitat. A famous North American lake cryptid reported in Lake Champlain seems to share some of Nessie's traits. The long-neck reptilian creature, called Champ, is a significant economic asset to the New York/Vermont region.

The possible existence of Nessie, Champ, and the mokele-mbembe raises some interesting questions. As mentioned, modern dinosaurs would not be the problem for young-earthers that they are for old-earthers and evolutionists. A recent creation (and the recent extinction of most dinosaurs) would be more consistent with a literal interpretation of Scripture.¹⁴³

Some point to the unusual beasts in Job 40-41 as evidence that dinosaurs and humans were contemporaries. To show Job that he was

¹⁴² There is also the ongoing problem of other large, modern reptiles. Some zoologists argue fine points of bone structure, phylogeny, and other anatomical variations, but crocodiles, Komodo dragons, and extant reptiles in general are not significantly different from dinosaurs in the context of this discussion.

¹⁴³ Information about the young-earth view can be found at www.icr.org and www.answersingenesis.org.

truly the Almighty, in perfect control of the universe, God displays two of his most magnificent creatures. I believe it's noteworthy that God devotes 44 verses of his inspired Word to describing the animals. The implied intent was to overwhelm Job's doubting with clear evidence of God's sovereignty. Naturally, the examples would have to meet the expectation of awe and wonder. This is where I think some interpretations miss the mark.

In many translations and footnotes, *behemoth* (similar to the general term for "beast," or "cattle.") is identified as a hippopotamus or elephant. I like hippos and elephants. They're interesting, photogenic, and sometimes quite amusing, however, I wouldn't put them at the level of overwhelmingly awesome.¹⁴⁴ I recall vividly my first viewing of the original *Jurassic Park*. My expectations were somewhat higher than the dino movies of the 60s, but I must say the first view of that brachiosaur rising on its hind legs to eat a tree—now that was awesome!

I like to imagine that Job may have never seen a behemoth (whose description fits perfectly with that of a brachiosaur). His reaction was probably similar to those of characters Sattler and Grant—utter shock. Sure, elephants are splendid creatures, but the description of behemoth seems very un-elephant: can't be tamed, semi-aquatic, tail like a cedar tree...

And if behemoth weren't enough, God calls up the sea-dwelling *leviathan*. The translators' best guess at this creature is usually a crocodile. Once again, I just don't see a croc in the description. Its features put even behemoth to shame...

- Can't be speared, hooked, bound, or shot with arrows.
- No hope of subduing it.
- No one able to fight it.
- Chest like stone.
- Treats brass like straw.
- Stirs the sea like a boiling cauldron.
- Nothing on earth its equal.

¹⁴⁴ Some claim that this is an example of biblical poetic exaggeration. This is employed in some books, but there seems to be no "poetic license" with the long description of other animals leading up to this. There's no indication that the mode changes with these final descriptions.

Ancients were familiar with some pretty fierce whale species. The verses imply that this beast was even fiercer. Some say the description sounds more like something of the mosasaur type. But here's the embarrassing little problem for those who prefer to limit God's ways to the modern, naturalistic *status quo*. Leviathan was a fire-breather...

His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth (Job 41:18-21.)

Fire-breathing dragons have been too over-the-top for most theologians the past two centuries.¹⁴⁵ Excuses include metaphor, poetry, an orangish tongue, just really warm breath, mythology, and mistakes in Scripture. Some scientists suggest ways that such a feature could be plausible. I don't pretend to have the final word on these beasts, but what I won't do is limit my options to appease those who limit God and his Word simply because their naturalistic presumptions are rustled.

We would do well to remember the scope of the Book of Job. The first chapter begins with a supernatural council in the divine realm employing supernatural interventions into the earthly realm. The main theme is that *we don't always see the full supernatural picture, but God is in control anyway*. Moreover, God's final dialog wasn't intended to give Job the answer to every mystery, but to lead him to confess: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."¹⁴⁶ *If* the creatures in Job were actually dinosaurs, a serious blow has been made to "millions-of-years" theories. With such high stakes, it's no wonder the idea is controversial.

Nearing Trail's End

Many CZs believe we are at a crucial point regarding the "famous" cryptids such as Bigfoot and Nessie. The technology to "fake" physical

¹⁴⁵ There are numerous examples of animals with the ability to combine secretions and create light, heat, and electricity.

¹⁴⁶ Job 42:2

evidence and videos makes the data inconclusive regardless of the quality. Only a body (dead or alive) or a unique DNA sample will verify their existence. But with the spread of other technology such as drones, robotics, and IR photography, if a cryptid does exist, its days of secrecy are probably numbered.

Should a long-sought cryptid be documented by mainstream science, it would no doubt make headlines. Ultimately, however, the creature would join the ranks of the rhino, gorilla, and coelacanth. When the mystique subsides, it will likely be added to the endangered species list, then tagged, tracked, and analyzed. Instead of a monster, we'll find another of the Creator's handiworks, perfectly designed to fit into an earth ecosystem.

11

Bigfoot on the Fringe

“I think [Bigfoot] is a kind of husband of Unk-ksa, the earth... Sometimes we say this One is kind of a reptile from ancient times who can take a big hairy form. I think he can also change into a coyote.” Joe Fly By¹⁴⁷

“Paranormal people like Sasquatch and ET-types have social contact with humans in this world when they choose to be seen; otherwise, they go about their business.”
Kewaunee Lapsertis¹⁴⁸

Once I had a bright idea for teaching seventh graders about moon phases. I brought a package of large round cookies to class. As I described what the various phases looked like, I gnawed the cookies into the basic shapes. There was a “no food” rule in force and I was instantly a rogue hero—but it was for science. I was so proud of my demo until exam day...

“A half-moon occurs when gravity tears out one side of the moon...”

“In the lunar cycle, sometimes pieces of rock fall away leaving a crescent shape...”

“Phases are when part of the moon is like, eaten away...”

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Keller & Knapp, *Hunt for Skinwalker*, (NY: Paraview, 2005), 158.

¹⁴⁸ Kewaunee Lapsertis, *The Psychic Sasquatch and their UFO Connection*, (Blue Water Publishing, 1998)

This is a dangerous chapter. Good teachers warn never to associate two superficially similar yet unrelated (non-analogous) ideas. Simply referencing ideas in the same lesson may indelibly link them in the minds of students.

However, my strategy here is strictly damage control. The deed is done. I believe the idea of true *biological cryptids* has been so merged with *paranoid cryptids* that our collective paradigms are hopelessly confused.¹⁴⁹ Invariably, most *History* and *Trvl* channel features about cryptids begin with flesh-and-bone beasts and end up somewhere in the twilight zone...

Popular interest in mysterious phenomena is high, creating an image problem for cryptozoology. Cryptids are often sandwiched between ghosts and UFOs within documentary-style programming, creating the perception that they are unearthly or paranormal... The need for entertaining or suspenseful devices creates the false impression that cryptozoology is just about hunting monsters...¹⁵⁰

I urge the reader to maintain a clear separation as we consider biological and paranormal cryptids. A corollary to the Pickle Principle might be appropriate: *The existence or non-existence of one group has no bearing on the existence or non-existence of the other.* A biological cryptid may be reasonable—a paranormal cryptid is a whole different animal.

Sasquatch Hops the Fence

As previously stated, cryptids in and of themselves aren't paranormal. However, Bigfoot sometimes takes on quite a different persona. "Parasquatch" has moved far beyond a flesh-and-bone

¹⁴⁹ Even referring to both groups as cryptids is probably misleading, but I'll do so here for simplicity.

¹⁵⁰ Chad Arment, *Cryptozoology: Science and Speculation*, (Landisville, PA: Coachwhip Publications, 2004), 11.

primate. Later, we'll explore some links to other paranormal phenomena. For now, let's consider the supernatural side of Bigfoot encounters.

Obviously, with the popularity of Bigfoot and the large number of sightings, a few outlandish outliers could be expected. However, a growing number of reports involve abilities beyond a natural wild animal. Several Native American groups, for example, consider Bigfoot and kin to be spiritual phenomena. Depending on the specific tribal tradition, the creature's role ranges from a sacred and revered wild animal to a wise and powerful spirit entity.

Since the earliest modern sightings, some have sided with the tribes who view Bigfoot as highly intelligent—perhaps superior to humans. Although based on the *absence* of evidence, they point to the fact that Bigfoot has successfully eluded us for centuries. If Bigfoot is real, he certainly has “outwitted, outlasted, and outplayed” us—the less-hairy primates—always staying one step ahead. Proponents say that would be expected from an intelligent being, well-camouflaged and on his own turf. Could there be an advanced civilization of the creatures who prefer to live in secluded underground habitats (and who also prefer not to bathe)? Some have suggested Sasquatch is actually studying us. Several squatch-hunters have begun wearing backward-facing cameras for that very reason. As Keel might say: “You noticed them, and they noticed that you noticed them.”

Kicking it up a notch paranormally, there have been consistent reports of Bigfoot fading in and out of sight, similar to ghostly apparitions. There are stories of the beast disappearing into a cliff face or materializing in a beam of light. Those who accept the incidents theorize that either the creatures are “cloaking” themselves in some way or are moving through dimensional portals. Both of these notions are often used to explain the elusive history of Bigfoot—they are not normal, physical entities.

Disturbing to the cryptozoology purist, a significant number of Bigfoot accounts include a mystic, psychological element. Witnesses list a variety of psychic phenomena such as mental “mind-melds” with the creature and telepathic messages. Some attribute our failure to verify Bigfoots to their ability to alter the perceptions of humans. This *woo effect* has become a popular topic among many crypto-enthusiasts.

If Native American traditions are correct, these abilities are expected of a mystical *skinwalker*, a spirit able to take any form and to behave in noncorporeal ways. If Bigfoot creatures are shapeshifter/mind-controllers, we may as well hang up our cameras, sit back, and wait for them to contact us. But while we're waiting, let's look at some other media stars...

The Monsters on Maple Street

Small-town America cherishes its neighborhood monsters. Some are whimsical; others are quite menacing. The mere possibility of their existence is influencing people's major life decisions. Whether a story is based on fact or fiction, once the tale grows legs (or paws) of its own there's no stopping it.

In 1893, surveyor Eugene Shepard claimed to have captured a strange beast known as a *hodag* near Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Shepard displayed the animal at the first Oneida County Fair shortly after. The public was mesmerized by the "fearsome critter" with the head of a frog bearing huge teeth, the spiny back of a dinosaur, and an ominous spiked tail. Not until a group of Smithsonian scientists came to visit did Shepard admit the hoax. The taxidermic chimera of teeth, skins, horns, and clawed legs (operated by wires) had fooled almost everyone.

Yet still, the hodag accounts live on. The Rhinelander school mascot is a hodag. Statues abound from one end of town to the other. Thousands come to pay respects to the beast at annual festivals and the local hodag museum. Many level-headed citizens claim to have seen living hodags over the past century, crawling through its natural habitat, the bogs of Oneida County. Some of these are even bigger and fiercer than Shepard's beast, supposedly attacking and devouring the unwary. Was Shepard's hoax based on a real animal? Will a living specimen ever be found? Two scenarios are possible: If a hodag is discovered, the town will continue the rich heritage of the hodag tradition. Or if it's never found—the town will continue the rich heritage of the hodag tradition.

Before the hodag began its prowlings, another monster was haunting the pine barrens of southern New Jersey. In the 18th century, a woman remembered as Mother Leeds was struggling with twelve hungry kids and an alcoholic husband. Upon learning of her thirteen pregnancy, she cursed her unborn and thus was born the *Jersey Devil*. The deformed offspring developed a horse-like body, horned head, and bat wings. Eventually, it found its purpose, roaming the region and wreaking havoc on the population. Thousands of eye-witness accounts of the Jersey Devil have been recorded since then.

Shapeshifters and Skinwalkers

Millennia before Lon Chaney Jr. perfected the art, Enkidu of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was able to appear as a ferocious wolf-like creature. Shapeshifters make excellent villains. How can you deal with a threat that may look like your mailman? Modern morphing technology in videos makes the phenomenon look believable yet imagine the anatomical problems. Werewolf movies bother me. Not from terror, but from wondering where the fur goes when he turns back into a man. I know it doesn't fall off. Does it suck back into his follicles? Does it magically fade away?

I think the fur thing pretty much establishes that shapeshifting (*therianthropy*) is a supernatural event with no comparable physical counterpart.¹⁵¹ Shapeshifters in mythology and fairy tales usually change back and forth into animals or other people. Also, witches and magicians can change a regular human into an object or animal. (How many frogs have been kissed in hopeful expectation?)

Wolves seem to be a good choice for a new shape. If I had my choice, it certainly beats a swan or frog. Medieval European myths eventually morphed into wolves having more of their humanoid features still intact. Peasants feared these beasts whom they believed to be demonic or servants of witches. To make matters worse, you never knew if your neighbor was a werewolf (*lycanthrope*). Some have suggested that the legends are based on a medical or psychological condition, or perhaps just a really stressful day. Haven't we all wanted to howl at the moon at some point?

¹⁵¹ No, not body growth or metamorphosis.

Therianthropic concepts are common in many Native American traditions. The name “skinwalker” is derived from the Navajo belief in entities with the ability to appear in different forms, usually animal or animal-human composites. These shapeshifters are generally malevolent and greatly feared by some. Navajo shamans avoid using the name *yeenaldlooshii* which translates as “because of this it walks on four feet.”

The Bray Road beast of Wisconsin is a wolf legend that refuses to die. Residents around Elkhorn’s Bray Road have been reporting the werewolf-like creatures since the 1930s. A flurry of new sightings in the 80s and 90s brought worldwide attention.¹⁵² Unlike the reclusive primate cryptids, this aggressive beast is more of a canine, yet still said to run bipedally like a human. The public was quick to note the similarity to the werewolves of movie fame. Alleged to be a relative of the Michigan Dogman, this 7-foot creature has a propensity for chasing cars (perhaps not surprising for a canine). Explanations include bears, deformed bears, mangey bears, and hoaxers. As with similar phenomena, eyewitnesses “know what they saw!” and many are said to be quite reputable citizens with nothing to gain by deception.¹⁵³

More Humanoid Haints

It does seem that some of the most disturbing cryptid reports are those involving creatures with human-like forms such as the Bray Road beast. Giant reptiles and fierce four-legged predators are certainly alarming, but beasts with a semi-human form are nightmarish. Perhaps these creatures represent archetypes of what we fear we ourselves might become under some extreme circumstance. Or do we have a hard-wired abhorrence of humanoids who don’t appropriately bear God’s image.

Another humanoid beast has more “goatly” traits and is said to lurk under the Pope Lick Creek train trestle near Fisherville, Kentucky. The

¹⁵² Linda S. Godfrey, *The Beast of Bray Road: Tailing Wisconsin’s Werewolf*, (Black Earth, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 2003).

¹⁵³ As with other large cryptids, I believe we can dismiss most hoaxers in costume with what I call the “just plain stupid principle.” That’s what it would take to put on fur and run through the woods in much of the country.

Pope Lick monster, a beast with a terrifying, horned goat/sheep head and manly body allegedly lures unsuspecting teens hypnotically to the train tracks to kill them. Several young people have, indeed, died over the past forty years, either falling from the trestle or being hit by trains. Explanations for Sheepsquatch include a vengeful circus freaks, human-animal hybrids, and visitations by Satan himself.¹⁵⁴

In the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and surrounding states, residents report a feline cryptid dubbed the Ozark howler. Cat monsters seem a bit more believable than some others since in a face-to-face with a mountain lion, “monster” might be a good description. The howler, however, is alleged to be super-sized and somewhat humanoid, often running on two legs. Once again, reliable witnesses swear by their observations. On the skeptic’s side, if I were being chased by a cougar, I might tend to overestimate the size and wouldn’t likely get a good look at its posture.

Not every cryptid legend remains a mystery. The Loveland frogman is a good case study in cryptid lore. In the early 1970s, people around Loveland, Ohio reported sightings of a 4-foot frog creature. The beast could supposedly stand on two legs to escape when confronted. After decades of storytelling, apparently someone looked at the police report from that time. An officer had shot the animal and carried it away in the trunk of his car. He identified it as a 4-foot iguana (likely someone’s lost pet) missing its tail. On the side of the folklorists, there really was a strange “monster” behind the myth.

One of the most famous paranormal creatures of all times harassed the town of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. The first sighting of the Mothman was by several men in 1966 who were digging a new grave. A few days later more people in the town began reporting a man-like creature with at least a ten-foot wingspan. Many witnesses commented on the beast’s red, glowing eyes.

Most of the encounters were near an eerie, abandoned WWII munitions factory, considered an appropriate hideout for a devilish flying monster. Sightings continued for several months. Some skeptics

¹⁵⁴ Reminiscent of Well’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, there have been suggestions that modern science (mad science?) might be responsible for some of these more bizarre beasts. In a coming chapter, we’ll look at the possibility of human-animal hybrids. A number of paranormal cryptid reports allege secretive intervention by law enforcement or the military in containing or covering up information. In my opinion, this would seem to be more extraordinary than some paranormal explanations.

attributed the phenomenon to a rare crane that had been observed in the area, or to secret night-time paratrooper operations. Paranormal investigator John Keel interviewed the townsfolk and found that some were experiencing random precognitions and visions. There were also reports of mysterious Men in Black (associated with the simultaneous UFO events) who threatened citizens, warning them to cease discussing any paranormal phenomena. The culmination of the Point Pleasant Mothman epic occurred on December 15, 1967. Forty-six people perished when the town's Silver Bridge collapsed. Many tied the disaster to the visions and Mothman. Subsequently, similar Mothman stories have occurred in other places around the world.

So how far can we push the borders of biological cryptozoology? Will our minds wrap around a cryptid such as a Jersey Devil or other more eccentric paranormal beings? Non-primate humanoids create problems. Paranormal Bigfoot at least had a physical, biological counterpart to consider. We know large primates can exist because they *do* exist. Our questions can be narrowed to whether they exist *here* and *now*.

However, *there are no real-world, biological counterparts to werewolves, sheepsquatches, mothpeople, or bipedal cats*. When we propose such creatures, they aren't simply on a continuum with biological cryptids—*they are something else*. Some of the creepier cryptid humanoids seem to move completely away from animal-like to just plain demonic (even by secular standards). Ghoulish *wendigos* and *rakes* are more the stuff of nightmares and Halloween than nature.

Then are we justified in suggesting that the Ephesians Hypothesis might be applied to some of these more esoteric cryptids? Many cryptozoologists, tribal philosophers, and media producers have already taken that quantum leap into another realm for us. And certainly, we must consider the Pickle Principle as well. A significant majority of paranormal cryptid incidents are likely misidentifications or hoaxes, as with other ghostly and demonic phenomena. But now, having connected cryptids, ghosts, and demons, would it be any more difficult or unexpected for a fallen spirit to deceive by means of a strange cryptid than by means of any other ghostly apparition?

Once again, without seeing demons behind every broken twig in the swamp, I believe the biblical worldview allows for fallen spirits that

can and will use any deception within their power to lead the unwary astray. This could easily apply to the more “surreal” incidents in which physical laws are alleged to be bypassed. It might also better explain some of the more unlikely physical forms. As with ghost phenomena, close-up cryptid experiencers often relate unique feelings in addition to the sensory data. Obviously, fear and alarm would trigger some hefty emotions, but many victims tell of a more “psychic” contact in which the creature is spiritually communicating or controlling.

Within the totality of cryptid reports, we would expect a broad range of observations and interpretations. It’s one thing to believe that a stray black jaguar might wander up into Arkansas, yet quite another to seine the Mississippi in hopes of finding a mermaid. Wherever the cryptozoological consensus goes, we most certainly should maintain a clear line between the possible existence of flesh-and-bone, biological cryptids and those that seemingly dip into the paranormal. I believe the common-sense application of the principles we’ve discussed establishes a good boundary for believability.

Merfolk and fairies would probably require a hefty sprinkling of pixie-dust to produce specimens, as would werewolves and goatmen. We’ll see later that many attempt to connect cryptids to UFO phenomena.¹⁵⁵ Is this link due to overactive imaginations or something more supernatural? If Bigfoot turns out to be an extraterrestrial, that would sort of make him a Wookiee, wouldn’t it?

¹⁵⁵ Hynek called this phenomenon “high strangeness.”

12

UFOs: The Lights' Side

“A UFO is the reported sighting of an object or light seen in the sky or on land, whose appearance, trajectory, actions, motions, lights, and colors do not have a logical, conventional, or natural explanation, and which cannot be explained, not only by the original witness, but by scientists or technical experts who try to make a common sense identification after examining the evidence.”

Center for UFO Studies ¹⁵⁶

*“There's a Starman waiting in the sky.
He'd like to come and meet us. But he thinks he'd
blow our minds.”* David Bowie ¹⁵⁷

Unidentified flying objects are just that—*unidentified flying objects*. And the truth is, as with other paranormal events, most UFOs are eventually *identified*. But let's be realistic. When the term UFO is used, our minds go directly to little green men. The idea that these unusual aerial phenomena carry visitors from outer space is known as

¹⁵⁶ Center for UFO Studies, www.cufos.org

¹⁵⁷ David Bowie, *Starman*, RCA Records.

the *extraterrestrial hypothesis* (ETH). The ETH has truly become *the* mythology of the modern era.¹⁵⁸

Our earliest writings are rich with tales of mysterious strangers from faraway places. Even very young children need little encouragement to dream of fairylands with fanciful, unearthly creatures. We eagerly imagine places found only through rabbit holes or shrouded in clouds. It's not surprising that as we finally conquered the deepest, darkest locations on earth, our imaginations shifted upward to the unknown expanses of space.

A Very Brief History of UFOs

The modern-era UFO fascination took flight about seventy years ago. On June 24, 1947, pilot Kenneth Arnold observed nine unidentified objects flying in formation near Mount Rainier, Washington. In subsequent interviews, Arnold described the objects as “flat like a pie plate” with the back cut away as in a half-moon. He said their motion was like a “saucer skimming across water.” With that, the term “flying saucer” was born, and the ETH reached escape velocity.

A few days later, there were several reports of strange objects flying around Roswell, New Mexico. On July 4, 1947, a farmer near Roswell reported wreckage from what appeared to be a crash strewn over his property. The site was investigated by officials from nearby Walker Air Force Base (then Roswell Army Base). At this point, the story branches into a myriad of scenarios. The military's stance, through several revisions, is that the event was the crash of a top-secret package of radio equipment carried by a balloon. Other accounts claim that alien bodies (perhaps living) were recovered. Some believe this evidence is hidden at the infamous Area 51.

Needless to say, whatever happened at Roswell has surpassed legend status. It has become the quintessential UFO story, inspiring believers and debunkers worldwide. Today there are no surviving witnesses, and the event has generated so much hearsay and misinformation, on both sides of the argument, that the truth about what

¹⁵⁸ For a number of reasons, the term *UFO* is often replaced with the more benign moniker *UAP* (unidentified aerial phenomena). The *UAP* designation is preferred by the government, military, and academia since it doesn't bring to mind flying saucers and extraterrestrials.

happened will likely never be known. Whatever did happen, the ensuing saucer-mania now has a life of its own, and a significant number of people are convinced of a cover-up.

But the events of 1947 were just the beginning of the UFO saga. In the chill of the Cold War, unidentified flying objects were seen as a threat—by both sides. One reason was that both the U.S. and Soviets feared retaliation by the other side if a UFO was mistaken as a military weapon. Declassified documents show that JFK discussed the issue with the Soviets just weeks before his death. Undoubtedly, much of the UFO secrecy within governments is still caused by the edginess of who-knows-what-and-how-much.

Perhaps as notorious as the UFOs themselves is the enigmatic role of the federal government in dealing with them. Conspiracy theories abound as the Feds “neither confirm nor deny.” The mystique is fueled in part by the mysterious *Men in Black* who allegedly appear whenever a UFO flap arises. Many see these figures as agents of the presumed *deep state* which spins and censors details of UFO encounters. Nevertheless, the official stance of the U.S. government has always been that UFOs are simply mistaken identifications or yet-to-be-proven mistaken identifications.¹⁵⁹

Despite government claims, however, we know through freedom-of-information policies that mountains of classified information on UFOs exist (in other countries, as well). Private individuals and some government leaders are currently demanding what is called *disclosure*, or the declassification of all UFO files. According to several former government and military employees, FOI guidelines are presently being circumvented by outsourcing UFO investigations to civilian companies.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Alternatives offered by the ufology community are 1) The Feds are as confused as everyone else, 2) ETs have been confirmed, but secrecy is necessary, 3) UFOs are secret deep state weapons.

¹⁶⁰ The resulting network is often referred to as the military-industrial complex. For more info on government UFO research, see the works of Luis Elizondo, Stanton Friedman, Nick Pope, or Chris Mellon.

The Research

The U.S. government and military have performed numerous official and unofficial UFO investigations. The most well-known is Project Blue Book, carried out by the Air Force from 1952-1970. The objective was to scientifically analyze the UFO phenomenon and determine its threat level. Astronomer J. Allen Hynek served as scientific consultant for the project. The “official” conclusion of Project Blue Book was that no threat existed, and UFO phenomena could not be attributed to extraterrestrials. Afterward, Hynek produced a rebuttal of the findings insisting that the investigation was inconclusive.

Since the 1960s, a private group, the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), has been recording and researching UFO phenomena. One of the leading, non-governmental organizations devoted to UFO studies, MUFON has over 120,000 cases in its database. As the Pickle Principle predicts, MUFON classifies many of these reports as misidentifications and hoaxes. Over 30% of MUFON cases are explained by misidentified natural phenomena.

Top Ten Things Misidentified as UFOs

1. Aircraft (from earth).
2. Meteors.
3. Manmade satellites in decay orbit.
4. The planet Venus in full phase.
5. Balloons (weather and party).
6. Flocks of birds/swarms of insects.
7. Lenticular clouds.
8. Mirages/temperature inversions.
9. Flares.
10. Lightning.

Also, most sightings are classified as “not enough data to determine.” About 60% of the cases cannot be studied because the evidence is anecdotal. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the evidence is faulty, but that it leads to a dead-end. For example, a couple witnesses an object floating over their house. Their account might be detailed, and

they might be reliable pillars-of-the-community, but there are simply no further leads to explore. The sighting cannot be fully resolved, dismissed, or reclassified.

But herein lies one of the complications in analyzing UFO reports: *That remaining 5%—the ones that cannot currently be explained naturally.* Astrophysicist Hugh Ross uses the term *RUFO* (residual UFOs) in discussing these unexplained cases.¹⁶¹

It would be easy to conclude that these few remaining accounts are simply the cusp of the “60%-not-enough-data” group. In examining the cases, however, that doesn’t seem to be the case. MUFON and other researchers point to a qualitative difference between this small group and the ones that simply can’t be explained due to lack of data.

That 5%

Five percent might sound insignificant until we remember the tremendous total number of reports. That 5% RUFO group becomes *thousands* of noteworthy incidents. I must admit that in my research of the RUFO cases, there is ample substance for further study. The vast majority aren’t lacking in data, so they can’t convincingly be dismissed as such. And as mentioned, it’s the qualitative aspect that differentiates them. There are “sets” of characteristics among these cases making them unique. Commonalities begin to emerge when the data are examined comprehensively...

1. Multiple evidence types. Most sightings start with exactly that—a sighting. An unusual object or light is observed. But often there is more than just visual evidence. Sometimes there is radar confirmation of a flying object. Tracks, disturbed surroundings, burn marks, or residual radiation have been associated with some landing sites. Also, observers or those nearby may experience electrical anomalies in devices, sounds, and physical ailments. More recently, FLIR and other infrared technologies have revealed even more data.

¹⁶¹ Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, *Lights in the Sky and Little Green Men, A Rational Christian Look at UFOs and Extraterrestrials*, (Reasons to Believe, 2002).

2. *Multiple, consistent observations.* A group of supporting eyewitnesses is a dream-come-true for a trial attorney. How many court cases are won on consistent testimonies from several witnesses? I tend to pay attention when several people agree regarding a UFO event. No, I'm not so gullible as to assume groups can't be wrong or deceptive. But like any good juror, I believe the more observers, the less chance of error, fraud, and conspiracy. And allow me to make perhaps an obvious observation: Some witnesses are more reliable than others. All other factors being equal, UFO researchers tend to invest more "trust" capital in professionals (law enforcers, military, pilots, scientists). Honest investigators also favor information from those who have more to lose than to gain from reporting an incident.

When an event does have multiple witnesses, invariably the murmuring begins—"mass hysteria!" Whatever the popular belief, true mass hysteria isn't what most people are thinking when they use the term.¹⁶² The phenomenon can't logically be applied to the typical multi-observer UFO event, or for that matter, most other paranormal phenomena. Moreover, I don't put a lot of stock in mass conspiracies. It's difficult for two people to keep a secret for very long, let alone dozens.

3. *Complex actions.* To understand this aspect, imagine releasing a fluorescent helium balloon (I could make one cheaply and quickly). It might look like a UFO to an unsuspecting observer, but the random floating motion wouldn't likely convince most people. Let's take it up a notch. Fasten the balloon to a toy drone. Now I can make more complicated, and perhaps more convincing moves. The behavior seems more deliberate. But the drone rig is more expensive and labor-intensive. *With complexity and added resources comes a lower chance that I would actually do this.*

If we extrapolate this to an object that darts between trees at high speed, splits into five separate objects that fly off in different directions

¹⁶² "Mass hysteria is a phrase that is used so often and so imprecisely to refer to anything from giving in to fashion fads to participating in riots and raves that it has become something of a fluid concept, synonymous with anything with a negative connotation that involves the participation of a large group of people." Maria Cohut, "Mass Hysteria: An Epidemic of the Mind?" www.medicalnewstoday.com, July 27, 2018. Also, a common knee-jerk response by skeptics is *folie a deux*, or some other shared psychotic disorder. At some point even skeptics must admit the alternatives are far less likely than an *observationally accurate* event.

and can make right-angle turns at breakneck velocities—well, I would like to play with that myself! And note, it's not that these features are impossible, but greater complexity tends to imply lower chances that someone could manage the hoax. This is especially true when some UFOs seem to maneuver in ways that defy the laws of physics or at least are beyond any technology known publicly.¹⁶³ Are there actually individuals or governments with the extreme resources to support the phenomena? If so, do they have sufficient motivation to make the investment or take the risk? I believe a synergy develops when all these characteristics are combined in the same event. As in any interpretation of research, the conclusions are more robust with more diverse sources of evidence.

Case Studies

The facts of the Roswell account have been broadcast, headlined, denied, rediscovered, dramatized, rewritten, disclosed, and reborn to the point that probably no one knows the truth. But despite its renown, I don't believe Roswell has ever had the vigor of other lesser-known cases. In this section, we'll look at some case studies of the 5% scenarios. There are many extremely interesting enigmas in this group, and the evidence seems credible. I've attempted to summarize five that illustrate the qualitative characteristics mentioned previously.

1. The Rendlesham Forest Incident. Often called “the British Roswell,” the events at Rendlesham Forest are perhaps the best-documented thus far.¹⁶⁴ These incidents took place in Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, England in 1980. The six-square-mile forest lies between two air force bases, RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge, both being operated by the U.S. Air Force at the time.

¹⁶³ I'm sure there are and have been talented individuals who would love to pass off a really good UFO hoax. The sheer number of successful “hoaxes” then becomes problematic. If some government has this advanced technology, why would they play around with it in such frivolous ways? Again, complexity doesn't *prove* anything, but it certainly tips the scale.

¹⁶⁴ Nick Pope, *Encounter in Rendlesham Forest*, (New York: Thomas Dunn Books, 2014).

On 26 December, 3 a.m., at the east gate of the RAF Woodbridge, base policemen John Burroughs and Bud Steffens responded to a strange red and blue light descending into the adjacent forest. The initial assumption was that a civilian aircraft had crashed since there were no military operations that night. The two drove toward the scene and noticed an additional white light moving through the forest in a manner uncharacteristic of an aircraft. At this time, they decided to inform the base. Burroughs and Steffens, not wanting to use their unsecured radios, drove back to the gate and used the landline phone. The message was relayed to flight chief Staff Sergeant Jim Penniston who along with AIC Edward Cabansag, joined the two at the gate.

Upon hearing Steffen's comment "It didn't crash. It landed," Penniston radioed the Master Sergeant J.D. Chandler who contacted other surrounding bases and Heathrow Airport. Radar had indeed detected a "contact whose identity is unknown" fifteen minutes prior to the incident and disappearing near Woodbridge.¹⁶⁵

Penniston, Burroughs, Cabansag, and Chandler who had now arrived drove back into the forest toward the lights to resume the investigation. As they approached the lights, the men reported a static charge on their bodies and the loss of radio communication. At that point, Chandler and Cabansag returned to the vehicle to maintain radio contact with the base.

As Penniston and Burroughs came closer, they reported that the lights seemed to "explode" silently into a mass of very bright light. After the explosion, a column of light remained over Burroughs as Penniston moved even nearer. He said the spherical clump of lights was actually a metallic craft of some sort. It was roughly triangular, about three meters across and three meters high. Blue lights were aligned along the perimeter with a larger white light on top. The craft was completely silent. Penniston moved directly up to the object. He noticed unusual symbols on one side, which he sketched in his notebook. He recounts the event...

The skin of the craft was smooth to touch. Almost like running your hand over glass. Void of seams or imperfections, until I ran my hands over the symbols. The symbols were nothing

¹⁶⁵ Pope, *Encounter*, 4.

like the rest of the craft, they were rough, like running my fingers over sandpaper.¹⁶⁶

In a few minutes, the object began to rise, slowly and silently above the treetops, then shot away at a very great speed.

Subsequent debriefings turned up many anomalies. Burroughs said that he remembered little of the incident from the light explosion (when he seems to have been knocked unconscious) until the object began rising. Also, Chandler and Cabansag had lost contact with the two others and the lights during a forty-five-minute period. They were ready to engage a search party when Penniston and Burroughs returned. However, Penniston and Burroughs claimed to have only been in the forest for a short time. Later they discovered that both their watches were slow by forty-five minutes.

In the following hours, more investigations revealed three indentations in the frozen ground where the craft was observed, presumably landing-leg marks. There were many broken branches in the path where Penniston and Burroughs witnessed the object navigating. Several rolls of photos were made by different people, but all were found too “foggy” to be developed by the base darkroom workers. Initially thought to be tampering, some think the film may have been tainted by significantly high radiation levels later measured at the site. At 5:00 am, the situation was turned over to Deputy Base Commander Charles Halt. Lieutenant Colonel Halt, described as a stickler for procedure, filed all of the appropriate paperwork regarding the event using the term “unexplained lights.”

If not already verging on “X-Filesque,” the account becomes even stranger. The next night, Halt and much of the base were at an awards banquet. Reminiscent of the movies, the shift commander located Halt and told him “It’s back.”

Halt quickly left the function, later explaining that his intent was to settle the UFO distractions and get operations back to normal. Over several minutes, he assembled a small team (Burroughs also came) and

¹⁶⁶ Pope, *Encounters*, 7.

ordered sets of large gas-powered lighting arrays sent to the forest.¹⁶⁷ The team drove directly to the site of the original sighting without observing anything unusual. As they investigated the area once more, a light appeared in the forest ahead. Recorded voices (Halt often used a small pocket recorder) describe a yellow light with “pieces falling off.” The extremely bright light had a darker center that seemed to blink like an eye. When they were almost underneath, a thin beam of light from the object hit the ground beside them. They watched as the beam seemed to probe the base property. Burroughs later described that as the event ended, the same explosion of light filled the area.

I try to keep a critical, yet open mind regarding these incidents, but after studying the eye-witness accounts and other available documentation, perhaps I’m most amazed by the skeptics’ responses. The explanations offered seem more contrived than any of the witness testimonies, not addressing any of the well-documented events. From lighthouse beams to joking airmen, the conclusions trivialize a large group of military personnel, with “no dog in the fight.”¹⁶⁸ The possibility of some hi-tech prototype would explain much, but that seems inconsistent with the technology of forty years ago. Some have also suggested that if a cover-up was involved, it could be related to the possibility of nuclear devices maintained at the bases. Penniston, one of the main players, isn’t convinced of ETs, but still has no good explanations...

My thoughts are simply that 99 percent of all so-called UFO sightings can be explained by people with a knowledgeable background or aerial training to reporting such things for exactly what they are... this leaves the remaining one percent. It’s this percent I believe is the truly unknown—a conclusion I made after I left the forest that night. This is the very reason

¹⁶⁷ The following events were recorded on Halt’s hand-held audio device. He claims in a later interview that much of the recoding has disappeared. Eighteen minutes of his descriptions of the UFO may be found on several YouTube sites.

¹⁶⁸ For example, at the time of the incident, Penniston had served through Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and was the senior security officer at the base, possessing some of the highest military clearances. He was trained in aircraft recognition and parts of his career still remain classified.

I am troubled by the events of December 26, 1980... I left the forest with the “One Percent Factor” raining all over me.¹⁶⁹

2. *The Hillsdale Sighting*. On 21 March 1966, around 10:30 pm, 87 girls in the MacIntyre Dormitory at Hillsdale College (Hillsdale, Michigan) observed a bright, silvery-white object over the adjoining arboretum.¹⁷⁰ For over ten minutes, the object displayed pulsating red and green lights, moving from side-to-side slightly. When the football-shaped light moved closer to the dorm, one of the girls called the Hillsdale Civil Defense Director Buck Van Horn. In the next minutes, Van Horn and several dorm moms joined the girls in one of the rooms and continued to observe the light.

Two Hillsdale police officers who saw the object from a mile away drove to the campus arboretum and documented the event. They also reported that the radio in their car stopped functioning. Eventually, all watched the object split in half, the segments traveling in different directions. The lights were observed until disappearing into the distance.

In an interesting side note, this event was investigated by Project Blue Book’s Dr. J. Allan Hynek. Hynek officially deemed the sighting “swamp gas.”¹⁷¹ Those who had witnessed the phenomenon were incensed, by the simplistic and obviously contrived analysis. The public outcry eventually resulted in state representative Gerald R. Ford’s call for a congressional hearing on the Air Force’s handling of Project Blue Book. The hearing led to a new study of UFO activity, the Condon Report. This was also a turning point for Dr. Hynek. When eventually free from the alleged coercion of the Air Force, Hynek became a

¹⁶⁹ Pope, Encounters, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Jack Butler, UFO: “Hillsdale Had Its Own Close Encounter,” *The Collegian*, www.hillsdalecollegian.com, March 19, 2015.

¹⁷¹ Project Blue Book was one of the most extensive government studies of UFOs. It was conducted by the US Air Force from 1952 to 1969. The goals were to 1) determine if UFOs were a national security threat, and 2) scientifically analyze UFO data. Under the direction of J. Allen Hynek, thousands of UFO reports were collected and analyzed.

staunch believer in UFO phenomena and founded the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS).¹⁷²

3. *The Westall School Account.* On 6 April 1966, over two hundred students and teachers in the Melbourne, Australia suburb of Kingston watched an unidentified object for several minutes. A silver, metallic disc, said to be a bit larger than an automobile, flew over Westall High School and a crowd of witnesses. During the twenty-minute ordeal, the object was close enough for many of the children to later provide consistent descriptions. Others around the Kingston community who were seeing the object converged on the school parking lot. Many, including adults, describe the flight behavior as “mysterious.” One researcher summarizing interviews with eyewitnesses said the saucer...

...flitted from one side of the sky to the other, as if it was just blinking off and then on again at spots hundreds of meters away. It ascended and descended and turned at incredible speeds. It was like watching a dragonfly trapped in a bottle, except this dragon fly had no wings...¹⁷³

Observers consistently recalled five small Cessna-type planes maneuvering around the object. The craft responded to the planes, dodging between and away from them cat-and-mouse style. Eventually, the silent craft moved across the school fence and over a row of trees, landing in a nearby field. Against the warnings of teachers, some of the children climbed the fence and approached the site. The students recounted later that the first girl to reach the craft passed out and was taken away by ambulance. Before others could arrive, the saucer then rose quickly and shot away, pursued by the airplanes. Students also reported the crushed, scorched circle of grass where the object had been.

¹⁷² Hynek speaking of the philosophy of CUFOS: “The attitude we are taking in the Center for UFO Studies is that since we are going to have scientists involved, we’ll push the physical approach as hard and far as we can—instrumentation, physical evidence, photographs, radar records. If we are finally forced by the evidence to go into the paranormal, then we will.” J. Allen Hynek, “Fate,” June 1976, in *The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters*, p. 304.

¹⁷³ Shane L.J. Ryan, “An Ongoing Mystery: The Westall Flying Saucer Incident,” City of Kingston: Kingston Local History, 11 June 2012.

One of the most notable features of this incident is the official denial despite such a large number of witnesses. Before the end of the school day, the headmaster had announced an unscheduled, school-wide assembly. Students still remember two men in suits speaking to them regarding the incident and warning them not to discuss it. One of the teachers had the forethought to grab a camera and snap a roll of pictures through the event. Several documented that men from the ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organization) confiscated her camera. Other adult witnesses later admitted that they were threatened with government action if any contact was made with the media.

The official government explanation was a weather balloon, at which the observers still scoff. The only news story to be found at the time was in the local *Dandenong Journal*. Witnesses claimed that “officials” in brown uniforms examined the area that afternoon and in days following. Government, military, and police denied any knowledge of the investigations. Records at the nearby airport indicate that no planes were flying over the area that day. In 2011, fifty eyewitnesses to the Westall UFO gathered in Kingston on the event’s forty-fifth anniversary. The group was composed of students, teachers, and others, still seeking answers. The Kingston city records note...

Two of those present had stood within arm’s reach of the flying saucers as they sat on the ground, in grassy paddocks adjacent to the schools. [Two others] had vivid memories of being called to the headmaster’s office and being grilled about what they had witnessed. Others had clear memories of seeing uniformed police officers and soldiers—one was even tapped on the shoulder by one and ordered back into the school...¹⁷⁴

4. *The Phoenix Lights*. There are several accounts of mass-sightings of UFOs over a long time span. The Phoenix incident involved thousands of witnesses over a 300-mile flight path. At about 8:00 pm, 13 March 1997, a large, triangular object was reported hovering over Henderson, Nevada. Reports mention 5-10 large lights on the leading edge of the object. Minutes later as it entered Phoenix airspace, numerous reports

¹⁷⁴ Ryan, “Ongoing Mystery.”

were relayed to authorities. Most witnesses saw only the lights in the same triangular configuration without the solid shape. The wingspan of the object based on the light array was estimated to be at least a kilometer. Over 2-3 hours, the object flew near Tucson and eventually Sonora, Mexico.

The phenomenon was well-documented with photos and video. It remains a complicated case due to the tremendous number of witnesses and government personnel involved. Several official explanations have been offered, from flares to plane formations. All are strongly disputed by witnesses.

With thousands of observers, there is no shortage of data. A large number of these witnesses were interviewed and can be found on many different videos. The descriptions seem remarkably similar. Most deviations can be attributed to distance and other viewing factors. I've collected representative statements from these interviews...

- Five lights passing overhead at a very slow rate.
- Too slow to stay in the air if it was an aircraft.
- “V” formation of five lights with two lights trailing.
- Two lights docking and undocking from the other five.
- So big we couldn't see both edges.
- I would gauge the object to be several football fields.
- A mile across—maybe more.
- Like we could actually reach up and touch it, it was so low.
- It was so low, all we could see was the left wing.
- Quite obvious it was no conventional aircraft.
- Soft glow. Bright, but no glare.
- Orangish-amber light, so lustrous it was almost like the objects seemed to be made of light.
- Three yellowish lights, perfectly round and equidistant.

A boomerang-shaped craft is common in UFO reports worldwide. The Phoenix incident is similar to the Hudson Valley lights (1983-1986) and the Belgium UFO wave (1989-1990). The shape would be easy to dismiss as an experimental B-2-type aircraft were it not for its immensity and flight habits.

5. *The Nimitz Encounter*. On 14 November 2004, The *USS Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group and the missile cruiser *USS Princeton* were conducting drills about 100 miles southwest of San Diego, prior to Persian Gulf deployment. At midafternoon, two F/A-18F Super Hornet fighter jets from the *Nimitz* were ordered to stop maneuvers and proceed to new coordinates. It was later acknowledged that the *Princeton* had been tracking “anomalous aerial vehicles” (AAVs, in lieu of using the loaded term “UFOs”) in the area for the past several days.

The *Princeton*’s senior radar operator Kevin Day admitted that radar detected over a hundred AAVs in the week leading up to the event. He claims that the radar images at times were “like watching snow fall from the sky.”¹⁷⁵ Initially, the radar team suspected electronic glitches, all systems were tested and approved. The objects first appeared at 80,000 feet, which is well above typical air traffic, then dropped very quickly to the ocean surface.

When the diverted jets reached the site, the lead pilot reported a disturbance in the water with waves crashing over what appeared to be a large object just under the surface.¹⁷⁶ Around this same time, sonar operators reported a submerged object moving at twice the speed of submarine capabilities. Within seconds, another object appeared about fifty feet over the water. It was described as a white, forty-foot oval shaped like a Tic Tac candy. There were no visible wings or rotors. One of the pursuing pilots recounts the object’s unusual flight characteristics...

And what I mean by “erratic” is that its changes in altitude, airspeed, and aspect were just unlike things that I’ve ever encountered before flying against other air targets. It was just behaving in ways that aren’t physically normal... aircraft, whether they’re manned or unmanned, still have to obey the laws of physics...The Tic Tac was not doing that.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Interview in *Unidentified: Inside America's UFO Investigation*, The History Channel, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Lead pilot David Fravor was commander of the elite Black Aces, a Top Gun program graduate, and had more than sixteen years of flight experience.

¹⁷⁷ Matthew Phelan, “Navy Pilot Who Filmed the ‘Tic Tac’ UFO Speaks,” New York Magazine, www.nymag.com, 19 Dec 2019.

The Nimitz events were part of the data leading some military and government officials to become more interested in UFO phenomena. Vehicles that can move at hyper-speeds, appear and vanish in our airspace, fly without exterior mechanisms, and out-maneuver our best technology deserve attention. At least that's what Senator Harry Reid and others concluded...

I personally don't know if there exist little green men other places, I kind of doubt that, but I do believe that the information we have indicates we should do a lot more study...¹⁷⁸

At the urging of Reid, a secret investigation of *unexplained aerial phenomena* (UAP... again, a less controversial term for UFOs) received funding of 22 million dollars. The Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) investigated data on UAP from 2007 to 2012. It was headed by Luis Elizondo, of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence. He was instrumental in the DoD's release of previously classified aerial videos made during the Nimitz incident. In a surprising turn, the Pentagon (which had denied any such program during its operation) admitted in 2017 that the AATIP had existed.¹⁷⁹ Shortly after, Elizondo resigned his post in protest of the government's refusal to make full disclosure of AATIP to the public. In an effort to continue the AATIP's work, Elizondo established the private organization *To the Stars Academy*. As for the government's current role in UAP research, DoD spokesman Christopher Sherwood stated...

¹⁷⁸ Owen Daugherty, "Harry Reid Urges Senators to Push for More UFO Research," www.thehill.com, January 10, 2019.

¹⁷⁹ I love my country, and I understand the need for some secrecy. I see no need for outright lying. If anyone doubts that government individuals or departments do, in fact, lie, we need look no further than the AATIP. Under the auspices of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the UFO research program ran for five years from 2007 to 2012 with a budget of 22 million. Its function was to discern and analyze the threat posed by UFOs. AATIP was initiated by Senator Harry Reid at the lobbying of Robert Bigelow of Bigelow Aeronautics. The government and military denied the project's existence throughout its operation.

The department will continue to investigate, through normal procedures, reports of unidentified aircraft encountered by US military aviators in order to ensure defense of the homeland and protection against strategic surprise by our nation's adversaries.¹⁸⁰

Clash of the Real-World Worldviews

One of the themes of this book is that *worldviews have consequences*. How we observe, frame, and interpret our world really does affect decision-making. For example, Luis Elizondo believes that one factor contributing to the government's slow response in addressing the UFO threat is that some influential government and military leaders operate from a Christian worldview. He maintains that several high-ranking individuals, because of their Christian beliefs, don't believe ETs exist. Furthermore, these leaders interpret unexplained UFO phenomena as supernatural (God or Satan). Elizondo's U.K. counterpart Nick Pope notes the situation...

I was aware that Pentagon pushback on UFO research was in part due to the religious belief of some of those involved... It was an odd irony that UFO investigations were being hampered because some people's belief in God meant that they either didn't believe in the existence of extraterrestrial life or that they regarded UFOs and extraterrestrials as demonic.¹⁸¹

A future chapter will deal with the credibility of this claim. For now, though, I simply want to point out the worldview implications. As Elizondo and others warn, if UFOs are real vehicles, controlled by ETs or other countries, the potential security threat they pose should be of enormous concern. We can easily see in this situation two different

¹⁸⁰ Steven Greenstreet, "The Pentagon Finally Admits It Investigates UFOs," www.nypost.com, May 22, 2019.

¹⁸¹ Jasper Hamill, "Pentagon and MoD Officials Feared UFOs Were Either 'Demonic' or Sent by God, Former Investigators Reveal," www.metro.co.uk, May 8, 2018.

worldviews and how they affect real-life responses. Decisions *are being made* regarding UFOs, and they are derived from the worldviews of those who make them. Worldviews based in reality (the true nature of things) will produce correct decisions. *Worldviews have consequences...*

Confirmed Government/Military UFO Research

- Project Sign (1948)
- Estimate of the Situation (1948)
- Project Grudge (1949)
- Project Blue Book (1952-1970)
- Robertson Panel (1953)
- Brookings Report (1960)
- Condon Committee (1966-1968)
- Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (2007-2012)

13

UFOs: The Inside

“In the firm belief that the American public deserves a better explanation than that thus far given by the Air Force, I strongly recommend that there be a committee investigation of the UFO phenomena.” Gerald R. Ford, 1966.

“It got closer and closer and right above the pine trees it stopped and then it began to change colors from blue, to red, to white. Then it stayed there for a while. We were all aghast. We didn’t know what it was. And then it just disappeared into the west. That was the end of it.”

Jimmy Carter, on a 1969 incident.

“I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.” Ronald Reagan, 1987.

I realize the stigma attached to this topic. When serious thinkers or even presidents raise the issue, they may as well cover their heads with aluminum foil and buy a lifetime Comic-Con pass. As a science fiction enthusiast *and* a Christian *and* a scientist, I often ponder the intersection of these perspectives concerning extraterrestrial life. Yes, when I gaze into the starry night, the nerd part of me hopes that Ewoks are gazing back at me from a galaxy far, far away. But how do extraterrestrials (ETs, or more specifically ETI, extraterrestrial intelligence) fit with

what God has revealed about himself and his universe? Has an unlimited God limited himself to a realm of a few billion humans on a lonely little planet?

Bottom line—Scripture doesn't provide specific information on this topic. We are assured there is at least one other "somewhere" beyond the one we now experience. The Bible gives us glimpses of another domain, where God and his angels now reside. It seems to be a world quite different from the one in which we presently live, and more amazing than anything science fiction can conjure.

The Theology of ETs

In his *Space Trilogy*, C. S. Lewis hypothesizes a solar system filled with *Hnau* (ETs). According to the storyline, these races never fell in sin as did the humans. Death, sin, and evil are dealt with differently than on fallen Thulcandra (Earth). Hnau are also able to intermingle with the angelic beings and have an unmarred relationship with God.

Extraterrestrial life does raise some interesting theological questions. Are humans the center of God's dealings? (Pre-Copernicans believed the earth was the center of the universe, but they were wrong.) If there are ETs, do they need redemption from sin? Did God also come incarnate as one of them, or do they have doctrines of a Savior who died for them on a faraway planet? Will they someday be our new mission field?¹⁸² These questions might sound farfetched, but the discovery of non-earthly beings would demand theological answers. *It would change worldviews*. Moreover, the mere *potential* of discovery is already altering worldviews. Pope Francis for one, is already planning for the possibility...

¹⁸² I personally think Scripture indicates that humans are *it* for sentient beings in the physical cosmos. Note the description of Christ's work: "Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many" (Hebrews 9: 25-28). Nevertheless, I keep a slightly-open mind.

If, for example, tomorrow an expedition of Martians came, and some of them came to us, here... Martians, right? Green, with that long nose and big ears, just like children paint them... And one says, “But I want to be baptized!” What would happen? When the Lord shows us the way, who are we to say, “No, Lord, It’s not prudent! No, let’s do it this way...”¹⁸³

What would it be like if someday we discovered a race of ETs? Heiser suggests that perhaps ETs could also be created “in God’s image” since the phrase may be translated “as God’s imagers.”¹⁸⁴ Could God have other imagers besides us?

Despite our speculations thus far, extraterrestrial biological beings are conspicuously absent in Scripture, yet we shouldn’t build an argument from silence. The Bible quite often portrays humans as a singular component in God’s creation. God’s grace, mercy, and love seem to be uniquely poured out on humans...

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:16-17).

This passage is limited to a comparison with angels. but the implication seems broader.

I frequently hear the argument: “If Earth is the only planet with conscious beings, then why is the universe so enormous?” This question doesn’t take into account God’s revealed nature. Our Creator is extravagant. His resources are boundless. He often goes above and beyond merely adequate to show his glory and his love for his creatures. Flowers grow in fields unseen by a single eye. Amazing fish are doing amazing things miles below the ocean’s surface in total darkness. Besides, it’s no more difficult for God to make a universe than a flower!

¹⁸³ Abby Ohlheiser, “Pope Francis Says He Would Definitely Baptize Aliens If They Asked Him To,” www.theatlantic.com, 12 May 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

Ron Rhodes writes that God’s purpose behind the vast universe of planets is...

...not to inhabit them with multiple life-forms but to serve as a testimony to his power and glory. It is not necessary to argue that simply because many planets exist in the universe on which life *could* exist, life *does* therefore exist on those planets.¹⁸⁵

The Psalmist certainly understood the purpose of God’s loving “overindulgence” in his creation: “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

Personally, the adventurer in me would like to meet some aliens out there somewhere. Who knows—in the vastness of Eternity someday, will God choose to populate a few galaxies with other beings? We are his image-bearers—showcases for his mercy and grace. Will other life forms in the eternal realm be used to showcase other attributes of the Godhead? I can only imagine. Whatever the case, we can rest assured that any beings we might encounter, now or later, will be God’s creation and will be as much under his sovereignty as are we.

The Rime of the Ancient Aliens

The belief that advanced ETs have been visiting the earth for thousands of years results in some bizarre, and somewhat amusing conclusions. In 1968, Swiss hotel worker Erich von Däniken released *The Chariots of the Gods*. His premise was that all the “deities” in human history (including the God of the Bible) were actually extraterrestrials. According to von Däniken, these *ancient astronauts* were responsible for all the unexplained and paranormal artifacts of the past, such as Stonehenge, the Great Pyramids, Easter Island, the Serpent Mounds, the Nazca Lines, and the list goes on into his subsequent books.

Biblical miracles were also part of von Däniken’s theory. Ezekiel’s wheel is interpreted as a spacecraft. Elijah’s fire from heaven was a

¹⁸⁵ Ron Rhodes, *Alien Obsession: What Lies Behind Abductions, Sightings, and the Attraction to the Paranormal*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), 40.

phaser set on “kill.” The parting of the Red Sea, manna from heaven, healings, prophecies, and even the creation of human civilization are all seen as extraterrestrial acts. This ideology demonstrates how errors in primary worldview components can drastically affect the interpretation of events. Nonetheless, the musings of von Däniken have huge appeal (70 million books sold), especially to anyone doubting or rejecting biblical explanations. What better way to quench the craving for some sort of transcendence without all the accountability guilt!

More recently, the ancient astronaut theory was taken to new heights by Zecharia Sitchin. A popular voice on many radio and TV programs, Sitchin used ancient texts to back up his claims. Perhaps the most significant boost for these ideas came from the History Channel’s *Ancient Aliens* series. The 179 episodes (so far) have preached to millions this gospel of alien creators and saviors.

The idea that extraterrestrials “planted” life on earth is a popular sci-fi pitch. When serious scientists consider the idea, they use the term *directed panspermia*—the theory that life originated *out there* and eventually got *here*. Oddly, outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins supports this concept that super-intelligent aliens could be responsible for humanity, yet he flatly denies divine creation.¹⁸⁶ Unfortunately, the naturalist’s problem with designed, purposeful creatures is simply pushed back one rung on the philosophical ladder.

Obviously, many problems are raised by ancient astronaut stories. Both von Däniken and Sitchin have rejected any notion of the biblical God. Many works have been exclusively devoted to debunking their ideas.¹⁸⁷ Archaeologists, historians, and academics in general point to the contradictions, misrepresentations, and lack of any scientific rigor in their work. Nevertheless, many with susceptible worldviews are being lured into UFO religions based on superficial analyses of the material.

¹⁸⁶ Jeff Miller, “Directed Panspermia and Little, Green (Non-Existent) Men from Outer Space,” www.apologeticspress.org

¹⁸⁷ See the articles by biblical languages scholar Michael Heiser.

The Science of ETs

Some Christians might worry that the reality of aliens could potentially affect our theology, but the lack of any such discovery is already causing sleepless nights for naturalists. If biological evolution is so forthright and apparent, shouldn't space be teeming with life? As mentioned earlier, the universe is an unbelievably huge place that likely has a staggering number of planets suitable for some type of life. If sentient life does exist elsewhere, are we coincidentally the most advanced civilization in our galaxy? Are our neighbors still in their Middle Ages? Assuming a large number of suitable planets and the principle of mediocrity, shouldn't there be a *lot* of ETs out there that are more advanced than humans?¹⁸⁸ If so, shouldn't we at least be detecting their electromagnetic signals?

In 1961, astrophysicist Frank Drake proposed an equation for estimating the probability of inhabited planets. Although its variables are difficult to determine, the Drake Equation did stimulate research in the area. Drake, Carl Sagan, and others have invested millions in the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) project. Radio telescopes and vast antenna arrays have transmitted and listened intently for decades. A special message from humanity was directed into deep space in 1974. The Arecibo Message consisted of recorded icons of earthly life, hopefully, understandable to alien listeners. We're still awaiting a reply. If anyone is out there, they certainly are quiet. The embarrassing implication (to naturalists) is that we truly are alone in the physical universe. Maybe the evolution of life isn't as likely as theorized. Maybe humans *are* quite special.

It's interesting (and a little amusing) that science fiction writers are compelled to address this trade secret of cosmology. How can you have stories with alien life forms so diverse and believable when experience indicates that ETs are either very rare or non-existent? One way is to set the scene "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." Out of sight, out of mind. Another is to do what creator Gene Roddenberry did with *Star Trek*. The Prime Directive clearly mandates that advanced civilizations may not interact or even be detected by the less advanced. Do we simply have a lot of growing to do before ET phones us?

¹⁸⁸ This principle assumes that all things being equal, we should consider a random sample (in this case Earth) to be one of many "in the middle of the curve."

Lacking any solid evidence of sentient life in the cosmos, why should Christian apologetics devote time and energy to the question of ETs? I reiterate the rationale for examining the paranormal in general: Our beliefs affect our worldview. And of all paranormal phenomena, UFOs and ETs are perhaps the most endemic in our culture. Two decades ago, Kenneth Neelson, of the National Academy of Sciences was already asserting that ETs were “no longer a fringe type of thing.”¹⁸⁹ And as previously noted, significant numbers in our population are already fully acclimated to the “fact” of extraterrestrial life, even without solid evidence.

As a baby-boomer, I can attest that TV and other media, in general, have nourished me with a steady diet of UFOs and aliens as far back as I can remember. For many, this modern mythology significantly blurs the boundaries of reality. A national survey in 2019 found that a third of Americans believe UFOs are extraterrestrial visitations and 16% claim to have seen a UFO or ET. Over 65% believe the government is covering up evidence related to UFOs!¹⁹⁰ *Whether extraterrestrial life exists or not, its influence on our culture’s collective worldview is significant.*

The large number of unexplained, yet convincing UFO accounts lead to only three viable realities, each with significant worldview implications...

- A group or a government with extensive technology and resources is implementing an extreme and deceptive agenda.
- Extraterrestrial life does exist, and we anticipate huge changes in our view of reality.
- Paranormal or supernatural realms exist, and there are beings among us with a covert agenda.

¹⁸⁹ Jim Wilson, Popular Mechanics, July 1999.

¹⁹⁰ Lydia Saad, “Americans Skeptical of UFOs, But Say Government Knows More,” www.news.gallup.com, September 6, 2019.

A Grand Scheme?

Are UFOs and ETs just a clever ruse associated with some ulterior motive? Conspiracy theories abound in ufology. Publicly, the US, Soviet, and Chinese governments have all accused each other of being behind the phenomenon. It's a fact that governments hide the truth quite often, and there's no end to contradictory statements. A few earlier UFO sightings are now known to have been cold war projects (American and Russian). For years before the unveiling of the B-2 stealth bomber, people who reported its secret flights were scolded and muzzled by officials. The military staunchly denied the existence of any such craft. Afterward, all lies were justified as "routine security measures."

Does our government have new, secret technology? I hope so. And I think I would like for it to be somewhat secretive until we need it. Or is the secret that they know about and have communicated with ETs? Even more bizarre, has the government hijacked an alien vehicle? (This would make a good plot for a TV series!) I'm not dogmatic about it, but I tend to doubt these possibilities. The technology associated with what UFOs are observed to do is orders of magnitude beyond ours. Some UFO behavior even defies universal physical laws. The crafts have been observed to travel at speeds in the tens of thousands of miles per hour yet are able to turn right angles without slowing. At times they materialize or fade from sight, visually and on radar. Even at high speeds and near the ground, the objects produce no sonic booms or other sounds. Many observers report that the objects change shape, break apart, merge, pass through solid objects, and perform other unusual acrobatics. Some suggest projected or holographic sources, but the scale is still far beyond known abilities.

Considering the case studies in the previous chapter, each involved technology that was far ahead of the technology of the day. We might imagine experimental vehicles that are the next step up from our current known science, such as the early B-2 tests. But the "unearthly" machinery observed in these incidents is difficult to explain as "next generation." Some suggest that the Nimitz incident could be attributed to extraordinarily high-tech designs that employ superconductors, quantum gravity fields, inertial insulators, and a lot of other fancy-sounding science fiction gadgets. A popular notion is that someone

might be “reverse engineering” alien technology to make such great strides in a short time. I suppose any of these are feasible at some level, but then we are faced with trying to explain a virtually super-human conspiracy. If that card is to be played, why not just go with the traditional UFO theory? And, we’re still stuck with the anachronistic problem. If some government has been staging the phenomena, why would this advanced technology show up in the 1960s and remain unconfirmed and unchanged for over fifty years?

This points to a related puzzle. Perhaps the most compelling reason to doubt a widespread conspiracy is the span of UFO incidents. The phenomenon has outlived government “regimes” for over 70 years in almost every country. Again, proposing a conspiracy of such secrecy and effectiveness takes more gumption than simply believing in ETs. The governments with which I’m familiar have trouble managing healthcare and postal systems. They don’t seem capable of keeping secrets through an election period, much less a half-century. It’s easy to speculate about government UFOs, yet quite another to consider it pragmatically.

We could also ask why, if the government or military were able to pull this off, would they seem so disorganized in the actual responses to the phenomena? We’ve observed compartmentalization and maybe even petty competition among levels of government and military before, but not to the point that one branch would deceive and endanger individuals in another. (I’m hoping that only happens on TV.) There have been lower-level officials caught in cover-ups and disinformation, but paper trails quickly uncover the motives. So far, despite many efforts, no one has produced any verifiable, human scheme behind UFO activity. Once again, longevity, incompetence in secret-keeping, and context would seem to be inconsistent with a major conspiracy.

Does anyone have anything substantial to gain by a widespread infatuation with ETs (other than the Syfy Channel)? UFOs do seem to “want” to be known. But if they want us to notice, why be so elusive? If they’re waiting for us to be “conditioned” in some way, we’re way past that. Why not stage a first contact on the White House lawn tomorrow and get things moving? “We’re ready!”

On the other hand, if their agenda requires secrecy, can’t they do a better job than what we’ve seen over the past decades? I question the

competency or the sincerity of a group whose agenda seems to be playing obscure games with random, usually uninfluential people. Despite all these improbabilities, UFO phenomena are real on some level. *Are we missing something?*

14

UFOs: The Other Side

“One theory which can no longer be taken very seriously is that UFOs are interstellar spaceships.” Arthur C. Clarke ¹⁹¹

“I have come to support less and less the idea that UFOs are nuts-and-bolts spacecraft from other worlds.”

J. Allen Hynek¹⁹²

The extraterrestrial hypothesis is by far the most popular of the pop culture explanations for UFOs. Aliens are just plain cool—at least in stories. But as much as I would like to warp around the galaxy, seeking out new life and new civilizations, I must boldly go where I don’t want to go in saying: *It probably won’t happen...*

...in the physical realm anyway. I’m not an expert in physics, but my physicist friends have some discouraging words about interstellar space travel. Space is much bigger than words and numbers convey. The nearest star to our star (the sun) is 4.5 light-years away. (Just to enjoy the zeroes, that’s 25,000,000,000,000 miles.) Let’s say I have a spaceship that can go 50,000 mph. It would take me 500 million years to make a one-way trip to our nearest stellar neighbor.

¹⁹¹ Arthur C. Clarke, “UFOS Explained,” www.nytimes.com, 27 Jul 1975.

¹⁹² Ian Ridpath, “Interview with J. Allen Hynek,” *Nature*, October 4, 1975.

Can we go faster? Maybe, but physicists say we can't surpass the speed of light.¹⁹³ And even if we could get *near* the speed of light, journeys to the rest of our galaxy would still take thousands of years. Many other factors will prevent interstellar travel beyond the single-digit light-year range, and even then, the trip would be perilous and very long. All of this to say that ETs face the same problems. The laws of physics are, indeed, *laws*, regardless of your planet of origin.

So, let's look at our paranormal options again:

1. Mistaken identification.
2. Directed human activity.
3. Observationally accurate event.

Let's also keep our premise that the majority of UFO cases are mistaken identifications or directed human activity. If not interstellar travelers then, do we still have a convincing explanation for the notorious "5%" that seems to be observationally accurate?

There have been several hypotheses put forth that sidestep the ETH, although they don't bypass the paranormal. Some have postulated that UFOs could be time travelers from our own future. Others speculate that ETs are as earthly as the rest of us, living deep in the ocean or in subterranean cities. But these options seem to pack the same excess baggage as the ETH.

The Interdimensional Hypothesis

If saucers aren't your cup of tea, the most popular *non*-ETH idea was popularized by Jacque Vallee in the 1970s...

...are we dealing instead with a parallel universe... From that mysterious universe, are higher beings projecting objects that can materialize and dematerialize at will? Are UFOS "windows" rather than "objects?"¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Gene Roddenberry solved the problem in *Star Trek* by having warp speed, the ability to travel multiples of light speed. An excellent idea, but it's imaginary. It wouldn't have made a very interesting series had the crew been limited to our solar system

¹⁹⁴ Jacques Vallee, *Passport to Magonia: On UFOs, Folklore, and Parallel Worlds*, (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1993).

Vallee's *interdimensional hypothesis* (IDH) provides a popular alternative to extraterrestrial visitation. Could we be observing vehicles from other space-time dimensions or rather the doorways to such? Some of those fuzzy orbs and blurred lights do appear too ephemeral to be solid objects.

Do advanced entities have the ability to navigate between worlds using dimensional windows? We've long envisioned worlds through looking glasses and over rainbows. The destinations are similar—a place unlike here. Far away, yet so near... And, other realms provide diverse narratives. The rules can be different in a different place. The old history doesn't determine the new present, as creators of superheroes know so well. The Marvel Universe obviously isn't bound by the limitations of our own.

Is the preoccupation with aliens preventing research in other areas?...

In Europe UFOlogists have recognized these parapsychical characteristics for years and have made considerable progress by discarding the ET myth and other aimless controversies that have bogged down their American counterparts...¹⁹⁵

Before tumbling too deeply through this portal, let's consult the physicists again... Our human senses allow us to experience four dimensions—three spatial and one temporal (time). But multiple dimensions aren't inconsistent with modern physics and mathematics. String theorists, for example, propose at least a ten-dimension system in order to incorporate both quantum activity and gravity. Also, most cosmologists today accept an extradimensional cause for this universe. Whatever triggered the inflation of our space-time universe had to have been outside this 4-D universe.

The biblical worldview describes at least one additional dimension beyond our physical four. Moreover, the premise of this book is that there exists a dimension outside the one we perceive. Defining other worlds in science-ese doesn't negate the fact that when we speak of the

¹⁹⁵ John Keel, *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings*, (CreateSpace Platform, rev. 2016), 154.

heavenly realm we are speaking of another dimension—a real place that is beside/trans/beyond where we are now.¹⁹⁶

Jesus himself provides a possible illustration of interdimensional movement if we aren't afraid to apply somewhat scientific terms to spiritual events. This passage describes one of his post-resurrection appearances...

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19).

The text indicates that Jesus apparently materialized abruptly in their secured hideout. Already in his glorified "spiritual" body, this was not simply a vision or other noncorporeal specter. Jesus's new body could be in the supernatural realm then suddenly pass into the natural. Later in a similar event, he even invites the inquisitive Thomas to touch his real, physical body: "Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."¹⁹⁷

So, as Vallee postulated, do other dimensions account for some of the unusual behavior observed with UFOs? Others have made this speculation in light of their speed, maneuverability, and ability to pop in and out of detection. Interdimensionality, as untestable as it is, would explain many unusual observations in a variety of paranormal events.

Keep in mind as I ramble, there isn't a shred of empirical evidence that other dimensions exist.¹⁹⁸ *If* they do, many scientists doubt that different dimensions can interact with each other physically, on a macro level anyway. (Bad news for *Stargate* and a gazillion other sci-fi episodes.) Others speculate that subatomic wormholes and quantum entanglement may hint at the possibility. What would the interface between two worlds look like? Would it be some sort of invisible energy vortex, only discerned by instruments? Perhaps the patriarch

¹⁹⁶ Words certainly carry baggage. If you are uncomfortable thinking of parallel dimensions and hyperspace, just insert the phrase "heavenly realm" (or vice versa).

¹⁹⁷ We also see in Scripture Enoch being miraculously transported to the heavenly realm (Genesis 5), and Peter suddenly whisked from Ethiopia to Azotus (Acts 8).

¹⁹⁸ Except the communicated evidence revealed in Scripture. This is the same evidence that allows us to know the supernatural in general.

Jacob could have witnessed such a phenomenon in the form of a “stairway to heaven...”

There was a stairway set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it (Genesis 28:12-13).

Portals are a common feature in many fairy tales and paranormal accounts—a magical door connecting two realms. In the *Stranger Things* series, a portal, or rift, allowed access to the Upside-Down world and its terrifying creatures. Theoretically, something can pass through a portal and suddenly exist in the other realm and not exist in the former. Or, if light can pass through, we could see into the other world like looking through a window. Maybe that’s being described in Revelation 6 where “The sky rolled back like a scroll.” I believe I’ll experience a functioning portal someday when my spirit is suddenly “absent from the flesh, but present with the Lord.”

Connections between worlds may be of the same nature as miracles. Like other biblical supernatural events, portals had a specific purpose at a specific time. It’s serious business when God allows our realm to connect with his. Jacob’s stairway was necessary to convince him of the spiritual side of reality. His observation of the interface was necessary for his understanding of God’s plans for him and his progeny.

Considering Christ’s enigmatic movements, his apostles needed a clear understanding that divine resources were not miles away in some faraway celestial city. Christ would not be distant! Their new heavenly portal would be as intimate as the Spirit himself living within them. As temples of the Holy Spirit, believers today have that same built-in corridor connecting us with the unseen “extradimensional” realm.

Experientially, dimensional portals seem to explain some odd UFO phenomena. If the UFO could be a manifestation of an object in a different realm, it wouldn’t be limited by our physical parameters. It could appear to exceed speed limitations and bypass inertial and gravitational laws. An object could also seem to appear and reappear. Or perhaps as Vallee theorizes, the UFO itself may be the portal, moving and behaving apart from the laws of physical objects.

From a biblical worldview, however, we must also consider this in light of the Ephesians Hypothesis. Are fallen spirits allowed to manipulate and use such features as did the angels in Jacob's experience? I don't find any specific biblical examples of this, although the assumption is that demons can enter the physical realm, possibly in physical bodies. Also, we know that angels may enter our dimension with at least the appearance of physicality. If God does allow divine entities to navigate between realms in this way it doesn't seem that it would be inconsistent with Scripture. We'll explore this idea further in the following chapter.

15

UFOs: The Dark Side

*“I thought that they were angels but to my surprise,
They climbed aboard their starship and headed for the skies...”*

Styx ¹⁹⁹

*“I was taken from my bed by two little beings who were two
and a half, three feet tall. They came into my bedroom, took
me through the living room... It was like we were floating,
not walking. I had no control. They took me aboard this craft
and gave me an examination... They took a sample from my
leg. I have a scar on my thigh where they took a sample of
tissue. They did something to my back and other things
I'd rather not talk about.” Shirley A. Coyne ²⁰⁰*

From his research files, J. Allen Hynek devised a rating system for UFO phenomena which was picked up by Hollywood in 1977. Stephen Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* included bits of the real lives of Hynek and his colleague Jacques Vallee. Hynek's UFO incident scale began with what he termed a “close encounter of the first kind” (CE-1), defined as an observation of a UFO up close (near enough to make out basic features). A close encounter of the second kind (CE-2) included some interaction with the environment such as a track, burn

¹⁹⁹ Styx, *Come Sail Away*.

²⁰⁰ Phil McCombs, “Secrets in the Saucer,” www.washingtonpost.com, 29 Jun 1987.

mark, radio static, or illness. According to Hynek's system, at a CE-3 level, an actual living entity associated with the UFO is observed.

Until now, our focus has mostly been on the nature of the UFO itself—that unidentified flying *object* shooting through the sky, or the strange light hovering in a forest. But a CE-3 is a boundary crossed. The ETH now has legs, and the event moves from a phenomenon with potential natural explanations to a narrowed notion that now must account for an intelligent, interactive source. When we examine CE-3 scenarios, there is also a shift in perspective which brings us much closer to the paranormal. Those who don't follow CE-3 incidents closely are often surprised to learn what the collective data reveal. One poll indicated that as many as 3 million Americans claim to have memories of being abducted or physically manipulated by what they perceived to be aliens.²⁰¹

Hynek's Extended Classification of UFO Close Encounters

- 1st kind – Observation of a UFO.
- 2nd kind – Observation of a UFO with physical evidence.
- 3rd kind – Observation of a living ET.
- 4th kind – Abduction by an ET.
- 5th kind – Direct verbal or mental communication by an ET.
- 6th kind – Death of human or animal caused by UFO.
- 7th kind – Creation of a human-alien hybrid.

A sobering trend emerges among alleged extraterrestrial encounters. The ordeals are almost always dark, ethereal, and sinister. Experiences are no longer social events, instead, they're intimate and intrusive. Not only are the encounters disturbing simply because they are unfamiliar confrontations, but they also take on a transcendent, surreal, and confusing nature. Those who claim to encounter ETs don't walk away enthused or uplifted. The victims are certainly changed, but the experience is almost exclusively pathological. Vallee summarizes his investigation of these cases...

²⁰¹ Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs, and Ron Westrum, "Unusual Personal Experiences: An Analysis of the Data from Three National Surveys Conducted by the Roper Organization," (Las Vegas: Bigelow Holding, 1992).

The experience of a close encounter with a UFO is a shattering physical and mental ordeal... New types of behavior are conditioned, and new types of belief are promoted.²⁰²

The Hill Abductions

One of the earliest and most publicized abduction accounts involved Barney and Betty Hill in 1961. The two were driving home from vacation to their home in New Hampshire when Betty noticed a bright light that seemed to be following them. Barney stopped and got out of the car for a better look. As the object came closer, he could see that it was a large saucer-shaped craft with windows along the edge. Barney claims he could see odd, uniformed beings watching him through the windows. At that point, he ran back to the car and they hurried away as the saucer followed. They both told of strange beeping sounds coming from the trunk and the feeling of some type of energy passing through their bodies. The next thing the Hills remember was regaining consciousness about thirty miles down the road. Upon arriving at home, they realized the trip had taken two hours longer than expected.

In the following days, Betty began pouring over books about UFOs. After reading of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), she contacted the group and filed a report of their encounter. Over the next years, Betty experienced vivid nightmares in which she and Barney were onboard a craft undergoing some type of medical examination. Betty underwent months of psychological therapy, wrestling with “new,” horrifying memories. Much of her treatment involved hypnosis. During the sessions, she eventually pieced together more details of the couple’s ordeal...

During the examinations, the beings... plucked strands of their hair, took clippings of their nails and scraped their skin...

²⁰² Jacques Vallee, *Messengers of Deception: UFO Contacts and Cults*, (Berkeley: And Or Press, 1979), 9.

Needles, connected to long wires, probed their heads, arms, legs and spines.²⁰³

Betty Hill's hypnotherapy uncovered many fragments of her encounter. She described grayish, large-head beings, and remembered talking at length with them. During the incident, she claims a long needle was inserted into her abdomen. One of the beings explained that it was a pregnancy test. In her stories, the aliens also had a sense of humor, laughing at Barney's removable dentures.

Another curious aspect was the star chart given to Betty by one of the creatures. Under hypnosis, she redrew a map of star positions that had been placed into her mind. After the publishing of the diagram, an amateur astronomer announced that the map was from the perspective of a viewer in the star system Zeta Reticuli. Betty's "followers" still see this as proof of her encounter with extraterrestrials. Many astronomers, however, question the accuracy of the map.

Barney Hill died eight years after the event. Betty claimed to have been visited several times by the aliens until her death in 2004. A New Hampshire historical marker stands at the site of the alleged abductions.

The iconic "Grays" are the aliens described in the majority of CE-3 cases. These ETs sport small (3-5-foot) humanoid bodies, with proportionally larger heads. They are typically hairless with large, black, almond-shaped eyes. Limbs are slender with fewer than five fingers. Noses, mouths, and ears are usually small or absent. Two science fiction stories by authors Gabriel Linde and H.G. Wells depicted similar extraterrestrials in the early 1900s. After Betty Hill's report, the Gray became the archetypal ET for most of the modern world.

²⁰³ Linda Lacina, "How Betty and Barney Hill's Alien Abduction Story Defined the Genre," www.history.com, updated 15 Jan 2020.

The “Perfect Abduction”

The Hill case contained many elements that seem to be common in alleged abduction incidents since then. Skeptics claim that the Hills’ highly publicized story may have influenced subsequent reports. In researching the material for this book, I reviewed over a hundred abduction cases selected from a variety of sources. With this base, I then followed Tyrrell’s strategy for modeling a *typical* apparition. The “perfect abduction” description that follows is a mosaic of many abduction scenarios. Some of my categories are based on the observations of psychologist Joe Nyman who worked extensively with those claiming to be victims.²⁰⁴ (For simplicity, in the remainder of this section I’ll drop terms such as “claim to” and “allegedly” and assume the subject’s point of view.)

1. The event starts late at night.
2. The victim is in his car or bedroom.
3. Immediately before the incident, the victim senses dread, general anxiety, or physical uneasiness.
4. A dreamlike, ethereal feeling envelops. Voluntary muscle control is lost.
5. The victim is transported into a room or wakes up there. Usually if awake, he floats in a paralyzed state. Some recall passing through solid objects such as walls or ceilings.
6. The environment is foggy and surreal. Unusual lights are present. These tend to be bright until the abductee reaches the destination, then it becomes much dimmer.
7. The victim experiences laying on a surface and being “probed” with various metallic devices. Most attention is focused on the head and reproductive organs.
8. A “sermon” is given, often telepathically, in which the abductee is “enlightened” about a variety of vague philosophical topics.
9. The victim is returned to the place of abduction or nearby.

²⁰⁴ Nyman, Joe, "A Composite Encounter Model," In: Pritchard, Andrea & Pritchard, David E. & Mack, John E. & Kasey, Pam & Yapp, Claudia, *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, (Cambridge: North Cambridge Press), 83-85.

10. A loss of time is noted.
11. Subsequent abduction experiences are likely.

Those who have had up-close encounters with aliens are referred to as *experiencers*, or if manipulated in some way against their will, *abductees*. *Contactee* refers to a person who has communicated (perhaps telepathically) with an extraterrestrial. The descriptions are sometimes used interchangeably, but those who feel violated by ETs sometimes resent the neutrality of being considered a mere experiencer. It should be noted that quite often abductees and experiencers don't consciously recall their encounters. In many cases, the memories reside "deep in the subconscious" and can be recovered only through hypnosis or other treatments. Hypnotherapy isn't without its doubters.^[p.226] Some point to the problem of *false memories* that are known to arise during hypnosis. Experiencers can also be significantly influenced by the therapists' styles of questioning and other external suggestions.

Subjects with no conscious recollection of an alien contact may have dreams, flashbacks, and general paranoia which lead to suspicions and fears that an alien encounter could have occurred in the past (especially when hearing of similar symptoms in other abductees). It's also common for an experiencer to be a *repeater* or one who remembers several different encounters. Repeaters generally recall that their incidents started in childhood. On considering the characteristics of ET confrontations, skeptics often point to the similarities between experiencers and those with mental illness.

It's easy to see how a person with some form of mental illness could express the condition with the same perceptions. This in no way implies that all experiencers have a mental issue, but it's likely that some accounts may be explained as such. It should be noted that very many experiencers and abductees have no indications of mental illness whatsoever. Harvard psychologist John Mack who studied over 200 abductees concluded that psychological issues before his patients' abductions were not different from those of the general population. His controversial work with alleged abductees provided the template for the organized study of the phenomenon. Mack's research revealed an unusual mixture of physical and spiritual qualities woven through the abduction accounts. He recognized three categories of UFO/ET perceptions among his patients and other experiencers...

1. *Evidence in the normal physical universe.*²⁰⁵

- unusual lights
- radar blips
- burned patches of earth

2. *Phenomena that appear to be explainable with physical laws if we had better technology.*

- speeds and maneuvers that seem impossible with our technology
- vanishing or appearing suddenly
- telepathy with humans

3. *Observations for which we can conceive no explanation in the physical universe.*

- “sense that experiences are not occurring in our space/time universe”
- “a consciousness abductees experience of vast other realities”
- “deeply felt sense of opening up to or returning to the source of being or creation”
- “experience by abductees of a dual human/alien identity”²⁰⁶

Clearly, the phenomena experienced in this third category seem to have crossed into another realm. Once again, the experiences are qualitatively different from the former ones. Perhaps most puzzling is this abrupt change in mode. Certainly, the presumed ETs may do whatever they wish, but I believe we can honestly ask, why this switch? Apparently, there is no problem with the appearance of material crafts or their physical interactions. I could envision a scenario in which aliens continue the CE-3 contacts in nuts-and-bolts (or rather “skin-and-bones” or whatever) form.²⁰⁷ In other words, there seems to be no logical reason to change “formats” in the middle of an abduction.

²⁰⁵ You may notice these categories resemble Hynek’s CE classifications in some ways.

²⁰⁶ John E. Mack, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 31-32.

²⁰⁷ I realize I’m speculating a lot here, knowing nothing about the alleged aliens. But I believe we can make some more or less educated guesses about them. My point is that they seem to

A Riddle, Wrapped in a Mystery, Inside a Spaceship

If the government and military seem “flighty,” the ETs certainly aren’t doing much better. Granted, there’s a danger in attempting to anthropomorphize their actions, but I think we can apply some broad reasoning here. Are they looking for something? Are they just studying us? Vallee noted how absurd this curiosity/guinea pig theory is. The assumption is that to travel here in sophisticated spacecraft would take sophisticated technology. How long does it take mega-brains to study Earthlings? Shouldn’t advanced space travelers have all the info they need by now? Even Hynek has stated...

It seems ridiculous that any intelligence would come from such great [distances] to do reportedly stupid things like stopping cars and frightening people.²⁰⁸

Stories of forcible abductions and other physical manipulations seem to be almost as common as their fictional TV and movie depictions. Victims recall nightmarish memories of probings, surgeries, and other molestations. Yet despite what TV and tabloids promote, abductees rarely exhibit verifiable implants or surgical scars. Few if any plausible accounts involve what we might call real-world meetings or communication with a “tangible” being.

Along with many others, I’ve tried to imagine what visiting ETs are attempting to do or say. Like Hynek, I assume that if aliens are visiting us, they must be highly advanced to accomplish the feat. Furthermore, since we haven’t all been zapped to ashes already, they must be either benevolent or indifferent. So, we would expect ETs to have already made some type of a worldwide, public debut.

But they haven’t... When they make an appearance, it seems to be only to random individuals. Then maybe the messages ETs are leaving with these isolated abductees contain significant morsels of technology

prefer the physical universe for their travel (or at least that’s the way they prefer to manifest their travel means). Our planes engage them. Radar detects them. Their movements sometimes are physically difficult to explain, yet still physical (point A to B, dodging, landing, etc.)

²⁰⁸ Ian Ridpath, “Interview with J. Allen Hynek,” *Nature*, October 4, 1975.

or wisdom to be passed on. That isn't the case either. Why can't they throw us a few bones?

Furthermore, aren't there better ways to send a message to humankind than by probing someone in a dream-state and leaving a few confusing memory riddles? If I were contacting another planet and didn't want a lot of publicity, I think I would just beam up a phone and call important people. Don't highly advanced creatures know how to hack into email or social media? Seriously, herein lies the conundrum. The enigmatic behavior of alleged ETs isn't consistent with what our commonsense demands. And I realize my reasoning here is more intuitive than scientific since I'm presupposing a lot about the nature of ETs. Nevertheless, considering their alleged visitations, wouldn't they probably operate on a few similar universals such as purpose, logic, industry, creativity, curiosity, and some semblance of sociability?

And back to the ETs' sage, civilization-altering wisdom... Aside from a few star charts and intergalactic anecdotes, ETs are quite monotonous. There's no useful medical, scientific, or technical advice. There are no practical ideas for improving society or a constitution for starting a "United Federation of Planets." A typical contact scenario resembles a medieval exorcism more than the meeting of two species. What happened to "Take me to your leader?" Their messages are more séance than science.

This has frustrated UFO aficionados for decades. By the 1970s some were already making the connections. John Keel noted...

The endless messages from [ETs] would now fill a library, and while the communicators claim to represent some other world, the content of those messages are identical to the messages long received by mediums and mystics.²⁰⁹

It becomes obvious that the UFO/ET paradigm doesn't fit with modern science and logic. I'm not speaking of the technologies (unearthly physics, antigravity, etc.), but rather the overarching behavior or "psychology" of the phenomena. UFOs and ETs seem to be inconsistent, unpredictable, "flirty," inefficient in supposed objectives,

²⁰⁹ John Keel, *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse*, (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1970).

and often contradictory. Some have offered explanations for this, which I believe at best are unsatisfying:

- ETs are stupid. (Not likely. How did they get here?)
- Perhaps there are several different races of ETs? (That would only multiply the chances of messing up. And surely one group would have an understandable plan.)
- ETs are so smart they just appear stupid. (Wish people would say that about me.)
- There is “method in their madness.” The flirty, inconsistent behavior is a ploy for some hidden agenda. (If this is the case, their agenda must not be the expected “take over the earth,” “destroy the earth,” “study the earth,” or “save the earth.”)

We often hear the theme that ETs are our “space brothers” who only want to help us grow and evolve. If so, why are they so erratic in their methods? Perhaps they’re observing us to learn better strategies for organization and effective communication. It has been suggested that our next message to space should be “Figure out what you’re doing then come see us!”

The Dirty Little Secret of Abduction Cases

After the work of Mack, mental health professionals began dealing with experiencers and abductees on a more practical level. One of the most surprising findings was that the cases were clinically similar to issues brought about by occult encounters. As mentioned, some had already noticed this association as early as the 1960s...

The UFO manifestations seem to be, by and large, merely minor variations of the age-old demonological phenomenon.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ John A. Keel, *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse*, (New York: Putnam, 1970), 299.

Just as with demonic dreams and ghostly harassments, C-3 encounters and abductions seem to occur as much in the mind as in the material world. With the more extreme stories, in which a person claims to have been violently abducted, virtually all take place in eerie, other-worldly settings, producing suppressed, dreamlike memories in the victims. Computer scientist and astronomer Jacques Vallee did extensive UFO research with Allen Hynek in the mid-1900s. One of the icons of ufology (and an agnostic), Vallee became convinced of the “spiritual” nature of UFOs...

At first view, the very suggestion of the link is disturbing to a scientist... the phenomena reported by witnesses involve poltergeist effects, levitation, psychic control, healing and out-of-body experiences... familiar [in] occult literature.²¹¹

Bad news for naturalism... Indeed, naturalists would hope UFO phenomena are explicable in materialistic terms, even if this points to the possibility of sentient, extraterrestrial life. For the naturalist, a supernatural source would be a worst-case scenario, yet after decades of data, these implications remain.

Not only do ET encounters seem to mimic occult and spiritualist phenomena, the selection of participants is also heavily skewed toward those with previous ties to mysticism and the paranormal...

In looking at the background of UFO abductees, it quickly becomes clear that almost to a man, they have some background in New Age or occultic beliefs. Interestingly, studies show that there are very few practicing Christians or Jews amongst UFO contactees. What could this mean? Are the aliens racists? Or does this, rather, indicate something about the belief systems of the abductees themselves?²¹²

²¹¹ Jacques Vallee, *Messengers of Deception: UFO Contacts and Cults*, (Berkeley: Ronin, 1979), 204-5.

²¹² Goldman, Stuart, *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1990.

Certain researchers have concluded that the data show little difference among experiencers with respect to ethnicity, gender, age, and religion. Here is where surveys can be misleading. When data are analyzed more discriminately, an interesting fact is revealed. Referring to the abductee population, Bates explains...

...there is one group of people that, by and large, is notably absent. They are Christians... I am talking about what are known as “born-again,” Bible-believing Christians—those who are often (these days unflatteringly) described as “Christian fundamentalists.” It is as if ETs tend to avoid this select group of people.²¹³

I certainly don’t believe we should generalize from these statistics that *all* experiencers are unbelievers, nominal Christians, or occultists.²¹⁴ Mature believers aren’t immune to deception and spiritual pitfalls, but they do have armor and an Advocate. Bates is concerned that most churches aren’t equipped to deal with abduction accounts because Christians generally avoid the topic. Immorality and substance abuse are approachable—claims of abduction are not.

One parachurch group has as its mission the investigation of ET phenomena and ministry to abductees and experiencers.²¹⁵ Their success rate in squelching the phenomena is significant. One of their more interesting findings is that when the name of Jesus is evoked during an alleged ET/abduction event, the results are the same as with demonic manifestations. The “ETs” seem to stop the experience and either vanish, fly away, or react wildly as fleeing demons. Obviously, accounts such as these don’t get a lot of media attention.

²¹³ Gary Bates, *Alien Intrusion*, (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2018), 254.

²¹⁴ For example, in the case studies presented earlier a broad range of people witnessed the same events. This seems to indicate that some phenomena may be nuts-and-bolts and not mental manipulation—perhaps evidence that fallen spirits may be presenting physical manifestations.

²¹⁵ Gary Bates, “Lifting the Veil on the UFO Phenomenon,” *Creation* 33(3):20–22, Jul 2011.

Are UFO and ET Phenomena Consistent with the Ephesians Hypothesis?

The title of this section asks a question that is either ridiculous in its credulity or profound in its insight. As with all sensory information that enters the human brain, UFO/ET/abduction data (first or secondhand) will be processed through an individual's worldview filter. I have biases, just like every other person who has ever lived. I make no excuses, nor do I offer any apologies. And to be clear, I don't expect my examples and reasoning here to convince the skeptic. My purpose isn't to lay out a scientific treatise, but rather to allow Christians to see that the same faith they have expressed in a supernatural salvation can also embrace the reality of the supernatural drama presented in Scripture.²¹⁶

Yet I believe this is still a data-driven hypothesis in that it's consistent with the fundamental empirical evidence. This isn't simply playing the god-of-the-gaps card (or in this case demon-of-the-gaps). The Ephesians Hypothesis has explanatory and predictive power regarding the "big picture" of UFO phenomena. Hynek, Vallee, and many other secular researchers found no conflict between the data and this idea. There is no need to force-fit UFO and CE-3 accounts into a supernatural mold. (Be sure to note, I'm referring here to the 5%, or RUFOs, that seem to imply supernatural or extraterrestrial origin.²¹⁷) For those willing to see, there is more than enough evidence to warrant the inclusion of this spiritual explanation for UFO/ET phenomena in the overall discussion. More recently, Christian scholar and pastor Mark Hitchcock makes the same connection as Vallee with a bit more specificity...

It is our belief that the UFO enigma is a demonically driven phenomenon. In our research of this subject, there is nothing in the realm of ufology that we don't find explained by the

²¹⁶ This isn't to say that the Christian faith is without evidence. There are multitudes of Christian apologetics, both scientific and philosophical. Unlike many belief systems, the biblical worldview is supported by a *reasonable* faith.

²¹⁷ In no way do I contend that every odd, unexplained UFO incident has a demonic source. It would be unwarranted and irresponsible, as well as a bad testimony, to mark every anomaly as demonic.

realm of the demonic. There is a consistent parallel between UFOs and the demonic/satanic that cannot be denied. There is a clear parallel between UFOs and the occult, as well as UFOs and the New Age movement.²¹⁸

In another work, he notes a possible motivation for the phenomenon...

Belief in UFOs fills many people's spiritual hunger with alleged higher sources of knowledge and experience. All of this is consistent with Satan's portrayal in Scripture as a masquerading deceiver...²¹⁹

All things considered, I believe that a spiritual view of the 5% seems to provide coherent answers to the "why" question and other inconsistencies discussed earlier. Can we expand on Hitchcock's suggested motive? What would Satan have to gain by proliferating a mythology of extraterrestrials, and would this be within his ability? Let's examine some UFO/ET enigmas that are addressed by the Ephesians Hypothesis...

1. The RUFO phenomena, in general, are often elusive and inconsistent. We've alluded to this issue quite often, and it hovers in the background of almost every media account—UFO data give contradictory signals as to purpose. Do they wish to be seen or not? UFOs float slowly over heavily populated areas, low enough to pique curiosity, yet high enough to avoid detailed observation. Sometimes radar sees them—sometimes not a trace. They fly teasing close to our best military weapons, then vanish. When they make a close encounter, it's to a few who are unprepared or unbelieving. Are UFOs more theatrical than technical? Vallee observed...

²¹⁸ Mark Hitchcock and Scot Overbey, *Extraterrestrials: What on Earth Is Going On?* (OKC: Hearststone Publishing, Ltd., 1997), 112.

²¹⁹ Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to Questions About Satan, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014), 77.

Human beings are under the control of a strange force that bends them in absurd ways, forcing them to play a role in a bizarre game of deception.²²⁰

Moreover, are intelligent entities staging “just enough” at “just the right time?” UFO researcher Nick Redfern discusses this characteristic...

There’s the nature of the entities themselves: they practically overemphasize who, or what, they claim to be... We only have to take a careful look at such cases ... to see that these “incidents” are clearly stage-managed. It is a game, a scenario that has *everything* to do with trying to emphasize the ET meme ... Of course, they could easily avoid us! But, here’s the deal: *they want to be seen*. It’s not an accident. It’s carefully planned. And it’s designed to plant an image of “ET scientists” in the mind(s) of the witness(es).²²¹

What if our confusion over UFO *behavior* stems from wrong-thinking about their *nature*? If the phenomenon has a spiritual source, the charades of Satan and his fallen angels don’t necessarily need to be sensible, consistent, or believable. *The goal of the Father of Lies is to lead humans away from God’s truth.*

Deception, then, could use literally any strategy—silly, serious, simple, complex, enigmatic, believable, fearsome, scientific, fanciful, religious, secular, bizarre, classic, esoteric, logical, illogical, old-school, cutting-edge, mysterious, virtuous, or *anything that works*... Lewis warned that any demonic deceptions are possible, “provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing.”²²²

2. *Why so many different manifestations?* It seems that UFO styles change with trends in earth technology. Ancient sightings were like angels or birds, with flapping wings and feathers. Accounts of strange

²²⁰ Jacques Vallee, *Messengers of Deception*, 20.

²²¹ Nick Redfern “UFOs: Extraterrestrial? Probably Not,” www.mysterious-universe.org, 2016, Accessed 4 Jun 2020.

²²² C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (New York: HarperOne, reprint edition, 2015).

aerial phenomena from the 1800s describe them as floating airships (blimps). A bit later they were gawotting as noisy “steampunkish” machines like those in Jules Verne stories. By the mid 20th century, observers saw mostly the iconic saucer form. Now, UFOs commonly appear as ethereal, non-physical craft. Also, in earlier close encounters ETs claimed they came from the moon, Mars, or Venus. Now that we know better, they hail from conveniently far-removed star systems.

Even though UFO/ET phenomena are erratic as to *motive*, they seem very predictable in terms of *mode*. It isn’t the case 100% of the time, but their mode generally seems to coincide with the expectations of the observers...

...the UFO phenomenon simply does not behave like extraterrestrial visitors. It actually molds itself in order to fit a given culture.²²³

Interestingly, Keel made the same observation about paranormal phenomena in general...

If we are young and living in a Catholic community, It becomes a BVM [blessed Virgin Mary]. If we are atheistic and immersed in science and technology, It appears in a mechanical-looking contrivance in the guise of a being from some distant galaxy.²²⁴

Some attribute this to the gullibility of observers, but we’ve already dealt with that aspect in designating the RUFOS. This becomes almost a clarion cliché by its ubiquity: *We can’t dismiss as gullibility, hoax, or recklessness such a significant number of accounts given by reliable witnesses*. So, does a spiritual cause have explanatory power in this aspect, as well? Wouldn’t a deceptive Enemy use the preexisting beliefs of his targets?

²²³ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFOs and Other Supernatural Phenomena*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 10.

²²⁴ John Keel, *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings*, (CreateSpace Platform, rev. 2016), 217.

3. *Do they want to kill us, save us, use us, or probe us?* Alleged messages and abduction experiences are diverse and contradictory, but the two central teachings are 1) a vague New Age pantheism, or 2) the atheistic idea that they (the ETs) are somehow responsible for the existence of humankind on Earth. I'm not arguing here whether these ideas are true or false. Rather, I'm perplexed by the odd mismatch of behavior and message if ETs are indeed behind the phenomenon. Ankerberg states this well...

...how credible is it to think that literally thousands of genuine extraterrestrials would fly millions or billions of light years simply to teach New Age philosophy, deny Christianity, and support the occult? Why would they do this with the preponderance of such activity already occurring on this planet?²²⁵

Hitchcock supports this observation...

The curious thing is that the theology [of ETs] is New Age theology; namely, that we are all divine, all evolving to higher levels of consciousness, that reality is what you perceive it to be, etc. These are anti-Christian teachings. In some cases, comments about Jesus himself have been made that directly contradict biblical revelation. I've studied the New Age for quite some time, and a great many people in the New Age not only accept aliens and UFOs but teach that they are more highly evolved than we are; and that we need to learn from them.²²⁶

Another prevalent theme of ETs' alleged communication is that their purpose is to "help" humans. However, this help is usually nebulous, generalized advice, much like a daily horoscope. One would think that beings with the intelligence and technology to traverse light-

²²⁵ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFOs and Other Supernatural Phenomena*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 13.

²²⁶ Mark Hitchcock and Scot Overbey, *Extraterrestrials: What on Earth Is Going On?* (OKC: Hearststone Publishing, Ltd., 1997).

years could give us a bit more. Perhaps I'm being too pragmatic, but it would be nice to get a cure for cancer or a cheap, clean energy source. And if their assistance must be limited to the moral and spiritual, why not give some specifics about how to reach the "higher plane" they preach? At least Yoda taught Luke how to levitate a spacecraft and wield a lightsaber.

I make no claim that any of this is strong evidence against the ETH. I only point out that these messages are highly consistent with messages we might expect from demonic sources. They're virtually indistinguishable from the signature information we get from psychics and occult practitioners.

In addition to giving us the battle strategy for fallen angels, Ephesians also identifies another of Satan's titles. Paul reminds the Ephesian Church of their former trajectory of "following the *prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."²²⁷

Some connect the Deceiver's role, "Prince of the Power of the Air," directly to UFO phenomena. It's a bit of a stretch exegetically, but if Satan does presently claim this domain of Earth as his own, it's no wonder he uses it for his dark purposes.

Is this all too broad a mental jump? Our 21st-century minds often have trouble wrapping a modern phenomenon in what culture wants to keep a medieval myth. I believe even this could be part of the deceptive strategy. In upcoming chapters, we'll examine some details of how this deception might play out.

²²⁷ Ephesians 2:2

Evidence Against the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis

1. *Humanoid form.* If aliens are the result of evolution as their claims indicate, why would they resemble humans in *any* way? Given the nature of evolution, the chances that a visiting ET would be bipedal, two-eyed, or *anything* like us would be highly unlikely. Also, most UFOs are of a size that would resemble that of humans. Why would that be so, assuming random evolution?
2. *Physics faux pas.* A significant number of UFOs seem to violate physical laws such as speed, inertia, gravity, etc. Sci-fi may romance the idea of overcoming physics, but *physics is physics*. (That's why we call them laws.)
3. *Interstellar travel.* Again, we may dream of hyperspace and warp drive, but stars are unbelievably far away. It's likely that the speed of light is the absolute limit to velocity.
4. *Earth is a speck.* Why would they come? The fact that we see any of them implies aliens are numerous. But if they're numerous, why aren't we empirically verifying any of their movement or communications.
5. *Many reports have alien beings outside their vessels,* in earth atmosphere. Once again, why would we assume that creatures who had evolved on another planet could survive in an Earth habitat. Do they breathe our gases? Do they have our same temperature and humidity requirements?

16

A Paranormal Potpourri

*“I’ve seen movements in the clearing.
Someone sent you something satanic...”*
Sir Elton John²²⁸

*“Big deal! The devil can move something. The devil can tell
you something. The devil can do something unusual.
Why should we be shook up about things like this?”*
Walter Martin²²⁹

Once while standing in line at the grocery checkout, my attention was drawn to the elderly couple in front of me. I stepped closer to make sure... Yes, I was correct. They both had prosthetic noses. I had never seen a prosthetic nose before, and certainly seeing one would not have been highly unusual. But two... On two apparently married seniors?

In no way am I minimizing this. The loss of a nose is undoubtedly a tragic and miserable occurrence. But I couldn't help wondering... “What causal factor would have resulted in two closely-associated people experiencing such a rare event?” As I inched forward in line, several hypotheses came to mind. Did they both share a degenerative sinus infection? Did they both inspire radioactive particles? Was there an inhumane attack of some sort? Were both thrown through the same windshield? Did they meet at a support group for those who had lost

²²⁸ Elton John, “I’ve Seen the Saucers.”

²²⁹ Walter Martin, “Tools of the Occult,” Audio on www.calvarytruths.com, Accessed 23 May 2020.

noses? To this day, my hypotheses remain untested, even though I've wasted way too much time thinking about them.

We've seen that paranormal phenomena are often concentrated around certain places or *hotspots*. Two or more similar incidents in a non-random relationship imply another level of significance.²³⁰ These clustered data can be misleading in that it's sometimes difficult to distinguish cause and effect. Are multiple phenomena *drawn* to the location, or does something about the location *cause* the phenomena?

For example, ufologists have noted that UFO sightings seem disproportionately higher near military bases. Several logical *causal agents* could be put forth. Despite the official spin, perhaps some UFOs really are top-secret military craft. Or do ETs simply have an interest in the military? For now, let's not be concerned with the correctness of either explanation. Just note that our usual assumption is that data clusters have a relational (non-random) cause.

There are other *nuisance variables* that might come into play. Could the people at a particular location be more likely to see or report phenomena? Does the geography of a location simply make observation easier? Is it possible that reports of an initial event could trigger similar ones? Or perhaps more controversial, does the local culture of an area make expecting, imagining, observing, or reporting phenomena more likely? Here again, we must often apply the Pickle Principle mercilessly to weed out the non-genuine.

Some paranormal hotspots possess an additional complexity. Let's call the previous type of data cluster a *single-phenomenon* (SP) hotspot. What are we to make, then, of *multi-phenomenon* (MP) hotspots? How does the logic change when at one location, several seemingly *different types* of paranormal phenomena are claimed?

Vallee was one of the first to draw attention to MP hotspots...

It is the rule, rather than the exception, to find significant UFO sightings preceded or followed by other anomalies, notably of the poltergeist variety.²³¹

²³⁰ Hynek referred to this as "high strangeness."

²³¹ Jacques Vallee, *Confrontations: A Scientist's Search for Alien Contact*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991).

UFOs and ghosts? Are we stuck in a late-night B-movie? The uncomfortable truth is that Vallee was correct and similar combinations still haunt paranormal investigators.

We might expect combinations of these incidents and variables to be more difficult to analyze than the individual phenomena. However, I believe their symbiosis provides a valuable clue in analyzing paranormal phenomena. First, let's look at some specific examples.

Bridgewater Triangle

Had the Pilgrims only known about the area just west of Plymouth, would history have been different? The Bridgewater Triangle has generated enough paranormal lore to knock the knees of the staunchest settler. Bounded by the Massachusetts towns of Abington, Freetown, and Rehoboth, the 200-square-mile triangle has a long history as a multi-phenomenon hotspot. Some ghostbusters trace the strangeness to Native American curses and spirits. In the 1670s, relationships between the colonists and the Wampanoag tribe deteriorated, leading to numerous skirmishes in what has been named King Philip's War. Many historians cite this as one of the bloodiest wars on American soil. Wampanoag legend says that the land would be under a curse until the lost belt of King Philip (their chief) is returned to the tribe.

The Wampanoag occupied the 16,000-acre Hockomock Swamp as a launching point for attacks on the colonists. Several tribes have used it as a sacred burial site. Aptly, "Hockamock" is Algonquin for "the place where spirits live." Roughly at the center of the triangle, the Hockomock Swamp seems to be ground-zero for the region's paranormal activity. The swamp is allegedly home for a variety of cryptids, including Sasquatch, giant wolves, wolfmen, and giant cats. There have also been documented (by police) reports of large flying creatures resembling pterodactyls, or *thunderbirds*. Adding to the mystery, many have seen huge snakes "as thick as a stovepipe" in the swamp.

Ghost and poltergeist claims are commonplace in the Bridgewater Triangle. The most popular recent apparition is the "red-haired hitchhiker" seen by drivers on Route 44. The middle-aged man is easy to identify by his black eyes and tendency to vanish when offered a ride.

Current residents still see the elusive *pukwudgies* who have vexed Wampanoags for centuries. These four-feet-tall, humanoid creatures have smooth, gray skin and almond eyes (sounds like a Gray, huh?) and have the ability to fade away suddenly, hence the name translation “little wild man of the woods that vanishes.” It’s interesting that encounters with the creatures are almost always accompanied by glowing orbs (*tei pai wankas*) and a large, shadowy form not far away. When the gospel reached the Wampanoags, the *pukwudgies* were identified with demons, still set on frightening, harming, and destroying.

With the parade of other oddities, it’s easy to overlook the UFO sightings over the Bridgewater Triangle. Citizens claim that UFOs actually dominate the paranormal reports in the area. Orbs and other lights seem to be the most common. On Halloween night 1908, before the modern age of flying saucers, many in Bridgewater witnessed a large glowing “lantern” navigating over the town. The most extensive UFO flap in the history of Massachusetts occurred in 1979. Several videos exist showing nighttime orbs, exhibiting unusual flight behavior. The best-documented incident was a low-flying, shield-shaped craft over Raynam, estimated to be larger than a football field.

Any discussion of the Bridgewater Triangle phenomena must include the occultic activity in the area. At the southern end of the triangle, in and around the Freetown State Forest is a different type of hotspot—an epicenter of crime and evil. Beginning in the 1980s, the triangle experienced a high proportion of crime and violence including occult activity, organized crime, murders, suicide, drugs, and general violence. Despite dissociation by the Church of Satan, several sites for satanic rituals were verified by police. Animal mutilations, sacrifices, and at least one ritualistic murder were attributed to satanic cults operating in there.

Some have attempted to link these evils to the paranormal mystique of the location. It would be difficult to prove such a connection. Cause and effect factors can be misleading. Considering only the occult influence in the area, do places with a rich paranormal tradition tend to attract those with occult views? If some paranormal phenomena have demonic sources, could the area be predisposed to other types of evil? Is this evidence of territorial spirits (demons)?

Most regions have their own folklore. Paranormal researchers are quick to note that the Bridgewater Triangle phenomena are qualitatively different in preponderance, diversity, and number of reliable witnesses (not to say that many aren't hoaxes and silliness). There is little indication that this hotspot will fade from memory anytime soon.

Skinwalker Ranch

Skinwalker Ranch has become perhaps the most studied multi-phenomenon hotspot on the globe. The 500-acre plot in northeastern Utah is allegedly a showcase of paranormal events. UFO reports have been common in this Uintah Basin region since the 1970s. Accounts of other paranormal phenomena can be traced back hundreds of years in folklore and Native American legends.

In 1995, the Sherman family bought the acreage and began cattle ranching. After being on the property for under two years, the family called it quits due to what some referred to as a “paranormal Disneyland.” George Knapp who has written extensively about the ranch describes it...

...as if some cosmic puppet master had written a laundry list of every spooky phenomenon of modern times and then unleashed them all in a single location, resulting in a supernatural smorgasbord that no one could possibly believe, even less understand.²³²

The list of odd occurrences included...

- UFOs – Both lights and nuts-and-bolts, many small glowing orbs.
- Poltergeist activity – Numerous items disappearing and reappearing hours or days later, stacks of wood moved across a field, farm equipment placed high in treetops.
- Cattle mutilations – Organs removed with surgical precision, no blood at site.

²³² Colm A. Helleher and George Knapp, *Hunt for the Skinwalker: Science Confronts the Unexplained at a Remote Ranch in Utah*, (New York: Paraview Pocket Books, ebook, 2005).

- Cryptids – Super-sized wolves, wolf-like humanoids, and other creatures.
- Phantom holes – Large amounts of soil disappearing leaving craters.
- Odd energy effects – Magnetized corrals, frozen engines, radiation burns, unusual behavior of electronic devices.
- Men in Black – What paranormal adventure would be complete without mysterious government(?)/military(?) observation?

The Shermans' fear of being stuck on cursed land was assuaged in 1996 when Robert Bigelow purchased the ranch. Among many other entrepreneurial successes, he is the founder of Bigelow Aeronautics and well-known for his interests in UFOs and other paranormal phenomena.²³³

Bigelow immediately made large investments in the property, setting up elaborate surveillance systems and bringing in another of his pursuits, the National Institute for Discovery Science (NIDS). He established the organization as a kind of SWAT team to bring together credible scientists for paranormal research. NIDS scientists and security officers monitored Skinwalker Ranch 24/7 for months, reporting some of the same phenomena as had the Shermans.

The results of the observations were frustrating according to Bigelow and the NIDS leaders. Despite the high-tech approach, tangible evidence was elusive. The scientists and crew claim to have witnessed numerous paranormal incidents but were unable to gather the solid scientific proof they sought. The consensus of the NIDS scientists was that the phenomena were “random and unpredictable, and never happened more than once in the same place or in the same way.”²³⁴ Paraphrasing the researchers: “It’s like they know what we are planning

²³³ Robert Bigelow has numerous paranormal connections. He not only established NIDS, Bigelow Aerospace is involved in several far-reaching space projects. Bigelow was a major force in lobbying for the AATIP program. He also states that he is “absolutely convinced” that ETs have visited earth. (Helene Cooper, et al, "Glowing Auras and 'Black Money': The Pentagon's Mysterious U.F.O. Program," www.nytimes.com, 16 Dec 2017.)

²³⁴ Helleher and Knapp, *Hunt*.

and always try to mess up our investigations, and prevent the collection of solid evidence.”

In 2016, Utah real estate tycoon Brandon Fugal purchased Skinwalker Ranch. Paranormal investigations are on-going with a new team of scientists.

Some Other Alleged Paranormal Hotspots to Research

- Whitehall, NY, the Abair Road sightings
- Chest Ridge, Pennsylvania
- Bray Road, Wisconsin
- Pleasant Point, West Virginia
- Hudson Valley, New York

Dancing with the Apparitions

The Bridgewater Triangle and Skinwalker Ranch phenomena present some unique interpretive challenges. Analyzing a single-phenomenon site is often difficult. Analyzing a multi-phenomenon hotspot is orders of magnitude more complex.

If I have five symptoms of illness, I don't assume I have five different causal agents (although that *could* be possible). Unless sicknesses are the daily norm for me, my assumption should be that simultaneous multiple symptoms stem from a common cause. Knapp notes this principle...

Which particular research data from the Utah ranch does one have to discard in order to fit the rest into a tidy box? Or should we just ignore all of the tidy boxes?²³⁵

Let's go ahead and state the obvious issue with Skinwalker Ranch and other MP hotspots: *Observing several different paranormal phenomena in close association is crazy (or someone is crazy)...*

²³⁵ Helleher and Knapp, *Hunt*.

If I went to the ER with a gunshot wound to my pinky toe, claiming a freak accident, medical staff would fix my toe (maybe with raised eyebrows) and send me home. If I came in with *both* pinky toes shot, claiming two different accidents, my toes would be fixed, then I would be transferred to—well, a different wing of the hospital. Logic demands a commonality between associated, random, low-probability events, and in this case, my mental state would be the suspected connection.

Are we misinterpreting one or more of the “tidy boxes” encompassing MP hotspots? Despite what you may have experienced in high school chemistry, empirical science loves simplicity. Back to the disease example, it’s much more *parsimonious* to assume one common cause for five simultaneous symptoms. In other words, the *principle of parsimony* (Ockham’s Razor), says that the simplest solution is probably the correct one.²³⁶ In the quest for more and more data, good scientists always strive to organize the data and discover broad over-arching explanations that can provide meaning to apparent randomness.²³⁷ Currently, for example, physicists are seeking a *theory of everything* (ToE) that would tie several seemingly unrelated physical laws into a simpler model. None of the quantum, string, M, gravity, or relativity boxes seem tidy enough.

So, what is the most parsimonious explanation for paranormal hotspots? Is there a commonality that could ease the “craziness” problem? What are some possible connections among ufology, ghost-busting, and cryptozoology at Skinwalker Ranch? In a discussion of MP hotspots, Keel concludes...

... many of these events may have been somehow interrelated and may, when viewed in toto, represent a larger whole. Witnesses of hairy monsters and witnesses to UFO events and psychic manifestations have experienced many of the same things. Instead of dealing with mere extraterrestrial

²³⁶ Obviously, not always the case. There are times when the answer is more complicated than first thought. But it’s acceptable to use Ockham’s Razor as a logical starting point.

²³⁷ Scientists use *inductive reasoning* in observing data and creating a hypothesis. (Owls fly, robins fly, sparrows fly... My hypothesis: Birds fly.) Then using *deductive reasoning*, a hypothesis is tested. (Birds fly... If that’s true, then that unknown bird sitting on the branch should be able to fly.)

visitations... we may be dealing with brief glimpses of something far broader and infinitely more complex.²³⁸

There is a tendency to place the UFO component at the epicenter of multi-phenomenon activity, likely because UFOs are arguably “less crazy” than other paranormal alternatives. I suppose I would rather be psyched by an alien than by a ghost. But as we might expect, worldview is a strong factor in weighing hypotheses and identifying causal agents...

1. *A ghost hunter* might explain the Skinwalker Ranch phenomena as “Spirits of early people killed on the land are haunting it. They are appearing as UFOs, poltergeists, and strange beasts in order to drive away human intruders.”²³⁹

2. *Ufologists* could claim “Aliens are using the area for base operations. They employ advanced theatrics to confuse and scare away humans.”

3. *Cryptozoologists* have an answer, too. “A population of highly-advanced, secretive werewolves has lived in the area for millennia. They wish to remain unknown and are attempting to discourage human encroachment.”

4. *New Agers* can explain everything easily. “Gaia, the Earth Spirit, is unbalanced because man desecrated the land. She is fighting back with all manner of psychic manifestations.”

5. *Skeptical naturalists* might accuse: “It’s one big hoax. Everyone is in on it—NIDS, the ranchers, the Utes, the neighbors, and the government. It’s a publicity stunt for books and movies.”

6. *Parascientists* theorize: “Perhaps quantum tunneling is allowing a portal to form between two dimensions. A variety of vehicles and

²³⁸ John Keel, *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings*, (CreateSpace Platform, rev. 2016), 156.

²³⁹ These different viewpoints are examples of how different *worldviews* might interpret the same event (see Appendix B).

beings are accidentally coming through from all over the galaxy, and they are as confused as we are.”

7. *And, of course, the government* can't admit it, but they too have a hidden agenda: “One of our top-level branches is involved. We can neither confirm nor deny what they are doing, but suffice it to say, it's important for national security.”

I would guess there are psychologists (both professional and armchair) who would like to weigh in, as well. It would certainly simplify the whole business of dealing with the paranormal if we could give a blanket-diagnosis of insanity (or maybe just a touch of neurosis) for all experiencers. Undoubtedly, mental aberrations (whether pathological or just over-active imaginations) account for some paranormal claims. No one disputes this. But the preponderance of reports from many reputable observers has always been the fly-in-the-ointment for skeptics. Remember, a premise of this book is that in a proportion of paranormal incidents, observers may be making some *observationally accurate* observations.

The only thing worse than having the wrong view of something is to have a mixture of wrong views. We've discussed how some Christians compartmentalize their views regarding spiritual matters—“What happens on Sunday stays on Sunday.” Postmodern thought is good at this *pragmatic hypocrisy*. There is a disconcerting trend today to create a separate compartment (or *tidy box*) for each supernatural phenomenon.

Just this week, I listened to a podcast with a published paranormal researcher who exemplifies this. From his Christian background, he believes that angels and demons exist and that demons may possess some people. But he also believes that ETs are operating on Earth and that it may be difficult at times to distinguish whether a person who claims to be an abductee is relating a demonic experience or an alien encounter. This investigator also believes that it may be possible for a ghost (the spirit of a dead human) to mimic both demonic and ET phenomena. But wait... He also speculates that malicious beings may be entering our realm through interdimensional portals. At a recent

seminar, he outlined ways of determining which of these four different “paranormal” entities might be harassing a troubled individual.

In a way, this is a form of paranormal “polytheism,” (or at best dualism) and it’s disturbing that many Christians buy into it. It’s as if God says, “I’ll deal with the demons, but those other phenomena—they’re out of my jurisdiction!” Not only does this concept snub Ockham’s Razor, but it also mocks the revealed nature of the Most High. Kuyper reminds us of the biblical truth...

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, “Mine!”²⁴⁰

Pardon the preachiness, but this touches on the main point of this book. Yahweh God is sovereign over all existing beings, locations, realities, and belief systems.²⁴¹ Reiterating an earlier premise, *if a supernatural source is indicated in a particular phenomenon, it will necessarily and singularly be of the reality described in Ephesians 6.* [p. 31] There are no supernatural alternatives to the one supernatural reality presented in Scripture.

It bears repeating at least one more time: *Worldviews have consequences...* And I believe the biblical worldview best provides a coherent interpretation of activities beyond our senses. This isn’t a new or radical concept, but rather the traditional, scriptural view of reality. The Ephesians Hypothesis has explanatory power not just in paranormal phenomena in general, but in multi-phenomenon cases. None of the other proposed explanations withstand scientific, philosophical, or evidentiary scrutiny. That was the conclusion of NIDS and others who have investigated the phenomena.

If these incidents are genuine, the random combination of paranormal components appears to be too bizarre to apply the usual SP explanations. They point to a more purposeful and orchestrated phenomenon. (And that is my assumption—logical connections among

²⁴⁰ Abraham Kuyper, From *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

²⁴¹ Indeed, good news for the believer who is truly in Christ. There is only one supernatural threat and Jesus, by his finished work on the cross, has “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them...”

all paranormal phenomena.) Unlike other alternatives, the Ephesians Hypothesis is as robust in explaining MP activities as it is with SP ones. In fact, I believe the Enemy may be inadvertently “showing his hand” in MP manifestations. *When craziness is pushed too far, it draws attention.*

Christians should not be shamed into silence simply because the opinion police attempt to squelch anything with biblical connections. Some from an opposing worldview might still argue that this hypothesis works only because it presupposes evil supernatural entities with great power and a bent toward trickery and deception. To this I would say “Good! You’re beginning to comprehend the biblical worldview!”

This is unquestionably a faith issue to a large extent, and if one wishes to leave it at that, the Ephesians Hypothesis is as good an explanation as the Scripture is trustworthy. But for those who need a more tangible base, we can dig deeper. (I’m so glad Jesus didn’t condemn Thomas for this stance. When Thomas the Curious needed empirical data, Jesus readily offered him palpable, physical evidence.)

The Quintessential Ghost

This is possibly one of the most important sections of the book. Thus far, we’ve looked at various phenomena individually and as they occur in some MP cases. We’ve also applied the Ephesians Hypothesis in a piecemeal fashion as a potential explanation for some paranormal events. I think it’s time to pull it all together into a *tidier box* or even something close to a supernatural *theory of everything*.

I admit there is danger here. Even Ockham would confess that his razor cuts both ways. By making things too parsimonious, we run the risk of missing some causal factors. In other words, we must not oversimplify at the price of sacrificing accuracy.

We’ll begin with an individual phenomenon that I believe fits the Ephesians Hypothesis most comfortably—ghosts. Let’s examine the details of the general theory of “ghosts” we arrived at earlier. (I assume most Bible-believing Christians accept that any genuinely paranormal “ghost” is actually a fallen spirit engaging in some form of deception, but for now, let’s play along with the secular ghost idea.)

Tyrrell, who gave us the criteria for a “perfect ghost,” described the paradox of apparitions he noticed in his research...

Apparitions, then, combine two qualities. They are: a) non-physical in character, yet, when at their best, they are b) indistinguishable from material figures normally perceived, so far as the visual and auditory senses are concerned... it is not uncommon for the sense of touch to be hallucinated in apparitional cases.²⁴²

He also noted some specific abilities of a typical apparition as witnesses report them...

- The apparition can externalize in different ways. It might be perceived as ethereal or as solid as real matter.
- It has no actual physical basis, since it may vanish or pass through walls even after being sensed as solid.
- The apparition can imitate normal perception. It can fit into the surroundings and respond to them.
- It can externalize additional features other than its central figure, such as clothing, jewelry, furniture, carriages.
- The apparition can make itself perceived in the same way (or different ways) by multiple observers.
- It can manipulate perceptions of general surroundings such as air temperature, wind, clouds, precipitation, and lighting.
- It can alter the observers’ subjective feelings to some extent, causing unwarranted fear, peace, disorientation, happiness, or sadness.

Now let’s rough out a “ghostly phenomenon hypothesis” that might fit the Ephesians Hypothesis:

Satan’s scripturally revealed aim is to deceive, confuse, and oppose all that is of God. It is within his ability, and that of demon spirits, to manipulate diverse phenomena either physically or through human perceptions. They have as their

²⁴² G.N.M. Tyrrell, *Apparitions*, (New York: Collier, 1953, e-book 2018).

goal the age-old, continuing strategy of encouraging belief in a false supernatural and drawing humans away from biblical truth by whatever methods work.

As a model for other paranormal phenomena, let's revisit ghost incidents in light of the Ephesians Hypothesis.²⁴³ I've aligned the observations with the appropriate components [see p. 30]...

1. There is only one supernatural reality—the unseen spirit realm described in Scripture. If the supernatural is indicated, it will be of this type, and this type only.

Observation: Ghosts seem to be spirits, but they don't necessarily have to be the spirits of dead humans or any other type of paranormal being.

2. Paranormal events will never be neutral. They are designed to lead the observer.

Observation: Ghost phenomena change people and culture. In most cases, the change is negative, causing fear instead of faith, or at best, a distorted worldview.

3. Biblical spirit beings can interact with the physical world.

Observation: Ghost phenomena seem to exist in the physical realm.

4. Fallen spirits are able to “lead” the thoughts of humans, as allowed by God.

Observation: Reports of ghost encounters indicate that witnesses seem to experience non-physical objects and entities. It isn't clear whether the phenomena are composed of matter and energy at the time of occurrence or are deceptive perceptions created in the observer's mind.

²⁴³ I encourage the reader to follow this model in analyzing any paranormal phenomenon.

5. Not all evil is directly caused by fallen spirits. Its source can be our own fleshly nature and the evil of the world system.

Observation: Despite the number of unexplainable phenomena, many apparitions have natural explanations (hoaxes, false perceptions, overactive imagination).

6. Satan, the leader of fallen spirits, has the goal of opposing God in any way possible.

Observation: Except for possibly affirming the afterlife, apparitions contradict the biblical worldview in message and behavior.

7. Satan's chief strategies are lies and deception.

Observation: Superficially, ghost phenomena are generally confusing and enigmatic. Among incidents, ghosts provide contradictory information about the afterlife, God, and the nature of reality.

8. Satan and fallen spirits will use any means possible to deceive humans and lead them away from God and truth. In most cases, it's in Satan's interest to not reveal his true identity. Demons will manifest themselves to some, but maybe not others.

Observation: Ghost phenomena are quite effective in leading observers to false truth. The elusive nature of apparitions seems to be clear evidence of these strategies.

9. Satan can appear as an "angel of light."

Observation: Many apparitions claim to be benevolent. Even though their doctrines are false, the messages support a vague view of pseudo-Christian concepts, such as heaven, an afterlife, and a god-like being. Some ghost manifestations are literally "angelic" in nature.

10. Fallen spirits have some ability to manipulate matter and energy. Although Satan and fallen spirits have great power, the ultimate power is God.

Observation: Apparitions often include poltergeist phenomena. The actions are sometimes difficult to explain except as a spiritual interaction. They are limited and fleeting.

We don't always understand God's operations in the physical realm. Philosophers ponder why bad things happen to good people, and vice versa. God in his love and omniscience often allows a temporary *lesser evil* in order to gain an eternal *greater good*—for example, in his revealing of sin, leading to repentance, or sanctifying believers. It's difficult to comprehend, much less accept, that God allows Satan and his followers to exert any influence on this world at all, yet that is a biblical fact. Why would God allow paranormal events when he clearly has the ability to prevent them? We must assume the same answer as with any trial or tragedy: “For those who love God all things work together for good—for those who are called according to his purpose.”²⁴⁴

If a suspected paranormal incident has a demonic source (or any other), it didn't escape God's notice. Whether it's the result of the general fallenness of the world, malicious individuals, or direct demon activity, God remains in control of the outcome. I believe, however, that we are accountable for our response to any danger or evil. Scripture lays out the divine strategy for confronting the supernatural.

Ephesians urges us to put on the gospel armor so that we can “stand against the *schemes* of the devil.” The word “schemes” is the Greek *methodeía* which has in mind an organized, methodical evil act that is well-planned. Some translations use “wiles” as in Wile E. Coyote. As everyone knows, Coyote never simply waits around for Roadrunner to happen by. He never recklessly chases Roadrunner. No, Wile E. has an arsenal of tools and highly orchestrated *methodeia*.

Perhaps a more sophisticated picture of *methodeia* is in the old *Mission: Impossible* series. The best part of each episode was watching

²⁴⁴ Romans 8:28

the team put together the minute details of the deception, not knowing how all the random pieces fit. Then, in the last three minutes, it all comes together, and the trap closes on the evildoers.

It would be *extremely* naïve to think that Satan and his cohorts are haphazard or flippant in their scheming. When the Evil One engages in battle, *it's always the best possible strategy he can muster, and it's custom-designed to deceive his victims*. Satan always plays to win...

The devil's brain is prolific with plans. He has many ways of doing many things... He never runs in ruts, Fruitful, diverse, and ever fresh is his way of doing things... He acts by trickery, and always by guile.²⁴⁵

Now let's take a big leap and apply this same reasoning to other paranormal phenomena. It should be apparent by now, that *if* ghosts did exist in the way secular culture believes, *any other paranormal phenomenon could be perpetrated by an alleged "ghost."*

If a ghost can cause illusions of a deceased person, couldn't it cause the illusion of a flying saucer or ET? If a ghost can provide obscure unknown knowledge, couldn't it pose as a psychic entity or ascended master? Could it appear as a paranormal cryptid? Please note: I'm not suggesting ghosts are responsible for all paranormal phenomena. Rather, I'm emphasizing that ghosts and all types of *genuinely* paranormal phenomena are of the same source—fallen entities from the supernatural realm. *I believe the biblically-defined spiritual reality is sufficient to explain all TRULY paranormal phenomena.*

Given this perspective, we may now ask whether individual paranormal events can be similarly explained. Even from a secular view, Hynek connected *close encounters* with *ghost encounters*. He concluded that UFOs and ETs might operate...

... in the same way that a poltergeist can produce very real physical effects.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ E.M. Bounds, *Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 106.

²⁴⁶ J. Allen Hynek and Jacques Vallee, *The Edge of Reality: A Progress Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1975), 262.

So, are UFO/ET phenomena material or mental? Christian apologist Walter Martin suggests...

It seems evident that these phenomena are produced in the same manner that other occult phenomena are produced. They involve dramatic manipulations of matter and energy. Although they originate from the spiritual world, they can produce very powerful, temporary physical manifestations at the material level.²⁴⁷

We could conclude that paranormal phenomena could be either material or mental, in the same way that a ghost may be either.²⁴⁸ The same hypothesis *may* be applied to manifestations of spirit guides, psychic messages, folklore creatures, or any other paranormal entities. Whatever their form, their singular goal is to demean the place of humans in God's plan, produce fear, and replaces dependence on God with dependence on a false source of truth and power. Thus, our formal hypothesis of paranormal phenomena:

Satan's scripturally revealed aim is to deceive, confuse, and oppose all that is of God. It is within the ability of demon spirits to manipulate the diverse phenomena observed at some MP hotspots, either physically or through perceptions. The commonality is simple—fallen, rebellious beings with the age-old, continuing strategy of encouraging belief in a false supernatural and drawing humans away from biblical truth by whatever methods work.

²⁴⁷ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFOs and Other Supernatural Phenomena*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992, ebook).

²⁴⁸ And ultimately, it doesn't matter to the Enemy as long as his victims perceive the realness.

17

Could It Be Magic?

*Bad reasoning as well as good reasoning is possible; and
this fact is the foundation of the practical side of logic.*

Charles Sanders Peirce²⁴⁹

“Sleight of hand and twist of fate...”

U2²⁵⁰

In Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, time traveler Hank Morgan wakes to find himself back in the Middle Ages. The classic plot has Morgan using his knowledge of science to amaze the citizenry with “magical” powers. To the dismay of the wizard Merlin, Morgan’s science-based demonstrations convince the people that he is the superior wizard.

This type of *natural magic* attributes its power to some universal, impersonal force. Clearly, the force in this story was simply the laws of science applied at the right place and time. Since these were unknown to the primitive people, it would naturally be considered paranormal to them.

The magic depicted in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* stories seems to be of the same type. Wizards (as opposed to non-magical Muggles) are born with the innate ability to alter the physical world around them through wands, incantations, and spells. Their magic operates through

²⁴⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief,” *Popular Science Monthly*, 12, November 1877.

²⁵⁰ “With or Without You,” U2, 1987, Island Records.

very specific principles much like science and can be manipulated by the user within these bounds.

In another type of sorcery called *personal magic*, the practitioner believes they are summoning their power from an intelligent, supernatural entity. Purveyors of personal magic believe that by following the required procedures they are summoning the assistance of gods, angels, demons, dead spirits, ancestors, spirit guides, ascended masters, or even aliens.

In both methods, the magician is attempting to use supernatural sources to affect a situation in the physical world. This sounds very much like the description of a *miracle*. We might now further refine our definitions within a Christian context: A *miracle* involves God as the supernatural source; *magic* has a supernatural source other than God.

Magic in the Bible

Sorcery was still widespread during the time of the early church. Acts 8 tells of a magician named Simon who was operating in Samaria. He was one of several Jewish sorcerers who capitalized on his ethnicity and knowledge of Jewish traditions to mesmerize pagans. Under the teaching of the Apostles, Simon became a believer but had trouble forsaking his magic persona. He was enthralled by the Apostles' miracles and offered to pay for a quick training session. Long story short—Peter made it clear that there was no room for Simon's magic in the life of a Christian.

Paul and Barnabas encountered another magician on the island of Cyprus. Elymas the sorcerer “opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.”²⁵¹ Paul was quick to discern that Elymas was “a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right.” Interestingly, the term *sorcerer* here in Greek is *magos*, the same term used for the magi who came to the infant Jesus.

²⁵¹ Acts 13:8

Serious Magic

Many terms are under the umbrella of magic including sorcery, augury, charms, enchantments, curses, omens, divination, and necromancy. We often smirk at these old-fashioned, fairy tale notions of magic, but the Bible takes a much more serious stance. God made it very clear that his people must avoid even the most trivial suggestion of magic, and for good reason.²⁵² Whether real or imagined, any dependence on magic is a denial of God's ability or wisdom. Surrounded by pagan peoples who practiced magic as a lifestyle, the Israelites were always vulnerable.

I believe this was more than simply warning them against wasting their time on superstitions and folklore. Perhaps of all paranormal activities, magic is the most blatantly "dark-side" supernatural. Can you imagine walking into an auto dealership and asking, "Does anyone here think I need a new car?" It must be a great day in the underworld when one of their "clients" *asks* for magical assistance. Far from being humorous, dabbling in magic is a serious matter to God. Perhaps that's why he gives one of his strictest warnings to his children...

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. (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

The warning didn't end in the Promised Land. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy to avoid the "lying wonders" of those such as Jannes and Jambres, who were likely among the magicians in Pharaoh's court. Interestingly, these sorcerers were able to replicate some of the miracles performed by Moses...

²⁵² This is logical since by its very nature, magic is "apart from" God. Why would a believer need more supernatural input than what could be provided by God?

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs (Exodus 7:10-12).

There is no implication here that the sorcerers were employing illusions or sleight-of-hand. “By their secret arts” the Egyptian magicians (*hartemim*), trained in occultism, could perform some of the same miracles as did Moses and Aaron—obviously empowered by fallen spirits. The thrust of this confrontation was not to convince Pharaoh of the supernatural but to prove that Yahweh God was superior to all of the Egyptians’ spirit powers.

Modern Magic

There remains a dark side of magic today. Discussing occult magic, past and present, Unger believes...

Such mighty demonstrations of demon power seem to occur periodically, like religious revivals, and are found today in Spiritism.²⁵³

Natural and personal magic are common today, despite the influence of Christianity. A large number of people, in a diversity of cultures, are involved with magic to varying degrees. Missionaries frequently deal with everything from folk magic to occult demonology. Tribal groups regularly use charms, curses, and talismans in attempts to manipulate reality. Shamanism is common in some traditional Native American groups but is equally welcome among modern spiritualists.

²⁵³ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 112.

Even on a more innocent scale, I would venture to guess that the typical American doesn't step on sidewalk cracks or walk under ladders. And do you hesitate a moment when a black cat crosses, especially on Friday the 13th? You're probably not a full-fledged witch, but the point is, magic has *not* been "preached" out or "scienced" out of us in the 21st century.²⁵⁴ Satan is more than happy to use even the slightest step into magic, making biblical warnings about magic as pertinent today as ever.

The Magic Christians

The intrinsic problem with magic is that it's an attempt to bypass God's way with a more "controllable" plan. We favor formulas in which we press a certain button and get a certain result. In its expected outcomes, magic is essentially a substitute for petitionary prayer. As with prayers of request, the magic practitioner's desire is a change in situation. It isn't surprising that Satan, the Master Counterfeiter, would attempt to capitalize on God's method (prayer) for allowing humans to supernaturally affect the physical realm.

But Christianity isn't based on a *recipe*. It's a *relationship* with a personal God who has the final say on a matter. Those who consider prayer a form of magic illustrate the problem. True scriptural prayer is a request nested in a relationship. It's never to be an incantation in which the correct phrase is uttered and the corresponding response occurs. We "let our requests be made known to God" and the outcome is totally up to him, yet always in our best interest. Jesus condemned the chanting mantras of the pagans and gave a new standard for relational prayer...

When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:7-8).

²⁵⁴ Be certain not to confuse entertainment "magic" with the darker sorts. Although modern illusionists often couch their acts in dark or demonic themes (an unfortunate but separate issue), most practitioners and observers realize that entertainment magic is simply well-rehearsed illusion and sleight-of-hand.

It's disturbing to see a Christianized form of magic within modern churches. A subtle, sleight-of-hand can rewrite the sovereign response of the Most High into a formula that God's power *must* obey. This is often taught as the *power of spoken words*. Several Christian groups have the view that the "power" of God can be manipulated by using the correct words or procedures. In this belief, God is obliged to give a particular response when one performs the prescribed action: If I say "A + B", then "C" must happen. One very popular evangelist says...

You can have anything you say!...the force of the spiritual world around us is controlled by the words you say. This force comes from inside you. (Paraphrased for anonymity)

Another in this same movement claims...

If you are poor, change what you are saying and it will change what you have. Change your vocabulary. God is obligated to meet your needs because of His word.

This clearly substitutes a relationship with God with the "power" of God. It replaces God with the force of natural magic or uses him as just another entity who dispenses power by necessity as in personal magic. But God is not mocked. Christian-sounding "spells," even if they sound like prayers and may seem to work are as damnable as sorcery in God's sight...

On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Effectual Prayer

A counterfeit can only be such if there is a genuine article for it to mimic. The misuse of prayer should never eclipse the true gift God has

given to believers. Volumes have been written about prayer, but the simple truth is offered by Pascal: “God instituted prayer in order to lend His creatures the dignity causality.” I would add that this gift is ultimately for God’s glory.

In a sense, prayer is the most imminent supernatural power possessed by believers. Without relinquishing his sovereignty, God has given us the ability to cooperate with him in altering the physical realm...

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much
(James 5:16, KJV).

Within God’s will, the praying Christian can do that which the sorcerer can only dream. Could anything be as amazing?

If the Fates Allow

The terms *luck* and *fate* are so engrained in our culture that we often miss the jabs. Every time I open Google it temptingly probes how lucky I may be feeling. If luck is simply referring to a statistical probability of something, I could go with that, but there is usually a more supernatural implication.²⁵⁵ If magic wasn’t bad enough, the ideas of luck and fate imply that the mystical power is strewn randomly, with no rhyme or reason as to who gets it or when. Some try to sweeten the odds by avoiding black cats or carrying rabbit’s feet, but the message is the same—sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Clearly, luck and fate are foreign to biblical Christianity. Billy Graham puts it very bluntly...

If life is random or ruled by chance, then it doesn’t really have any higher purpose. In fact, if you take it to its logical conclusion it means we are here by accident, and everything that happens to us is strictly accidental and has no meaning. Or we may decide we are ruled by fate and have no control over our destiny... But God tells us otherwise! God created

²⁵⁵ Although theologians might rightfully argue that there can’t be even statistical “luck” if God is sovereign.

us, and He put us here for a purpose. He loves us, and He cares about what happens to us!²⁵⁶

Blessings and Curses

Blessings and curses are mentioned often in Scripture. As with many Biblical concepts, the words have become skewed in contemporary usage. In simplest terms, a blessing is a wish for good things to happen to someone. To wish bad things to happen would be a curse. We would all probably agree that to wish bad upon someone is at its least a sin of attitude. Beyond that, whether we wish goodness or badness on another is essentially a moot point. Wishing doesn't accomplish anything.

...Unless it's God doing the wishing... Only God has the power to actualize a "wish" as a real event.²⁵⁷ Thus, we see God blessing and cursing in Scripture and his *will* becomes *event*. When God placed a curse on Cain, certain "bad things" were applied to the murderer. God's blessing of Abraham brought "good things."

The confusion, however, comes when we attribute blessings and curses to human agents. Sometimes, the word "blessing" in Scripture has the second meaning of a person's bestowal of certain rights on another. For example, Isaac's blessing of Jacob was more than just well-wishing. It was a validation of a certain inheritance or birthright. Also, a blessing may be prophetic or even a sort of prayer, requesting that God bestow a blessing.²⁵⁸

Curses are more black-and-white. First of all, they are forbidden by God's Word. Besides being a sinful attitude, curses are equated with spells and incantations. Therein lies the problem with modern cursing. (Not the use of profanity. That's a whole other problem.) From whom or what would one be invoking the curse? Is God being asked to do bad things to someone? That would be problematic, to say the least. The only alternative would be a form of *natural* or *personal* magic. Today,

²⁵⁶ Billy Graham, "Answers," www.billygraham.org, July 27, 2005.

²⁵⁷ I would argue that if I attempted to actualize a wish by *doing* something to someone, it ceases to be a wish. This is not true with God.

²⁵⁸ Jacob's blessing of his sons seems to be bestowing inheritance, prophetic, and prayerful.

those who employ occult practices to pronounce curses seem to be invoking entities of some sort to empower their wish.

Recently, Wiccans across the country pronounced a *mass curse* on our president. Should the Secret Service be on high alert, or are curses just mythology? I don't believe there are magical "forces" that can energize malicious curses. Can fallen spirits carry out curses? If by that we mean "Can they cause bad things?" we know that is possible. But realistically, Satan and his team are already engaged in this as a continuing pursuit...

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Evil spirits need no encouragement to be themselves. Nevertheless, if a believer is still worried that curses may be a threat, we have God's promise that...

...neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38).

This includes curses or any other malevolent intent from any creature. No evil will befall the believer apart from God's permissive, loving will.

Superstitions

Some forms of magic are so subtle as to zip right under our spiritual radar. The word "superstition" means to *stand over*, perhaps pointing to a rule that takes precedence over normal rules. Here again, the idea is that certain forces or entities are in control of events. As mentioned, many level-headed individuals who would never summon a spirit or use an incantation may go about life as usual on Friday the 13th, but with a bit more vigilance. We like the odds stacked in our favor "just in case."

I believe some superstitions are somewhat based on scientific reasoning, albeit flawed scientific reasoning. Remember, our minds are designed to find orderliness and purpose in randomness. That's a good trait. It allows the scientific method to work effectively in a universe bearing the stamp of purposefulness.

Assume you have no preconceived notions about black cats. Suppose a black cat crosses your path three times in a particular month. With each occurrence, you happen to recall that it rained each time within an hour. The scientific reasoning part of your brain kicks in—a pattern! *Does a black cat crossing my path = rain?* So far, this is still good science. You've formed a testable question.

There could be a real connection between the cat and the rain. What if the cat sensed the ominous clouds and headed home each time. The storm connected the rain and the cat's behavior. Or maybe a sadistic person always puts his rowdy cat out as a storm approaches.

With a potential superstition, however, the science stopped before this reasoning. Instead of testing the hypothesis by predicting and observing future crossings, you skip the step and make your question a principle: *Black cat crossing my path = rain*. But this isn't a tested hypothesis or principle. It's only a *pre*-superstition. Even if in the future a black cat crosses and it doesn't rain, you'll tend to ignore the contrary data. If perchance it ever rains again after a black cat crosses, that incident will be far weightier than the contrary data. *A superstition is now established.*

Not only is superstitious reasoning bad science, it mocks Scripture and the nature of our Father God who is just as sovereign over ladders and black cats as over the movement of galaxies. Believers should steer clear of even the suggestion of powers beyond God's purview, and use the situation as an opportunity to grow in faith...

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7).

18

Prophecy and Divination

“Man’s interest in the future is legendary, and many prophets—true and false—have tried to satisfy that interest.”

Charles C. Ryrie²⁵⁹

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death.”

Deuteronomy 4:1-4

In the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*, Phil Connors has the blessing (or the curse) of living the same day over and over. Through trial-and-error and observing each repetition in detail, he gradually gains the knowledge to “perfect” that particular day of his life. How many times have you been asked: “If you could see the future, would you?”

²⁵⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 159.

Undoubtedly, Adam and Eve had it good. A paradise. No weeds. No mosquitoes. No telemarketers. No death. The Creator himself walked with them in the garden. Their *only* restriction was the tree of “the knowledge of good and evil.” Was God withholding something they needed? Something good? This is purely speculation, but perhaps the Most High fully intended for them to *eventually* eat from this tree. After all, he isn’t opposed to knowledge—at the proper time and in the proper context. Whatever the case, Adam and Eve, with the nudging of the Serpent, decided that *knowing* was better than *obeying*. They preempted God’s plan and took matters into their own hands.

Despite what your junior high report card might show, we humans seem to have a deep-seated need to learn about things—especially when the information is secret or prohibited. Of course, knowledge isn’t a bad thing. Proverbs and many other scriptures encourage us to seek and to treasure knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Here again, the problem lies not in the innate desire, but the mode and extent of our learning.

Our fallen nature often leads us to pursue knowledge before its time, beyond that which is appropriate, and outside of God’s method. As children of Adam and Eve, we impatiently grope for ways to bypass God’s strategy for revelation. Much of human history deals with this persistent grabbing for forbidden fruit.

Prophecy vs. Divination

The most obvious bank of “secret” knowledge is the future. It looms before us like a thick fog. Information comes into sight one nanosecond at a time as we press forward. Occasionally, at his discretion, God blows away the mist and allows a distant panorama. A significant portion of the Bible is this extended view called *prophecy*. The broader definition of prophecy, however, includes God’s declaration of *any* truth through a human agent.

In Scripture, God often spoke through prophets, his designated, earthly messengers. Biblical prophets spoke and wrote via the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God. By faith, Christians accept their

prophecies as the inspired Word of God. The prophets' notarization: "Thus says God."

The term *divination* is used in Scripture to designate forms of knowledge-seeking that are outside of God's will. Unger's description shows its similarity to biblical prophecy...

The basic presupposition underlying all methods of divination is that certain superhuman spiritual beings exist, are approachable by man, possess knowledge which man does not have, and are willing, upon certain conditions known to diviners, to communicate this information to man.²⁶⁰

But these general assumptions are merely superficial similarities. In contrast to biblical prophets, the pagan *mantis* or *soothsayer* typically relied on chants, drugs, motions, and altered states of consciousness to divine the message. It was common for the mantis to eat organs of a sacrificed animal in order to establish a *channel* for communication.²⁶¹

As with magic, there are two analogs of divination. In *artificial divination* (also called *augury*), the mantis "reads" a sign or *omen* to gain special, hidden knowledge. An omen could have taken a variety of forms such as tea leaves, Tarot cards, zodiacs, or even livers. The assumption was that a supernatural agent manipulated the omen, infusing it with the desired knowledge. For example, it was standard practice for some pagans to read the liver of the sacrifice as an omen. Livers were believed to be the container of the soul; thus, the gods or demons could "connect" with the liver to relay information. Note that the message originated from a supernatural being, but the mantis had to be skilled in the art of extracting the message.

Inspirational divination posits that a supernatural being "inhabits" the soothsayer or "endues" him with the actual message, perhaps

²⁶⁰ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 120.

²⁶¹ Similar practices have continued to the present. Besides pagan groups and nature religions, New Agers and others use mind-altering drugs, not simply for recreation but spiritual enlightenment. A more refined upgrade of LSD, DMT, is touted as a link to "machinery elves" and other entities willing to provide "forbidden" knowledge.

verbatim.²⁶² In other words, the diviner may possess no special skills. He is merely the conduit through which another being speaks or writes. This is sometimes referred to as “mechanical” or “automatic” communication, meaning that the mantis was in a trance-like state, unaware of the event.

Nostradamus

One of the most popular prophets of the western world, Michel de Nostredame, or Nostradamus, lived in 16th-century France. He was born into a Jewish family who had converted to Roman Catholicism. After working several years as a physician and apothecary, Nostradamus began experimenting with the occult practices of astrology, charms, and necromancy. He is best known for the publication of *Les Prophéties* (*The Prophecies*), a large collection of enigmatic predictions of the future world. Fearing the Inquisition, Nostradamus always denied being a true prophet: “Although, my son, I have used the word *prophet*, I would not attribute to myself a title of such lofty sublimity.”²⁶³ He subsequently obscured the meanings of the prophecies by formatting them as quatrains (four-line poems).

Les Prophéties has never been out of print since its first publication, and literally millions of would-be interpreters have contributed their two cents. The resulting babel is an excellent study into what can happen when ambiguous predictions are pressed into the mold of pop culture. The first important element in creating a convincing prophecy is to speak vaguely. For example, one of Nostradamus’s most notable prophecies has been linked to Adolf Hitler...

Beasts ferocious with hunger will cross the rivers,
The greater part of the battlefield will be against Hister.

²⁶² Some claim that this is the same as Biblical inspiration, although the mainstream view is that the writers of Scripture were inspired through their own unique personalities—the result being the exact intent of God.

²⁶³ Nostradamus, *Preface to César*, 1555.

Into a cage of iron will the great one be drawn,
When the child of Germany observes nothing.

With our hindsight knowledge of WWII events, some of these phrases might seem applicable. But looking at history in general, they could relate just as well to any number of events. Is the reference to Germany unusual? It might be—if Nostradamus lived in Oklahoma. Germany, however, was just across the border. The other proper noun in the quatrain might seem equally conspicuous, but *Hister* is a region around the Danube and isn't etymologically related to *Hitler* in any way. Realistically, if the words *Germany* and *Hister* didn't appear in such proximity, it's doubtful that anyone would have ever made a connection.

Another strategy for succeeding as a false prophet is to make so many predictions that some might actually hit close to the target. (Even a stupid squirrel finds a nut every once in a while.) Nostradamus wrote thousands of prophecies. Over a five-hundred-year period, we would expect that many of the broad predictions would mirror certain events. Nevertheless, Nostradamus groupies still hammer away, trying to fit the prophetic pegs into historical holes.

Finally, a good false prophet needs a receptive and undiscerning audience. While the Twin Towers were still burning on 9/11, this Nostradamus quatrain appeared on the Internet...

In the City of God there will be a great thunder,
Two brothers torn apart by Chaos,
While the fortress endures, the great leader will succumb,
The third big war will begin when the big city is burning.

Sound convincing? After viral reaffirmation of Nostradamus, it was learned that a university student had written this particular quatrain in 1997 as an illustration of how easy it is to write an authentic Nostradamus-style prophecy. (Wait... isn't everything on the Internet true?)

The Modern Mantis

What about contemporary prophets who seem to hit it “right on the nose?” In 1956, self-proclaimed prophet Jeane Dixon prophesied that the winner of the 1960 presidential election would be assassinated. What were the chances that such a specific prophecy would come to pass with the death of JFK? Does this rise to the level of Old Testament accuracy or even a miracle? Presidential assassinations in the U.S. are somewhat rare, but once again, context reveals much. That prediction does seem remarkable until we look at her others. Dixon also predicted that Kennedy would *not* win the 1960 election. Furthermore, she erroneously predicted that the assassination would occur in the president’s *second* term. Would she pass the Deuteronomy test?...

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, “How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken (Deuteronomy 18: 20-22).

Modern divination is yet another example of the paranormal paradox within the Church. It’s disheartening that many who claim a Christian worldview also make allowances for those “innocent” forms of divination. “Social dabbling” into the occult is currently increasing, especially among young people.²⁶⁴ Is this experimentation simply hobby-sorcery or is it more perilous?

For as long as there have been stars to ponder, humans have attempted to tie their motions to life here below. *Astrology*, possibly the oldest “science,” has been practiced continuously and is as popular as

²⁶⁴ Jennifer LeClaire Ministries, “Ouija Boards Are Growing in Popularity Among Christians,” www.christianpost.com, November 30, 2017.

ever.²⁶⁵ Somewhere in prehistory, skywatchers noted the consistent, predictable motions of celestial bodies. They learned that the star patterns followed an imaginary line (the *ecliptic*, actually derived from the rotation of the earth) through the night sky. The sun tracked through twelve different star groupings along the line in a single year (the zodiac constellations).

Many were in awe of how “the heavens declare the glory of God.” Others read into the intricacies a source of power and secret knowledge. Today, hundreds of millions of people base their activities to some degree on personal horoscopes. Modern astrologers have the benefit of computers to calculate and disseminate divinations in nanoseconds.

Despite new technology, the accuracy of the predictions remains scientifically and practically abysmal. Apart from scattered sheer coincidences, horoscopes depend on the fact that generalities will always seem to fit in *some* way. For example, I looked up my own horoscope for today...

*[Date, sign] News could come your way, perhaps through local magazines or newspapers, about possible renovations occurring in your community. These changes could be rather controversial, [sign], so don't be surprised if you hear a lot of gossip and a number of opinions, both pro and con, on the matter. You might want to delve more deeply into the facts before forming an opinion of your own. This could prove quite enlightening!*²⁶⁶

I'm a teacher. This could virtually describe every day of my life! For the Christian, horoscopes are essentially a no-win game. If the message is wrong or unproductive, you lose. If the message seems to help you in some way, congratulations! You've just employed a fallen spirit to circumvent God's perfect, loving will for you! But aside from

²⁶⁵ We now differentiate between astrology (the pseudoscience) and astronomy (the scientific study of celestial objects). The lines were blurred until the age of modern science. To varying degrees, early astrologers studied both the science and the “sorcery” of the heavens. Although steeped in the occult, many astrologers calculated celestial motions quite accurately, making important contributions to science.

²⁶⁶ www.horoscope.com; On a link to another site, I could get a live, full reading with a professional astrologer (with credit card).

merely pragmatic reasons to avoid astrology, Scripture is clear about the practice in general...

Let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you. Behold, they are like stubble; the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame (Isaiah 47:13-14).

A Christianized version of the zodiac has been circulating since a book by Frances Rolleston in the 1800s.²⁶⁷ The premise is that God posted the timeline of his redemptive work in the zodiac. Rolleston's scriptural basis was derived from Psalm 19...

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (Psalm 19:1-4).

Rolleston interpreted the "information" metaphors in the passage as a prophecy of Christ. Many scholars agree that the translated term "line" does refer to the ecliptic line, and the language seems to imply the display of a "message." Several prominent Christian leaders agree with this *gospel in the stars* (GIS) idea.²⁶⁸ In this version, Leo the Lion represents Christ's Lion of Judah title, and Virgo is the Virgin Mary. Scorpio is Satan, Aries the Ram represents sacrifice, and so on. I enjoy stargazing, and while doing so I often mull over this galactic redemption story. I admit it offers good talking points and it's an interesting teaching tool. I'm not as certain, however, about whether the intent of Psalm 19 is to lay out a new component of natural revelation.

²⁶⁷ Frances Rolleston, *Mazzaroth, or the Constellations*, (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1862).

²⁶⁸ Charles Strohmer, "Is There A Christian Zodiac, A Gospel in the Stars?" Article ID: DG240, www.equip.org, 22 Apr 2009.

Modern sorcery isn't limited to the celestial realm. Since the movie *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, sales of the "toy" have exploded.²⁶⁹ (I wonder if anyone saw that coming?) The Ouija board was originally introduced by Parker Brothers as a "talking board" parlor game in 1890. Occult connections quickly emerged as spiritualists had long been using similar *spirit boards* as necromancy tools to contact the dead. Ouija messages are considered a type of automatic writing in which a spirit entity controls the movement of the planchette (wooden cursor) as it moves to various letters.

The Internet facilitates a seemingly endless variety of sorcery games. Charlie Charlie (*Juego de la Lapicera*) has become one of the most popular among teens worldwide. Divination is cunningly marketed to unwary Christians with *angel boards*, allowing messages from "friendly" Ouija spirits. An "angelic" version of tarot cards is also available. Many view even the frivolous entertainment use of horoscopes, Ouija boards, and similar pursuits as introductions to more sinister occult practices...

Ultimately, it's never a simple and harmless thing to use any method to contact the dead and/or the spirit realm, it is a doorway into the occult.²⁷⁰

We can't accuse the modern spiritualist of being behind the times. For the tech-savvy there are a number of electronic options for contacting spirits. *Electronic voice phenomena* (EVP) can be detected and recorded by gadgets made expressly for that purpose. The cheaper models are simply static generators and rely on audio pareidolia, the tendency of the mind to perceive sense in nonsense. Users claim to hear whispered words or phrases emanating from the static. High-end EVP devices have a digital bank of words spoken by a voice simulator. Words are said to be produced as a spirit "wills" them. These high-tech necromancing tools come with the same hazards as Ouija boards. Most of the messaging is simply randomness, but if a fallen spirit wished to deceive digitally, how nice to have an open channel and an anxious listener. Billy Graham expounds the practical effects of occult dabbling, in general, pointing to the relational aspect...

²⁶⁹ Neil Tweedie, "Sales of Ouija Boards Up 300%," www.dailymail.co.uk, 30 Nov 2014.

²⁷⁰ Matt Slick, "Can a Christian Use a Ouija Board?" www.carm.org, Accessed 10 Feb 2020.

Have you ever met anyone who was involved with the occult who truly knew God as their friend and loved Him with all their heart and mind and soul and strength?... If you're honest, you know the answer... The reason is simple: The occult—whatever form it takes—will lead you away from God, not toward Him.²⁷¹

Paul explains in detail the freedom we have as Christians, in this case, the fact that evil spirits have no claim on us. Many believers have engaged in occult-based games as entertainment with no serious consequences. Even though strong Christians *could*, should they? Paul goes on to say that with any freedom comes responsibility (1 Corinthians 8). Do our actions affect “weaker” brothers and sisters? Believers should keep this principle in mind in all paranormal dabbling.

We Three Kings of Orient Are What?

Likely you've heard the sad news. Our Christmas plays have lots of mistakes. There probably weren't three, and they really weren't kings...

The New Testament gives few details about the wise men (*magi*). The title itself informs us that these men were Gentile magicians, highly trained in sorcery and other academics. Originally centered in the Medo-Persian/Babylonian regions, some magi had spread throughout the Roman Empire at this time due to persecution. Many Jewish people were self-proclaimed magi, such as Simon the *Magus* in Acts 8. [p. 196]

These magi were likely legit, however, as we see them coming “from the East.” We know something of their training through Daniel's encounter. Magi were held in high esteem, being educated not just in sorcery, but science, math, and the philosophical wisdom of the day. Because of their accumulated knowledge, one of their roles was the selection of kings and other leaders. These particular magi seemed to

²⁷¹ Michael Gryboski, “Billy Graham Answers: Are Ouija Boards Harmless Fun or Satanic?” www.christianpost.com, November 03, 2016.

be quite familiar with the Jews and their God. It seems reasonable that Daniel might have played a part in this centuries earlier...

Because of Daniel's high position and great respect among them, it seems certain that the magi learned much from that prophet about the one true God, the God of Israel, and about His will and plans for His people through the coming glorious King.²⁷²

Scripture indicates that a star informed these magi of Christ's birth. Despite tradition, there is much ambiguity in this scripture. We simply don't have information regarding the nature of this sign. There has been speculation about eclipses, comets, supernovas, UFOs, and every imaginable "star." All we know is that God allowed them to discern a clear indication of Jesus' birth. The important aspect is that the magi responded.

So, did God communicate his son's birth through pagan sorcery? Without more information, this is the point at which we depend on God's unchanging, righteous nature to fill in the blanks. Having condemned all types of divination, would he use these practices? I tend to believe he wouldn't. But even if these "pagans" were bent on using stars in an ungodly way, perhaps God intervened and sent them true light.

Furthermore, nothing in the account implies a justification of astrology. An often overlooked aspect of the nativity is its foreshadowing of the gospel's broader application: In the short-term, Herod and the Jewish nation would reject the Savior while the Gentile nations come to him.²⁷³ It's clear by the magis' words and actions that they understood the Hebrew prophecies concerning the messiah quite well, perhaps better than the Jews they encountered. I would like to believe that God in his mercy, revealed Divine truth to the wise men and that they continued to respond to the light they were given.

²⁷² John MacArthur, "How Did the Magi Know About Jesus?" www.gty.org, 27 Jun 2019.

²⁷³ Matthew 28:19; Isaiah 60.

Prophets in Church

The role of prophet in today's Church is controversial. Some denominations teach that God continues to deliver new truths via selected individuals. Indeed, the act of prophesying is an expected, regular part of many worship services. The consensus of most who hold to a literal interpretation of the Bible, though, is that the role of prophet ended as the completed copies of the New Testament began circulating.

Prophets in the 1st-century Church were necessary because new revelations concerning Christ might not have been available to particular local churches. Their messages were not so much *foretelling* the future, but *forthtelling* truths about Christ.

These prophetic teachings might have been new revelations to the specific congregations, but they were subject to the strictest scrutiny. Anything spoken by a prophet must not disagree with Old Testament teachings. Also, all that a prophet spoke had to mesh with the teachings of the Apostles. God was in a sense, leading them to “fill in the blanks” of the gospel being presented (through the guidance of the Holy Spirit). With all teachings tested against these criteria, the application of the truths would also be fruitful and edifying to the church. After the local churches had received the written Word of God, this interim mode of prophecy was replaced by the gospel of Christ (New Testament)...

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1-2)

John MacArthur further explains...

In the early Church, the Apostles were the evangelists and the prophets were like the original teaching pastors, and that's why they are replaced [today] by evangelists and teaching pastors.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ John MacArthur, “John MacArthur on Modern Prophets,” www.gty.org, 3 Sep 2013.

From a practical standpoint, one who presumes to be a prophet in today's Church is either redundant or cursed. All that God has intended for us to know is already in his Word. If something new is being added, the specific warning in Revelation seems to apply to inspired Scripture in general...

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).

Deception in Prophecy

In a complete overview of prophecy, we should consider whether the Ephesians Hypothesis might have relevance. Concerning modern prophets, we've seen that coincidence and lack of discernment among recipients can explain most of the isolated "successes." The track records of contemporary soothsayers should be enough to discredit all of them. Still, advocates cling to those predictions which seem supernaturally inspired.

There have been prophets who so adulterate the Scripture that we could assume Satanic influence. Certainly, the prophecies of cult leaders such as David Coresh, Jim Jones, and Marshall Applewhite were so compelling that demonic assistance wouldn't be out of the question. Even "miraculous" individual prophecies associated with horoscopes and psychic readings could logically be attributed to fallen spirits. As previously noted, demons aren't omniscient and they probably can't foretell the future, but they can likely see a broader perspective, and to some extent, they might even manipulate the outcome of a prophecy.

There is little doubt that Satan and his minions have the ability and the motivation to affect the minds of both the so-called prophet and the hearer, as well as to manipulate the accompanying situations. Any or all of these could be used in leading both nonbelievers and undiscerning

believers away from truth. Is it any wonder the Old Testament gives such strict warnings against false prophets?

But the standard was no lower in the New Testament. Paul and Silas encountered a slave girl possessed by “a spirit by which she predicted the future.”²⁷⁵ Instead of lecturing on the possible dangers of occult practices, they go right to the root of the problem: “[Paul] turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!’” Obviously, not every modern-day soothsayer is demon-possessed, however, Scripture affirms the power source for all occult phenomena. There is no place for it in Christian practice or worldview.

Dreams

I’m skeptical about the significance of dreams in general. Yes, I know psychologists have studied them at length and have long lists of symbols and archetypes. Maybe I’m wrong, but my dreams seem to be random, dumb things that are more embarrassing than informative. (If you are a psychologist reading this, I don’t want to know whether my disregard for dreams has some symbolic meaning.) The surreal nature of dreams in general and their almost nightly occurrence make them likely avenues for misinterpretation, deception, or confusion. Should God choose to speak through a dream today, it would be the exception rather than the rule, and it would conform to the precedent we have in the Bible.

There are instances in Scripture in which God used dreams and visions to communicate messages. As with other supernatural interventions, the dreams were rare, purposeful, and contextually relevant. Peter had a vision of a sheet with unclean animals, illustrating that God would now be dealing with Gentiles. John’s vision was used to teach him the complicated events to come. God could have communicated differently, but these concepts were likely more effective in visual format.

²⁷⁵ Acts 16:16

Daniel and Joseph were given the ability to interpret dreams. In their cases, dream-reading was a badge of authority leading to new opportunities for service. God's Word confirms that he is much more likely to communicate through the acts of his son (the living Word) and the truths about him recorded in the written Word. Should one be convinced that God has spoken through a dream or vision, it would be prudent to use Tozer's guidelines for discernment stated earlier. [p.56]

The Biblical Standard

The masses cheer when a modern soothsayer offers a vague, general prophecy that "sort of" comes to pass. Biblical criteria for prophetic accuracy were considerably higher. All the prophecies in Scripture are fulfilled precisely with no hint of error, but some draw our attention more than others. Predictions such as the mathematical forecast made in Daniel illustrate the mark to which a true prophecy must align...

Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place (Daniel 9:24).

The Hebrew word translated "week" is simply the word "seven." Scholars agree that this passage is referring to seventy *sevens* of years (490 years). But this 70 "week" period of God's dealing with Israel would have two parts...

Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again (Daniel 9:25).

If you followed the math, there will be 69 "weeks of years" (7 + 62) between the decree to rebuild the temple and the coming of

Messiah. Using the Jewish calendar, that comes to 173,880 days.²⁷⁶ We know that Artaxerxes Longimanus gave the rebuild order on 14 March 445 BC. What was the actual day of Jesus's arrival as Messiah? The key is in the word "prince" (which is synonymous in the original with "king"). Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Messiah's official "arrival" given by Zechariah...

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus formally proclaimed his role as he rode into Jerusalem on 6 April 32 AD. Although the Pharisees urged him to tell the crowds he was not Messiah, Christ validated the people's declaration: "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."²⁷⁷ The event occurred *exactly* 173,880 days after Artaxerxes' order.²⁷⁸

Some skeptics argue that Jesus had control over the fulfillment of this particular prophecy. I suppose he did decide to ride a colt into Jerusalem on that day, but it's certainly difficult to explain the "lucky" series of events leading up to this point in his life. Skeptical reasoning of this sort seems to take more faith than belief in the supernatural. This complex prediction obviously sets a very high standard for prophecy.

²⁷⁶ Our calendar year is based on the 365-day solar calendar. The Jews and others of the time used a 360-day lunar calendar year.

²⁷⁷ Luke 19:40

²⁷⁸ Premillennialists place the remaining 7 weeks (years) as the Tribulation period. At that time (after the removal of the Church in the rapture), God will again focus on the Jewish people.

19

Parapsychology and Other Mind Games

Feb 13, 2020 - In a last-ditch effort to catch a fresh lead on the Jacqueline Brown case, the Lavana County Sheriff's Office followed the advice of deputies. Local psychic Dana Cusnack was contacted by Sheriff Dunn earlier this week and within twenty-four hours Brown's remains were located at a secluded area north of Twin Lakes. "Naturally, I was somewhat skeptical," Dunn stated in a news release last night. "But I have to admit, Cusnack's 'readings' were instrumental in the results."

How many times has this scenario been played out in law police departments across America? Well, actually—few if any. This is fake news. I just made it up. Judging by TV cop shows, though, law enforcement would screech to a halt without the aid of psychics visualizing crime scenes and “postcognating” the suspects. The truth is, hardly any crime-solvers use the services of psychics.²⁷⁹ Law enforcement does deal with psychics often, though. When major cases go public, investigators typically must wade through piles of incoming erroneous psychic “tips,” simply because all tips must be checked. (Why don't the psychics know about the cases before they go public?) And despite what we see on TV, track records of real-life psychics are dismal.

Parapsychology is the general term for several alleged psychic phenomena. The name does seem to lend a measure of credibility to its

²⁷⁹ Erica Goode, “Police Rarely Turn to Psychics, Texas Report Aside,” www.nytimes.com, 8 Jun 2011.

practice. In the 20th century, some scientists began research on these alleged mental powers, with the assumption that a little-known physical force known as *Psi* was the source. Early proponents reported solid evidence for this paranormal power, but critics were quick to note the nuisance variables associated with human subjects and the unreliability of mental measurements.

It's interesting that in the paranoia of the Cold War, both America and the Soviet Union undertook serious research into psychic ability as a weapon. The investigations of the CIA's Project Stargate were supposedly abandoned in 1995, due to lack of any practical value in intelligence gathering.

Déjà Who?

Human bodies are, indeed, “fearfully and wonderfully made.” I can't think of anything in God's physical creation that surpasses the intricacy of the brain. (I'm amazed that I can even think about my brain.) At times, certain brain functions seem to verge on the supernatural. Most of us have experienced the sensation of *déjà vu*, the feeling you have lived through a situation before. Some have tried to link this to precognition, but its association with physical brain events seems to indicate that it's merely an organic phenomenon.

Even people who don't consider themselves psychics might claim to receive *premonitions* (feelings or visions about the future) that eventually come true. This is a common occurrence and it's difficult to imagine there isn't something supernatural going on. Much of the time, however, these can be attributed to the same statistical flukes that cause superstitions and false miracles. It's part of our human psyche to connect events so that they make sense. (This is much like how a worldview works.) We wouldn't function very well without this cause-and-effect, logical thinking. But that same trait can sometimes work overtime and see connections that that are simply the result of random chance.

For example, the thought enters your mind of how good a plate of lasagna would be. That night, you go home and... Wow! Your spouse has made lasagna! How can that not be supernatural? The simple

answer is that you have hundreds of thousands of thoughts per hour. In a single day, imagine how many of those predictive type thoughts *didn't* come to pass. The one random thought out of millions that just happens to occasionally come true is instantly connected to the real event and a “premonition” is born. We tend to notice connections over non-connections.

Most of us have experienced the sensation of *déjà vu*, the feeling you have lived through a situation before. Some have tried to link this to precognition... Sorry, I'm just messing with your brain...

Back to premonitions, I'm not dismissing the possibility of something supernatural. God could use premonitions in some way, but I believe we should judge them as we do other miracles. Is it likely that God *would* use a miracle or premonition rather than some more ordinary means? *How does he usually reveal truth?*

And even if one is convinced that a premonition is supernatural, is it necessarily from God? Would a fallen spirit have any reason to lead our thoughts in a particular way? Would that deceiving spirit gain from a person's belief that a premonition is real? As always, we should “test the spirits.”

Extrasensory Deception

Parapsychology deals with more than simply the “forward” look. The term *clairvoyance*, meaning “to see clearly,” refers to any direction of the mind's paranormal gaze. One clairvoyant tool is *psychometry*, in which a psychic touches an object such as a pen and claims to be able to discern who has written with it.

Precognition, or *prescience*, is the ability to “see” future events—another flavor of divination or prophecy. The phenomenon, in general, is more personal than prophecy, usually informing one person about a specific future event. The seer might claim to see in several ways. Traditionally, the practitioner gets mental pictures regarding a certain scenario. The images typically come during a trance state or in a dream.

Postcognition is also an interesting concept. This ability to “see” events that happened in the past is like history class with a dash of paranormal. The practitioners claim to be able to discern the details of a past event, usually as a vision. Precognitions are typically of obscure

events such as secret crimes or a day in the life of Abe Lincoln. Parapsychologists attempt to add a scientific base by hypothesizing a type of energy field that holds a record of the past like a paranormal hard drive.

Jesus seemed to use postcognition when he told both Andrew and the Samaritan woman what they had been doing. Is there a place for this phenomenon today? It seems to be similar to the spiritual *gift of knowledge*. Modern charismatics claim this gift still operates in the ability of some believers to “know” what is happening to another person, not in direct communication, usually for the purpose of prayer. Since it mostly in the present, the term *extrasensory perception* (ESP) or *second-sight* might be more accurate than *postcognition*. Some TV evangelists tout evidence that word-of-knowledge healings are legitimate. It’s difficult to gather hard data since the individual accounts are usually quite general. Also, with a large enough audience, any pronouncement will likely apply to someone. Could God communicate through words of knowledge? Would he?

On another level, however, it may be difficult to discern some supernatural words of knowledge. Isn’t every prodding of the Holy Spirit a supernatural word of knowledge? How often in our moment-by-moment walk does the Spirit give us a fresh dose of wisdom or understanding? We are promised these interactions. Paul prayed specifically for the Spirit to impart such needs...

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:17-18).

How do we know that it’s God’s Spirit communicating? Unlike random paranormal experiences, God’s working is within a context. Meyers assures us that we have a three-fold witness for a true work of the Spirit...

God's impressions within and his word without are always corroborated by his providence around, and we should quietly wait until these three focus into one point.²⁸⁰

Postcognition is often submitted as evidence for reincarnation. There are several eerie cases in which a person remembers places and incidents that aren't part of their known experiences. Although anecdotal, the subjects are able to show an uncanny familiarity with someone from the past, apart from recorded historical records. One well-known case involves Barbro Karlen who believed herself to be the reincarnation of Anne Frank.²⁸¹ At an early age, Barbro began remembering aspects of Frank's life which presumably she could not have known. Upon visiting Frank's former home, Barbro was able to locate and identify various features.

This account could be multiplied by hundreds. Similarly, subjects are often questioned by experts who verify the "remembered" information about a past life. Is this proof of reincarnation? On the surface, there does seem to be a supernatural element. Without firsthand knowledge of these scenarios, I could only offer opinions based on a biblical worldview, which rejects the possibility of reincarnation. What would be an alternative?

Again, this is speculation, but I believe it to be consistent with the Ephesians Hypothesis. We established earlier that fallen spirits are able to plant and lead thoughts. I see no reason why these spirits would not know historical details better than our recorded history (they were there, ostensibly). Would they be able to relay obscure yet accurate historical data? Would the phenomenon seem to have the same outcome as a reincarnation episode? Would fallen spirits have anything to gain by "faking" evidence for an unscriptural phenomenon?

²⁸⁰ F.B. Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1896, updated 2010), 28.

²⁸¹ Barbro Karlen, *And the Wolves Howled: Fragments of Two Lifetimes*, (Clairview Books, 2000).

Hypnosis

The dictionary definition of *hypnosis* is “a trancelike state that resembles sleep but is induced by a person whose suggestions are readily accepted by the subject.”²⁸² Medical practitioners expand the characterization...

...hypnotherapy or hypnotic suggestion is a trance-like state in which you have heightened focus and concentration... When you're under hypnosis, you usually feel calm and relaxed, and are more open to suggestions.²⁸³

And with that, the agreement ends...

Trance-like states have been common since antiquity, but the modern form was popularized by occult-dabbler Franz Mesmer around 1780. Mesmer believed hypnosis (mesmerism) was enabled by some “animal magnetism” flowing from the hypnotist into the subject. Scientists quickly redefined it as a purely physiological phenomenon.

From a psychological standpoint, hypnosis leads a mind to a specific area of concentration without mental or physical distractions. It has been used in pain management, memory retrieval, behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, and entertainment. The phenomenon isn't entirely understood, and its clinical efficacy is debated. There is also disagreement among Christians as to its usefulness and safety. Hypnosis is regularly used by some Christian psychologists as a tool for a range of therapies...

We realize that hypnosis has acquired a bad name in the minds of many Christians. For our part, we see no reason to regard it as “evil” or “dangerous” in and of itself. In actuality, there is little or no basis for most of the popular fears associated with

²⁸² “Hypnosis.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, www.merriam-webster.com, Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

²⁸³ Mayo Clinic, “Hypnosis,” www.mayoclinic.org, Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

this technique. It's not true, for instance, that a hypnotist can gain control or mastery of another person's will.²⁸⁴

Others warn against any use of hypnosis, based on its association with other ideologies...

Altered states of consciousness and other mystical practices open doors in the spiritual realm. Once a door is opened, a person becomes vulnerable to any spirits which come through that door.²⁸⁵

Secular advocates of hypnotism also warn against its misuse. The Mayo Clinic recognizes side effects such as headache, anxiety, distress, and the creation of false memories.²⁸⁶ Experts agree that hypnosis should be used only by trained professionals. The consensus among Christians seems to be that unless hypnosis is clearly useful and practical in a particular instance, it should not be used. It's also clear that the worldview of the hypnotist is a significant factor in the results obtained. Connections to occult and New Age activity should be avoided...

...hypnosis, like any other therapeutic technique, should be rejected out of hand when it takes on questionable spiritual overtones – for example when it becomes occultic in nature or is clearly connected with the tenets of eastern religion or New Age philosophy.²⁸⁷

Telekinesis

The concept of “mind-over-matter” is quite ancient. Eastern mystics have long taught that the conscious self can alter physical reality. If I had my choice of superpowers, it would be a hard decision

²⁸⁴ Focus on the Family, “Hypnosis as a Clinical Tool,” www.focusonthefamily.com, Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

²⁸⁵ Dan Delzell, “Hypnosis and Yoga Open Hidden Spiritual Doors,” www.christianpost.com, 28 May 2012.

²⁸⁶ Mayo Clinic, “Hypnosis,” www.mayoclinic.org, Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

²⁸⁷ Focus on the Family, “Hypnosis as a Clinical Tool,” www.focusonthefamily.com, Accessed 23 Mar 2020.

between telekinesis and invisibility (although flying might beat both). I have to admit, not having to get up to retrieve the TV remote would be very practical. One of the many interpretations of quantum physics seems to evoke mind-over-matter, but most physicists find too many serious flaws in telekinesis to consider it an option.

Some psychics claim that telekinesis (or *psychokinesis*) could be a spirit causing objects to levitate, move, or be thrown across the room. That would fit the concept of an alleged poltergeist. Most proponents of telekinetic ability believe the power is truly paranormal and has as its explanation some unknown force.

Uri Geller kept us all amazed and entertained with his telekinetic spoon-bending, as have many other magicians. All have been shown to be illusionists' tricks. Physicists claim that it would be easy to scientifically test the phenomenon. Surely ultrasensitive probes could detect the motions caused by a mental command. So far, no one has pursued this scientifically. Also, given the similarity to poltergeist phenomena, I see no reason why demonic entities couldn't "cooperate" in a telekinetic event.

If You Could Read My Mind

Deanna Troi (*Star Trek's* Betazoid counselor) is an *empath*, possessing the ability to sense another individual's emotional state. Most of the crew avoided poker games with her. It would be bad enough for someone to know my feelings, much less my exact thoughts. If I encountered a true mind reader, I think my first thought would be "If you can really read my mind, blink twice." If they blinked, I would run as fast I could to a safe "out-of-range" distance. We love the safety of our own private thoughts.

Sideshow psychics tease audiences with some amazing feats of mind-reading. But here's the deal: So do stage magicians. Illusionists usually don't claim psychic abilities, rather they will reluctantly admit it's all a clever trick. The Americans, Russians, and Nazis have all experimented with person-to-person mind reading as a weapon. After wasting much time and money, the conclusion was that mind-reading isn't possible.

However, God isn't so limited. My Creator, in perfect love and omniscience, knows my thoughts—even better than I do! (Fortunately, he is merciful and forgiving.) Several passages affirm this truth...

Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man! (Proverbs 15:11).

O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, (Jeremiah 20:12).

Most theologians believe that Jesus purposely didn't draw on some of his attributes while in his earthly body.²⁸⁸ There were some things that may not have been known to the man Jesus since Scripture says he "grew in wisdom and stature." There were times, however, when it seems he did manifest his attributes as the second person of the Godhead. For example, when confronting the Pharisees, Jesus replied while "knowing their thoughts" (Matthew 12:25).

Near-Death Experiences

A print in Flammarion's 1888 book *L'atmosphère* shows a man with his head stuck through the supposed curtain separating earth from heaven. His attempt to reach heaven via an alternate route worked! The title of the old country song gets it right: "Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven, But Nobody Wants to Die."

Recently, two best-selling books have related stories about two different boys' "death" experiences and subsequent returns to earth (both written by their fathers).²⁸⁹ There are literally dozens of similar "heavenly tourism" books recounting near-death experiences (NDE),

²⁸⁸ Jesus's "self-emptying" of some aspects of deity is referred to as his *kenosis*.

²⁸⁹ *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven* (2010) recounts Alex Malarkey's NDE. In 2015 Alex released this statement: "I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible." (Jocelyn McClurg, USA Today, January 16, 2015.) The incident caused a firestorm of controversy among Christian publishers and distributors, some of which kept the book in circulation long after learning the truth. Obviously, this doesn't necessarily negate all such accounts, but it does show how vigilant we should be in discerning extrabiblical material.

many from evangelical publishers, all describing someone's journey to heaven and back.

Those who study NDEs say there are two questions to ask about the experience: Are the subjects truthful and are their perception as they seem? I don't doubt that many experiencers are describing their real perceptions. But when paranormal explanations are offered, it's always prudent to examine the nature of the perception. Is it possible that NDEs have physiological or psychological explanations?

Neuroscientists suggest that the common "bright light" at the end of a tunnel is a sensation caused by decreased blood flow in the visual centers of the brain. (I was once advised by my surgeon: "If you see a bright light, run the other way!") Could natural processes also bring about detailed images of a place with people and angels? I'm not sure, but I know dreams aren't necessarily supernatural, and my dreams are quite detailed at times.

And to be scientifically precise, no dead person since the biblical accounts has truly returned to life. There is a qualitative difference between brain death (biological death) and states of various organ cessations (clinical death). "Near-death experiences" are rightly named in that the victim has not actually reached biological death. Even medical professionals may not discern true biological death. When a victim flatlines and the attendants have a body that is so damaged resuscitation isn't expected, biological death is often declared with no EEG or further testing. When Jesus reanimated his friend Lazarus after four days, Lazarus was *dead* dead ("he stinketh," KJV). It's very unlikely that any NDEer has experienced biological death.

But let's assume that near-death is just that—*near* death. NDEers seem to suggest that the interface between this life and the next is a "fuzzy" place with choices of going forward or backward or lingering for a while. This doesn't mesh with Paul's picture of "absent from the body, but present with the Lord." However, most NDEers claim that there are corridors, bridges, highways, and all manner of labyrinths to heaven. (I'm thinking that when I die, I don't want an obstacle course. I would really just like to wake up in Christ's presence.)

NDEs were brought into mainstream culture in the 1970s with the book *Life After Life*, a summary of NDE anecdotes collected by M.D. Raymond Moody. One of the most influential books on the subject,

however, was Mary Eadie's *Embraced by the Light*, released in 1992. During surgery, Eadie experienced being released from her physical body by three angels who transported her through corridors and eventually into the arms of Jesus. She claims to have sensed an outpouring of love *and* a high-speed data download. Eadie learned that Jesus and God were two completely separate beings and that her spirit had lived before physical birth, aiding God with the creation and the directions of her physical life. (Both of these doctrines are not mainline Christian tenets but are consistent with Eadie's Mormon faith.)

Among many other non-Christian beliefs, Eadie discovered that all religions were true and necessary because people have different spiritual needs. She was also told that her death was premature and that she needed to return to finish her mission (although to avoid complications, it would be necessary to erase what she had learned about that mission).

At the risk of overgeneralizing, it's interesting that in most, if not all NDEs, there is little to no evangelistic component. One would think that such a spectacular experience would compel the subject to urge others to do everything possible to prepare for the destination. On the contrary, the message is generally one of universalism—we all will end up in heaven regardless of our earthly decisions. The comprehensive teaching is “Chill out, God's our buddy and it's all okay!”

As with Eadie's LDS background, when NDEs from different cultures are considered we find that the belief system of the subject determines much about the experience. Buddhists move to nirvana. Pantheists become one with the cosmos. I suppose atheists find themselves dissolving into nothingness. There are some aspects, though, that seem to be universal. An article in *The Atlantic* summarizes some common elements of NDEs...

- The sensation of floating up and viewing the scene around one's unconscious body.
- Spending time in a beautiful, otherworldly realm.
- Meeting spiritual beings.
- A loving presence that some call God.
- Encountering long-lost relatives or friends.
- Recalling scenes from one's life.

- A sense of connectedness to all creation.²⁹⁰

Of course, there are stories of NDEs that are more terrifying. Some have claimed to arrive at the gates of hell rather than heaven. The accounts usually end with the subject turning to God in repentance. I'm not sure what to make of these, since I doubt Satan would desire that outcome. And if God was the source of the supernatural preview, it certainly diminishes the need for spreading the gospel here on earth. The rich man's brothers in the parable had "Moses and the prophets," implying that Scripture is enough.

I can understand a Christian's desire for NDEs to be true. After all, we know by God's revealed Word that Heaven *is* a real place. I wouldn't fault anyone for wanting to believe the validity of a message from someone who is overjoyed at having seen heaven. But this is certainly a place to ask about God: "Could he? Would he?" And as with all paranormal phenomena, we should compare the experiences with the revelations in Scripture, and not our desires and presuppositions. If the NDEer returns with new "facts" about heaven, we should be especially skeptical. As Hitchcock explains...

...direct, divine, authoritative revelation ended with the conclusion of the canon of Scripture... Therefore, claims of "new truth" or revelations from God must come from another source, be it fallible human or deceptively demonic.²⁹¹

I assume that demonically-influenced NDEs would be as feasible as other demonic phenomena.

Even when considering only the NDEs of those who claim a Christian worldview, we find a wide variety of descriptions. Many are mutually contradictory which means some (or all) can't be correct. But even if all the accounts were consistent, we must ask whether we need more information than what Scripture gives us. Only four people in all

²⁹⁰ Gideon Lichfield, "The Science of Near-Death Experiences," www.theatlantic.com, Accessed 1 Apr 2020.

²⁹¹ Mark Hitchcock and Jeff Kinley, *The Coming Apostasy: Exposing the Sabotage of Christianity from Within*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2017), 163.

the Bible were ever allowed to see “beyond the curtain.”²⁹² In each of their accounts, we get very little information about the divine realm. Perhaps Paul gives the reason. What he saw were “inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”²⁹³ Some NDEers also confess that the sights are beyond words then proceed to write many words about the experience. If Paul couldn’t explain heaven, that speaks volumes. Hank Hanegraaff sees the irony...

It is simply incredible to think that Christians willingly accept the paltry substitutes offered up by modern near-death experiencers.²⁹⁴

Could God be blessing us today with an abundance of new extra-biblical details about our future home? Are we getting fresh insight to stir our imaginations? Spurgeon would think otherwise...

...never think that imagination can picture heaven. When it is most sublime, when it is freest from the dust of earth, when it is carried up by the greatest knowledge, and kept steady by the most extreme caution, imagination cannot picture heaven. “It hath not entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Imagination is good, but not to picture to us heaven. ²⁹⁵

I would never fault a child or any other sincere person for having an interpretation of an experience. The subjects have often gone through traumatic and often agonizing recoveries. But I believe we are allowed to hold any perceptions up to the light of God’s Word. As far as we can tell, the individuals from Scripture who were raised from the dead didn’t arrive with new revelations about the spirit realm. Should the future bring more NDEs (and it likely will), believers must apply scriptural criteria. Paul warns about new revelations...

²⁹² Isaiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament, John and Paul in the New. Stephen and Micaiah were also allowed very brief glimpses.

²⁹³ 2 Corinthians 12:4. Paul’s appraisal: “...whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows.”

²⁹⁴ Hank Hanegraaff, “Heaven Is Real,” www.equip.org, Article ID: HIR20140418, 16 Apr 2014.

²⁹⁵ Charles Hadden Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 02: 1856*, Sermon 56, 22.

... that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

No true experience, regardless of the sincerity or “good works” of the subject, will negate “even the smallest letter or mark” of God’s Word.

Artificial Intelligence

The completely physical concept of a computer “brain” has always tried to stretch its cyber-tentacles into the paranormal realm. We tend to flirt shamelessly with the notion that our Pinocchios can become real boys that know us and maybe even have feelings for us. I believe the supernatural context of artificial intelligence (AI) originates in our innate sense that our own souls are partly supernatural. Surely if we can make a machine that communicates with us and seems to understand, it must be verging on paranormal, right? Isn’t there some way to push it beyond the natural?

In 2016, Hanson Robotics activated Sophia, a state-of-the-art “synthetic human.” Sci-fi nerds across the world went ballistic. Finally, we have a robot woman who can converse, make facial expressions, joke, and do just about anything a long-awaited android should do. Sophia instantly became the sweetheart of the media. The Saudis even gave her full citizenship. So, is she the real deal?

The answer depends on the question. Can she act like a human? Of course. That’s why she was built. Is she conscious like a human? Facebook’s AI guru Yann LeCun isn’t convinced...

...many people are being deceived into thinking that this (mechanically sophisticated) animatronic puppet is intelligent. It’s not. It has no feeling, no opinions, and zero understanding of what it says. It’s not hurt. It’s a puppet. ²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Noel Sharkey, “Mama Mia It’s Sophia: A Show Robot Or Dangerous Platform To Mislead?” www.forbes.com, 17 Nov 2018.

Essentially Sophia is a very expensive, well-interfaced computer (or more precisely, a computer program that can operate some really fancy peripherals). Just like Siri, Alexa, and all their cousins, Sophia's program can calculate and run a lot of IF/THEN statements very quickly. But AIs like these do raise some worldview questions.

We should probably distinguish between *intelligence* and *consciousness*. On one level, brains and computers are similar in the way they process data. Neuroscientists believe the brain has an incredible number of pathways for handling data, just as a computer has circuits. If this is what is meant by “intelligence,” then yes, Sophia has intelligence. She and Siri are actually “thinking” in a basic sense. And it's conceivable that computers could be (and probably already are) smarter than humans. Does Sophia *know*? Does she possess *artificial consciousness*?

The question now becomes “What is consciousness?” Science has revealed much about how the brain functions, but precious little about how human consciousness comes about. We discussed earlier that the biblical view of our human “self” is that we non-physical spirits residing in physical “tents” (2 Corinthians 5:1-7). This is known as *substance dualism*—part of us is natural and part is supernatural. The opposing view is *non-reductive physicalism*, or that the soul somehow emerges from the physical workings of the brain. A few Christians embrace this belief, but it does seem to have many theological problems.

A naturalistic, evolutionary worldview, though, *requires* physicalism as an explanation for consciousness. There is no other viable choice for naturalists. It's easy to see how many scientists (and the culture at large) are in anxious expectation of a fully sentient AI since most accept naturalism. If human consciousness is physical, then it's simply a matter of time until neuroscience can synthesize it in a machine. On the contrary, the biblical worldview sees consciousness as “breathed into” humans. Our “self” is a nonmaterial entity connected to, yet not dependent on the physical body. Thus, true consciousness can never be attributed to a manmade physical machine.

Several paranormal concepts are related to the idea of human “modification” or “re-creation.” These ideas fall into the category of *transhumanism*, the merging of humans with non-human technologies. We see this at a low level with embryo selection and artificial body

parts, but the die-hard transhumanist is much more ambitious. If non-reductive physicalism is true, then the sci-fi enthusiasts' sky is the limit. Elon Musk and his crew will be able to live forever, moving their physical "souls" into robots. We can inject a college degree into our kid's head instead of going into debt. (But on the downside, our android servants will eventually turn on us and form their own army.)

I'll state it again: *Worldviews have consequences!* How we deal with AI and other transhuman concepts will depend on how we regard the supernatural. Unfortunately, many decisions are being made today under the assumption that physicalism is equated with total reality. There is no place for a transcendent, immortal, supernatural spirit. What a sad and empty legacy for our young people. On a personal note, I have no fear of an AI takeover in the future. Machines may be able to think more/faster/clearer, but they will never be able to consciously will/ponder/dream. And if perchance I'm wrong—we only need to wait for the next "blue screen."

20

A New Age of Old Ideas

“The force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the Galaxy together.” Obi-Wan Kenobi²⁹⁷

*“When the moon is in the Seventh House,
And Jupiter aligns with Mars.
Then peace will guide the planets,
And love will steer the stars.
This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.”*
The Musical *Hair*²⁹⁸

Over the past thirty years in the UK, nearly 5 million cows have been euthanized in one of the largest disease eradication programs in history. BSE (mad cow disease) is caused by an obscure neural pathogen called a *prion*. One of the smallest disease-causing agents, a prion is simply a misfolded body protein with the ability to pass its altered structure to normal proteins in the brain and nervous system. The twisting of affected proteins makes them useless in their prescribed function, thus, as the aberration spreads, brain function is lost. A body’s defense systems are unable to detect prions since they are so similar to normal proteins. This similarity also makes it impossible at the present to treat prion diseases.

²⁹⁷ Obi-Wan Kenobi, Lucas, George, dir. *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1977.

²⁹⁸ James Rado and Gerome Ragni, *Hair*, 1967.

What an apt metaphor for New Age religion. How does Christianity counter an ideology that is in many ways so superficially similar that it's often undetectable? Even when it can be identified, the next occurrence will have a different "twist" and may not resemble the first. And even though the twisting may seem minor, its effect is deadly. The functioning of the affected portion in the context of biblical truth is compromised to heresy.

Some claim that there are only two religions ever practiced by humankind—one that exalts the true Creator God and the other that dethrones him and exalts another being. That may be an oversimplification, but it certainly gives a good perspective on New Age thought (Eastern mysticism) and the religions it informs.

Studying the New Age may be compared to studying the concept of "love." A broad topic such as this would be experienced differently by a great number of people. There are different manifestations of love, such as romantic or platonic. Some people experience love more deeply than others. "I love my wife." "I love chocolate." If I use the word "love" in a certain context, the hearer may be thinking in a completely different context. In the same way, New Age religions are so varied and widespread that a concise, black-and-white definition is often evasive.

Many in the modern Eastern mysticism movement downplay the term "New Age" since it has taken on a negative connotation in some discussions. I'm using the term generally as a category for a wide variety of ideologies. Some may claim that these are merely related to New Age by common interests or that New Age should be included as just one branch of another belief system. But let's not concern ourselves with details at this point. This chapter will examine the basic tenets of the New Age as they relate to the paranormal.

Decloaking the New Age

Defining Eastern mysticism is very much like the nailing-jello-to-a-wall idiom. As with occult groups, when a general characterization is put forward for New Age, one of the constituent groups will protest: "Wait, that's not what we believe!" And there likely will be some truth in it. Also, much of "evangelical" mysticism (aimed at recruiting

Westerners) is couched in familiar Christian terminology. New Age will often sound very Christian.

So, to get our minds in mystic mode, let's start with a list of some common themes, beliefs, or threads that often run through New Age doctrine. Remember, this is only a loose set of very general ideas and buzz words (not necessarily bad or exclusive to New Age) that seem to characterize the groups...

- God is everything
- everything is God
- you are God.
- the power within
- realize that you are God.
- mind over matter
- truth is relative.
- your truth is no better or worse than my truth
- tolerance
- all ideas are equal
- self
- balance good with evil
- yin yang
- rainbow
- higher levels of consciousness
- harmonic convergence
- ESP
- I'm okay, you're okay
- karma
- holistic
- thoughts shape reality
- your reality may not be my reality
- reincarnation
- out-of-body
- a New Age is coming!
- visualize it
- paranormal
- age of Aquarius
- spirit guides
- ascended masters

- Zen
- Mother Earth
- the Force is with you
- pagan, primal
- create your own world.
- astral projection
- sorcery
- Christianity = limitation
- Western = bad
- yoga, chi, chakra
- Reiki, Feng Shui
- avatars, Nirvana, Krishna
- life energy
- peace, love, happiness
- intuition
- human potential
- transcendental
- evolving
- channeling, séance
- crossing over
- indigenous peoples have it right
- alternative
- name it, claim it
- enlightenment
- higher plane
- auras, vibrations, crystals
- oneness
- astrology, psychic reading
- Lucifer the Light

After reading this list, you may be somewhat put off over some of the items. Hold your fire! That's expected. Again, not everything noted is evil or exclusive to New Age. (Although I must say that if a significant number of these offend you, you may be deeper into New Age than you might think.) Inclusiveness, mimicry, and adaptability are characteristics of New Age spirituality. These are strategies aimed at an objective...

What makes [an activity] part of the New Spirituality is not necessarily the practice itself... but the goal of the activity.²⁹⁹

The New Age belief system is far from new. Satan, the Father of Lies, initiated the first tenet when he put forth “I will be like the Most High.” The implication is that one *can* be like the Most High, and there has been an unbroken chain of this rebellion up to the present. New Agers are named as such due to their anticipating and striving toward a “new age” in which humankind finally realizes its deity and rises to its well-deserved higher plane of existence. This is both a personal and a corporate quest: *I can become enlightened and we all must eventually become enlightened.*

All is One

After Satan’s ancient quest for godhood, the earliest inklings of this same notion emerged in the pantheistic beliefs of Sikhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, and some aspects of Buddhism. The basic tenet of pantheism is *monism* which claims that reality consists of only one essential substance (thing). In other words, minds, matter, energy, God, the universe—everything—is essentially just *mind*. Christianity is *dualistic* which means that we believe separate things exist, specifically minds *and* a separate material world. With this simplified explanation, let’s examine some aspects of New Age thought. I’ve spoken with and read many New Agers over the years. In the following section, I’ll attempt to give the aggregate of ideas from the perspective of a typical proponent of New Age philosophy.

“Humans, snails, trees, bacteria—our souls are all joined spiritually with each other. Like cells in a body, all organisms are “cells” in a spiritual body. When part of the body suffers, we all suffer. And in a way, isn’t Planet Earth like a big organism with many smaller living parts? It’s like Mother Earth has her own spirit (we’ll call her Gaia) so we should treat her with great respect.”

²⁹⁹ Glenn Sunshine, “New Age Practices and the New Spirituality, Emerging Worldviews 19,” www.breakpoint.org, 19 Nov 2019.

“We are all divine, little gods. God is everything. Everything is God. If there is a supreme god, it’s only our combined spirits acting in unison to create some impersonal, benevolent, magical “force” (yes, like Star Wars) that can be used if we can become enlightened (yes, like Jedi Masters). We can speed up the process by practicing New Age techniques of enlightenment, which would obviously start with shedding our old, traditional beliefs. That’s what Jesus did, right? He showed us how to dump tradition and live a good life in order to find the divine within. He achieved the Christ-spirit. So can we!”

“Why should we listen to religious dogma or old stories? We are the Divine! Truth is what we think it is. No, it’s what I think it is. Our truth may change as we evolve, but no problem—that will be our new truth. If we happen to see different or conflicting truths right now, that’s okay. We’re all at different places in our spiritual journey. We must be tolerant of others’ ideas because all ideas are equal and good. And naturally, if we all are living by the truth we believe, we’re all good people! Unless of course, your ideas are intolerant, and you refuse to see our enlightened ideas. It’s bad that you’re so far down on the evolutionary ladder!”

“The universe is important because it’s god—well, what we perceive as the universe. After all, we are one big mind. So, if I can visualize something, it will actually be there. Well, as ‘actually’ as anything else. Anyway, it doesn’t truly matter what the truth is as long as someone believes it. In the meantime, we should take care of the world we see around us. Those whales and spruce trees will eventually evolve to meet us. Or have the whales already passed us? I’m not sure...”

Most thinking people can easily see the logical inconsistencies in New Age ideology. However, most New Agers place little or no priority on logic. That’s not my biased criticism, it’s the nature of their philosophy (or non-philosophy). Logic, rationality, and reasoning are only products of the mind considering it, thus, they have no true, underlying reality.

A logical thinker, though, must ask many questions... What’s the ultimate purpose of the New Age universe? Why do we still have a strong moral sense of right and wrong if it’s only an illusion? What

happens when my perception of reality clashes with yours? If I create my own reality, why can't I do a better job of it? New Agers attempt to provide answers, but none are convincing. By contrast, the Christian worldview is based on absolute truth derived from the single reality that is God. It offers a logical, coherent explanation for the logical, coherent universe we observe.

New Age ideas will typically be intertwined with other worldviews. Its very essence is to merge and find unity with all. Therein lies much of the problem. Like a chameleon, New Age is often cloaked in the terminology of other thought systems. As previously stated, New Age concepts have crept into Christianity by the crafty exchange of terms so that they may speak of Christ, heaven, salvation, and still slip in meanings that are far from what the undiscerning would recognize.

Spirit Guides

Where Christianity centers on redemption through Christ, New Age is all about *enlightenment*. The central dogma is opening the mind's eyes to the fact that we are gods, allowing us to mature and evolve toward higher planes. But knowledge that enlightens must come through a channel. This conduit might be self-reflection (meditation), mind-altering drugs, psychic energies, or teachings.

Most branches of the New Age embrace the concept of *spirit guides*. These are spiritual personalities who may be contacted for guidance and wisdom. The origin of these entities varies among proponents, but most see them as *ascended masters*, those who have reached a higher plane of existence (usually through a culminating physical death after many reincarnations). A variety of spirit guides have been “adopted” by New Agers. The most popular by far is Jesus, but Buddha, Mohammed, Moses, Michael, and Lucifer have their own following.³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ The “Jesus” named is obviously a caricature fitting the proponent's concept of Jesus. He (it) is often referred to as the *Christ Spirit*. The idea is that the “true” Jesus (the man) was so enlightened that he attained the highest level—realizing he was completely God. This subtle lie is so deceptive, that many Christians rework their biblical worldview to fit it. The idea that we too can become enlightened and take on the Christ Spirit echoes the deception of Eden's serpent.

One popular New Age evangelist has been channeling her spirit guide for almost fifty years now. This entity claims to have lived in the lost land of Lemuria thousands of years ago. As a great military leader, he fought against Atlantis. If warriors aren't your thing, the chic trend today is to have an extraterrestrial spirit guide who can mind-meld from a distant galaxy. Newcomers to the New Age, however, may want to start smaller. If you're lucky, you can channel one of your ascended master ancestors.

Frivolity aside, I hope the *extreme* danger of contacting spirit guides is obvious. What a demonic holiday it is when a person willfully and enthusiastically gives an open invitation to "anyone out there." I believe many modern necromancers (dabblers and pros) *are truly receiving supernatural messages*. Satan has his own doctrines and anxious "faculty members."³⁰¹ This is a biblical principle, thus the admonition to "test the spirits." The warning also applies to the "secondhand" hearers of those channeling the messages. Only God's mercy stands between the channeler and any lie the spirits may dish out.³⁰² Could this be another reason God forbids contacting the dead?

There shall not be found among you 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 (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Kabbalah

Typical of other New Age belief systems, Kabbalah is difficult to pin down with definitions and doctrines. Its philosophy has influenced many thinkers such as Soloveitchik, Jung, and Freud. Surprisingly, the ancient, esoteric philosophy derived from Jewish mysticism is especially popular among celebs such as Madonna, Roseanne, and

³⁰¹ "...some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and *doctrines of demons*" (1 Timothy 4:1).

³⁰² This is the antithesis of Christian meditation. Yes, we listen for the Spirit's leading, but only in association with immersion in God's written Word.

Streisand (beware if you're a one-name pop icon!). Many of the writings and tenets are very subjective and attempting to follow them logically is difficult. Here are a few ideas that characterize the general themes of Kabbalah...

1. God is a source of infinite spiritual light.
2. Human souls existed before coming to earth.
3. God poured some of his light into humans.
4. Some human "vessels" broke. Their light scattered and became imperfect.
5. The Kabbalah was given to the angels, Adam, Abraham, and finally Moses, in order to teach us the pathway back to perfection.
6. Our job as humans is to help God to restore the Universe to perfection.
7. The sin of Adam and Eve was the failure to bring the universe to a new level of consciousness.
8. Four primary archangels deal with humans: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael.
9. There are two distinct Messiahs, one from Joseph's line and the other from David's.
10. We can, and should, develop a direct experience with God by learning the principles of Kabbalah.

Kabbalah teaches that the ultimate god (*Ein Sof*) is unknowable, but that he reveals himself in 10 forms, or *sefirot*. Each sefirot represents one component of the total entity. They are often shown in a *tree of life* diagram with connections between certain sefirot. A lesson we can learn from Kabbalah is that outdated, and mostly incomprehensible ideologies can still be attractive if dressed in New Age promises of power and enlightenment.

Reincarnation and Karma

Several early Greek philosophers entertained the idea that a soul could move from one physical body to another. *Spirit transmigration* has primarily been a belief within Hinduism, Buddhism, and other

Eastern religions. The belief sneaked into other cultures in the 19th century through the teachings of influential Transcendentalist and Theosophy leaders. Reincarnation also makes a good TV/movie plot, as Hollywood has given us *A Dog's Purpose*, *My Mother the Car*, and several *Three Stooges* episodes with transmigration themes. Even General George Patton believed he was the reincarnation of the military hero Hannibal. There are also a few within Judaism and liberal Christianity who have courted the belief, but my concern in this section is with the general “westernized” take on reincarnation that has been gaining popularity and seeping into some Bible-believing churches.

Reincarnation is closely linked to the concept of *karma*. There are many variations on this belief, but generally, karma involves the accumulation of good or bad deeds in a lifetime and how these are resolved.³⁰³ Karma is similar to Scriptural truths in that it implies a need for some type of payback or justice. Perhaps that's part of our *imago dei*. We intrinsically know right from wrong and that wrongs should be righted. The principle of karma, however, says that if the wrongs aren't sufficiently balanced in one life, there must be subsequent lives in order to obtain justice.

In theory, a person's spirit (the true self) will be reincarnated into physical bodies as many times as it takes for bad deeds to be balanced. Some proponents believe the new body could be any living thing—human, plant, or animal. Hopefully, if or when karma is completely satisfied, the soul will now be “free from [re]birth” (as George Harrison sang) and it can now rest in the nothingness of “godhood.”

Ultimately, reincarnation is a nondual philosophy that sees only the spiritual to be real or important, and the fleshly as a deception. Some claim this coincides with the biblical view of spirit and flesh. An accurate assessment, however, reveals that even though the spiritual is of highest priority, God also places value on his physical creation. There are some logical problems with the actual workings of reincarnation and karma, but to a proponent, those discrepancies are physical, and the physical is unimportant.

In the final analysis, reincarnation and karma stand in opposition to the Christian worldview. Scripture tells of a single, unique

³⁰³ Interesting, since *good* and *bad* are relative or erroneous concepts to most New Ager.

incarnation. We believe that the Second Person of the Trinity did, at a point in time, take on a fleshly, human body and that that body was raised and will be the physical manifestation of Christ through eternity. We also believe that our spirits will be joined to our perfected bodies in a process of *resurrection*, not bounced from one organism to another in an erratic attempt to atone for our bad deeds. Our dual spirit-bodies, designs of our Creator, will live in communion with our Creator with our sins atoned by Christ.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrew 9:27-28).

Yoga

I served several years as chief lawn mower for my family. My arch-nemeses during that time were bumblebees in a hive at the far edge of the yard. Unlike honeybees, bumbles have underground colonies with a single small opening at the surface. From experience, I learned they are mean, painful, and dislike having their entrance mowed over. Bumbles are relentless. They will chase you down regardless of how far you run. However, I discovered that as long as the mower didn't get too close, they were okay with mowing.

That would have been the end of the problem had I not been obsessive/compulsive about mowing. The unmowed clump on the edge unnerved me. I could have left it and no one would have ever noticed but that wasn't the point. I wouldn't be bested by insects. Every time I mowed, I trimmed as close to the hole as possible. Soon I had the clump down to a minimum with only a few angry bumbles.

Many Christians have a similar relationship with the New Age. Some of its elements are undisputedly pagan-supernatural yet are essentially harmless at a certain distance, at least in a personal sense. As long as I maintain a safe distance, all is well. The question then becomes "How close is too close?" Is the gain worth the risk of stings? Regarding the "grayish" aspects of New Age, I'm often asked whether

this is a hill we need to die on. We certainly don't wish to burn evangelistic bridges, but we must ask in response, at what point is the body count too high?

A good model for this discussion is yoga. Many, including Christians, practice yoga regularly with no perceivable, immediate harm, in fact, most seem to benefit. So, what's the problem? No one denies that yoga has its roots firmly planted in Hindu/Buddhist pantheism. The simplified objective of all flavors of pantheism is for an individual to realize his or her "oneness" with the rest of the universe. Yoga as originally designed was not intended to be physical exercise, but a way of posing the body for the efficient flow of "life energy."³⁰⁴ An offshoot of this is the belief that one's creative life force, the *Kundalini spirit*, lies coiled at the base of the spine. (Kundalini translates "serpent.") True yoga teaches that by achieving the proper poses, the kundalini can awaken and release its energy...

When this sleeping Kundalini is awakened it raises its [serpentine] hood. The door of the Sushumna [a *nadi* or energy conduit] is opened and the Kundalini ascends upwards along the Sushumna piercing through the six chakras... situated in it. When it reaches the highest centre, called Sahasrara, in the crown of the head, it unites with the Lord Shiva.³⁰⁵

Needless to say, Christians are divided on the nature of yoga. Can the practice be yanked from the occult, shaken free of its original intent, and sanctified for God's use? Former yoga instructor and Reiki master Jessica Smith says no...

I find no example in scripture where the Lord suggests that a good way to get closer to him or to honor him is to find a popular spiritual pagan practice that was created and developed for the purpose of worshiping and seeking communion with false gods, and just plugging his name in.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ We see the same *life energy* concept in Feng Shui and some alternative health practices.

³⁰⁵ Elliot Miller, "Approaches to Yoga: Kundalini Yoga," www.equip.org, 6 Apr 2009.

³⁰⁶ Jessica Smith, www.truthbehindyoga.com, Accessed 28 Mar 2020.

Others believe the physical part of yoga can be separated from the spiritual...

There is nothing wrong with stretching... The problem comes when one incorporates Eastern "meditation" techniques or other inherently religious practices that distinguish yoga from mere recreational stretching.³⁰⁷

Yoga proponents and instructors, however, teach that the philosophy of yoga is bound with the practice of asanas (poses)...

What makes [gymnastics and aerobics] different from a true yogic practice is that their focus is only on the body. What makes a true yogic practice unique is that its focus is on a sustained feeling of freedom and wholeness.³⁰⁸

Again, the broader question here may be, how close is too close? Yoga gurus agree that repeatedly "going through the motions" (literally) leads deeper into the spiritual spiral. The idea of neutrality and the separation of components is foreign to the philosophy of pantheistic yoga. We are also prone as humans to be lured into "baby steps." A majority of Westerners who now practice true spiritual yoga began their journey as merely an exercise regimen...

A trapper doesn't put a pile of dirt in a snare. He puts something tempting and appealing.³⁰⁹

This principle of spiritual desensitization is often seen in yoga as well as other New Age practices.

Should one wish to benefit from the physical discipline of yoga, are there alternatives? Smith says there are many alternatives to yoga that can provide the same physical benefits. If one has prayerfully considered the pitfalls of mysticism and still believes a safe distance is possible, those with experience in the area recommend the following

³⁰⁷ Jeremy Butler, "Should Christians practice Yoga?" www.carm.org, 15 Nov 2018.

³⁰⁸ Alanna Kaivalya, "How We Got Here: Where Yoga Poses Come From," www.huffpost.com, Updated 28 June 2012.

³⁰⁹ Jessica Smith, www.truthbehindyoga.com, Accessed 28 Mar 2020.

guidelines for Christians who wish to continue practicing physical yoga...

- Avoid the philosophy and vocabulary associated with yoga.
- Pray for wisdom and a clear mind while practicing yoga.
- Use relationships with others in your classes or sessions to thoughtfully spread truth rather than supporting error.
- Take care that “weaker brethren” are not being negatively influenced by your freedom to practice yoga (Romans 14). Could someone less disciplined be led by your actions, then lured into pagan philosophy?

Meditation

No sooner does the Book of Psalms get started than it encourages us: “Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.”³¹⁰ We are also told: “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”³¹¹

Unlike yoga, meditation has a scriptural precedent, yet many Christians are leery of meditation due to its “hijacking” by mystics. A comparison of New Age and biblical ideologies shows quite distinctively the importance of worldviews. We’ve seen that New Age groups frequently share some worldview elements and vocabulary with Christianity. Much of this is by design in an ongoing attempt to make mysticism palatable to those from Western cultures. *Christ* to a New Ager means the *christ spirit*, not *Jesus the Christ*. Christians may hear a mystic say *Holy Spirit*, yet their meaning is the impersonal, universal *Brahma*.

Meditation has a similar issue with meaning. Both mystic meditation and New Age *mindfulness* techniques draw on the pantheistic concept of inner searching. These practices have a singular purpose...

³¹⁰ Psalm 1:1-2

³¹¹ Joshua 1:8

Eastern meditation... employs techniques like concentrating on objects, exercising “controlled” breathing, and uttering mantras, all this with the purpose of emptying the mind of all kinds of distractions which supposedly will enable a person to reach an altered state of consciousness...³¹²

This type of mental focusing is ubiquitous in New Age ideology. The spiritual goal of the New Ager is to continually rise to “higher levels of consciousness” which requires less rationalizing and more feeling and experiencing. Propositional knowledge (the real world) must be cleared away so that esoteric, “cosmic” knowledge may flourish.

Biblical meditation is just the opposite—we are encouraged to *fill* our minds. Whereas New Age meditation and mindfulness look *inward* to find oneness, wisdom, and connection, scriptural meditation looks outward and *toward* an absolute truth, specifically the *Person* who is truth. The Psalms are in a sense records of meditation. They give several truths for us to meditate such as the person of God, his works, and his promises. Scripture posits an empty mind as a dangerous place, open to ungodly ideas and possibly the whisperings of malicious spirits. It’s unfortunate that in overreaction to Eastern mystic practices, many Christians shun true biblical meditation. Jesus recognized the benefit of getting away to a solitary place to pray and meditate. He made it a priority...

... great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray (Luke 5:15-16).

The Biblical word for *meditate* carries the idea of “chewing something slowly for a long time,” much as a ruminant would graze early in the morning then re-chew the rest of the day. In our rushed society, it’s often difficult to find a time and place for meditation, yet as Jesus shows it has intrinsic importance in the life of a believer. Paul urges us...

³¹² Christian Research Institute, “Christian Meditation: Is Meditation Biblical?”
www.equip.org, 17 Mar 2009.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

Biblical meditation could focus on a single attribute of God, but more often it's a deliberate act of searching and pondering a truth. Though the outcome is often peacefulness, the duration of meditation may be filled with crying out, complaining, and pleading. Far from an *emptying* of the mind Psalm 77 displays a diversity of emotional questioning, pondering, and reasoning...

When I remember God, I moan;
 when I meditate, my spirit faints.
You hold my eyelids open;
 I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
I consider the days of old,
 the years long ago.
I said, "Let me remember my song in the night;
 let me meditate in my heart."
 Then my spirit made a diligent search:
"Will the Lord spurn forever,
 and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
 Are his promises at an end for all time?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
 Has he in anger shut up his compassion?"
Then I said, "I will appeal to this,
 to the years of the right hand of the Most High."
I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
 yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
I will ponder all your work,
 and meditate on your mighty deeds.

The New Age and UFO Religions

The more esoteric UFO/ET phenomena play out well in many New Age circles. As we saw in our discussion of alleged abductions, victims are often indoctrinated with standard New Age ideology. One of the most disturbing UFO religions was observed in the Heaven's Gate group led by Marshall Applewhite. Applewhite maintained his commune at a mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California, and used video messages to spread his ideas.

Essentially New Age teachings with a sprinkling of Christian eschatology, Applewhite instructed his followers that they would soon ascend into the heavens where an extraterrestrial spaceship was waiting (parked out of sight behind the Hale-Bopp comet). The aliens would then transform their bodies and take them away to a better planet. Impatient with the lack of predicted activities, Applewhite revised his doctrine, saying the followers would need to shed their physical bodies first. In 1997, thirty-nine of the group committed suicide, hoping for the promised close encounter.

Raelianism, possibly the largest UFO religion with about 100,000 members, is very much alive worldwide. Founded in 1974 by Claude Vorilhon (now known as Raël), Raelians believe that an extraterrestrial species known as the *Elohim* created all life on Earth through advanced biological techniques 22,000 years ago.

The theology of Raelianism reads like a sci-fi version of the Bible. Much like the ideas of von Däniken and Stitchin [p. 145], every event in Scripture is reinterpreted as a naturalistic, ET intervention. Thus, the philosophy is a type of New Age atheism in which the only hope of transcendence and afterlife is through naturalistic means. Those means include cloning, genetic manipulation, AI, and a conglomeration of other transhuman concepts. Raelians expect the Elohim to return to Earth soon, and hopefully fix the mess we humans have created.

Raelians have received much publicity by their political and social activism. In an odd mix of liberalism and New Age ideas, they aggressively support, genetic manipulation, gender and sexual freedom, nudity, animal rights, anti-Catholicism, tolerance, and hedonism.

Hundreds of other UFO religions exist around the world and are collectively one of the fastest-growing belief systems. This shouldn't be surprising since the best deception always takes into account the

current state of the deceived. What better way is there to upgrade Satan's age-old strategy of dethroning the Most High? I believe we should expect a worldwide expansion of New Age beliefs coupled with transhumanism and ufology. Only a clear understanding of God's Word can produce a worldview capable of discerning these cunning deceptions.

21

Mega-Miracles

*“Every teacher, every preacher with the very best intent
Found new ways to hide the mystery replaced by common sense.
And to know you was to keep you in my pocket
So easy to hold.” Nichole Nordeman³¹³*

*“Creation is not a brute fact without meaning. It derives its
meaning from the divine character and will. As the theater of
God’s redemptive activity, creation is not static, but is
moving toward that goal established by decree before the
foundation of the universe.” Albert Mohler³¹⁴*

In our pondering of supernatural events, it’s easy to let all the trees obscure the forest. C.S. Lewis speaks of the *Grand Miracle*. That the unbounded Creator of all that is, could for a period of time take on a limited physical body, dwell among us, then die and live again—this is a phenomenal supernatural intervention. The creation event itself could also be considered a grand miracle. A self-existent, self-sufficient Being with no deficiency or need of any kind brought into existence the “otherness” of lesser beings and a universe for their temporary home.

Regrettably, many carry the name “Christian” who either deny or reduce to metaphor the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection.

³¹³ Nichole Nordeman, *Who You Are*, Sparrow Records, 1998.

³¹⁴ Albert Mohler, (2010). “The Christian Worldview as Master Narrative: Creation, www.albertmohler.com, 2010, Accessed 8 May 2020.

I also know there is a remnant who still fully believes in the supernatural reality of these three miracles.

The issue, however, is with the large number of believers on the fence of belief who wince at the mention of these *mega-miracles*. I use this term only from a human perspective since God is able to perform the largest miracle as easily as the smallest. And that's the point... Why do we pick and choose among miracles? If we believe God can work *any* miracle, isn't he able to work *any other* miracle?

As discussed earlier, this hypocrisy is at the heart of our current worldview problems. Many Christians *profess* belief in selected supernatural events simply because there is no satisfying alternative...

The truth is that Christians affirm the incarnation because they have to—it defines Christianity.³¹⁵

I would add, the same is true of the Resurrection. If we discard the true supernatural transformation of Jesus from dead to alive, we are absolutely without hope...

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

As a scientist, I encounter a variety of beliefs among my colleagues regarding origins. Thankfully, my co-workers all base their creation views on a solid, factual Christian worldview. I have crossed paths with many Christian scientists, however, who believe they are boxed into a compromised view because the supernatural elements of creation are simply *too* supernatural.

In some way, “God plus naturalistic laws” is more palatable as an ultimate source of reality than God alone. This view sees the supernatural as an “add-on” to the natural system. In essence, it says there is something that exists *beyond* or *outside of* God. This *something* somehow helps span the cognitive gap between natural and

³¹⁵ Heiser, *Unseen*, 186.

supernatural. Yet the problem remains—isn't this simply a more complicated type of supernatural? Not only is it contrary to Scriptural truths about God, it once again implies that some miracles are too difficult for God.

The Incarnation and Resurrection are beyond the scope of this book and my mind. (I would guess that anyone denying these pillars of Christianity, wouldn't likely be reading this book in the first place.) Let's focus, instead, on the creation and three other supernatural events that seem to be targets for skeptics and many Christians who fear their ridicule.

On the surface, these divine interventions may seem like side-show attractions, but I believe they are central in the Christian worldview. Coincidentally(?), they are all found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Perhaps the most controversial passages in the Bible (except for Christ's miracles), the accounts seem to be magnets for Bible critics and liberals who reject the supernatural. These eleven chapters are also the most disturbing to Christians whose worldview is lacking an adequate accommodation of the spiritual realm as revealed in Scripture. Are the events described in these passages too supernatural to be genuine? Can the 21st-century Christian worldview embrace even a part of these mega-miracles?

Major Supernatural Interventions in Chronological Order

1. Creation of the universe.
2. Fall of man and subsequent deterioration of the universe.
3. Purging of sinful people and destruction of earth's surface during the flood.
4. Dividing of people at Babel and assigning to divine overseers as different nations.
5. Incarnation of Jesus.
6. Resurrection of Jesus.

Creation

As a Christian and a science teacher, I've dealt with this topic extensively. The evidence ranges from the simple observation of the orderliness of nature to discerning the complex origin of information in a molecule of DNA. Chapter 1 of Romans reminds us that there is so much obvious evidence for a Creator in nature (*things that have been made*), that all who refuse to believe are "without excuse..."

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:20-21).

Note that the issue of nonbelief isn't due to a lack of evidence or even the misinterpretation of the evidence. The sad indictment is pronounced on those who *refuse to acknowledge* the Creator despite *knowing the evidence*. And the judgment has consequences in the here-and-now: *Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

The creation is too often portrayed as a death match between science and faith. In the 17th century, astronomer Johannes Kepler was one of many past scientists who had no issue with a universe of miraculous origin. Despite popular opinion, many contemporary scientists also see no discrepancy between science and Scripture.

And realistically, the *who* of creation is the easy part for Christians. It's the *how* that raises questions. Four primary views are common among scientists and others who consider origins. There are numerous subcategories, nuances, and overlaps, but we'll keep it simple...

1. Young Earth Creationism accepts the literal interpretation of events in Genesis. The days of creation were six, twenty-four-hour days. Earth's age is roughly 10,000-*ish* years. There was also a worldwide

flood that brought about many features we observe on the earth's surface.

2. *Old Earth Creationism* asserts that the days in Genesis are figurative references to long periods of time (billions of years). God created slowly, perhaps intermittently, all that we observe today, on earth and in the cosmos. Living things, including humans, were supernaturally created at appropriate times and experienced death for millions of years before the fall of Adam.

3. *Evolutionary Creationism (theistic evolution)* is basically the same as old earth creationism except that proponents acknowledge God used the process of slow evolution to bring life forms from ancient to modern. Little or no supernatural intervention was needed except perhaps in the very beginning.

4. *Naturalism (Darwinian evolution)* assumes only the physical universe. No intelligent, personal creator was needed, only random evolutionary processes. This is presumed to take long time spans to bring us to the present.

I appreciate the hard work of so many Bible-believing scientists who sift through piles of data from biology, geology, cosmology, and other fields related to origins. Like everyone else, I have my own view of creation events, but I've heard compelling arguments for the beliefs listed above (and several others).³¹⁶ There are still many questions to answer regarding *how* God created, and I would hope a healthy dialog will eventually resolve some of these.

It's one thing, however, to base views on legitimate data, yet quite another to disregard or eliminate particular alternatives simply because

³¹⁶ My personal view of origins would be considered *young earth*. I realize there are data that seem to indicate a universe of extremely old age. I also see evidence that seems to contradict this, thus I've yet to find a good scientific reason for concluding one or the other. Because of this, my belief derives more from theology than from science. In my opinion, young earth creationism is the only alternative that addresses the sin/death issue. According to Scripture (New and Old Testaments), death entered the universe by Adam's sin. There have been many attempts to circumvent this allegorically or etymologically, but the results are less than satisfying. And, I have absolutely no problem with God's supernatural intervention in any way he desires. I suppose I'll remain in the young earth camp until I find a good theological explanation for death without sin or a Savior with no need to save us.

of their ties to supernatural intervention. I have a great deal of respect for scientists who might disagree with my take on origins because they have data that seem to support their conclusions. My problem is with Christian scientists who profess the supernatural as one of the bases of Christian doctrine, then reject it arbitrarily in practical applications to real events in the physical realm.

For example, the most flagrantly supernatural creation scenario is a literal six-day event, about 6000 years ago, in which God brings from nothingness the entire functioning universe, with strata and stars appearing to be of great age. Whether this is exactly true or not, the point is that often opinions rest on the degree of supernatural intervention with which one is comfortable: “If we are uncomfortable with the supernatural appearance of age, let’s discard that and add a few million years. If the miraculous arrival of millions of fully formed species is a problem, let’s throw in slow evolution.” Again, *God can do a big miracle as easily as a little one*. Beliefs should not be based on the *least supernatural* explanation.

The Fall

The event often referred to as the *fall of man* is little more than a fairy tale today, even in many churches. Any mention of a real Adam and Eve is met with ridicule if acknowledged at all. Less than a third of American adults believe the couple even existed (the lowest in three decades).³¹⁷ John Schneider, a former professor of theology at Calvin College summarizes the view of many of the Christian intelligentsia...

Evolution makes it pretty clear that in nature, and in the moral experience of human beings, there never was any such paradise to be lost... So Christians, I think, have a challenge, have a job on their hands to reformulate some of their tradition about human beginnings.³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Art Swift, “In U.S., Belief in Creationist View of Humans at New Low,” www.gallup.com, May 22, 2017.

³¹⁸ Barbara Bradley Hagerty, “Evangelicals Question the Existence of Adam and Eve,” NPR Morning Edition, August 9, 2011.

But Scripture is unequivocal on the subject, and for good reason. Adam's sin was the precipitating cause for our present predicament (regardless of public opinion on how or whether it's possible). Most Christian doctrines are based on the historical veracity of this event. The need for Christ's atoning work is centered on the sin of an actual historical man...

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ (Romans 5:12,17).

And in a real sense, the entire gospel message is negated by the absence of a historical Eden. As Albert Mohler writes...

The denial of an historical Adam and Eve as the first parents of all humanity and the solitary first human pair severs the link between Adam and Christ which is so crucial to the Gospel.³¹⁹

Jesus himself referenced the real-life Adam and Eve in explaining the significance of marriage vows (Matthew 19), and their son Abel in speaking of the death of prophets (Matthew 23). Like any good Jewish boy, Jesus was schooled in the Old Testament (Torah). Never in his teachings was there even a hint that certain parts were allegory or myth.

So, what's the deal with eating the forbidden fruit? Many good sources are available that detail the significance of the sin of Adam and Eve. Here are some doctrinal axioms derived from the event:

- Adam and Eve originally had an untainted relationship with God, who communed with them (likely as the visible second person of the Trinity) in Eden.
- The couple was in a state of innocence at this time.

³¹⁹ Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., "False Start? The Controversy Over Adam and Eve Heats Up," www.albertmohler.com, Accessed Feb 26, 2020.

- God, who has always desired a free, loving relationship with humans, gave only one restriction—not to eat from a particular tree.
- In a free, self-willed choice, Adam and Eve decided to disobey God.
- That choice (sin) broke their relationship with the Creator, who let them pursue their own will.
- The result was a deteriorated, sinful nature within, and a fouled, distorted universe in which they had to live.
- All that could come from a tainted population was more tainted individuals.

Many have attempted to allegorize this account or vilify God, but any feelings of injustice come from our corrupted understanding of God and the true repugnance of sin. My inherited sin nature has trouble accepting the idea that I might have an inherited sin nature. The fall has implications that rub our ego and self-esteem the wrong way. Modern education, self-help, and psychology begin with the premise that we are “good down deep” not “sinful by nature.” But Scripture is unbudging at this point. “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me” (Romans 7:18).

From a scientist’s perspective, the fall has enormous implications and great explanatory power. I observe a world in which decay is the norm. Organisms die. Animals eat other animals. Pain dominates. And this isn’t just a planetary phenomenon. As far as we can determine, the entire universe is slowly slipping into dark, cold entropy. Does this seem like a condition for which God would give the appraisal “It is good?”³²⁰ Couldn’t an omnipotent and omniscient Creator do better? Of course, he could—and he did. A metaphorical Eden at best leaves us struggling for a theological reason for why things are the way they are. At worst it strips the Almighty of the very attributes that make him almighty.

Skeptics are correct on one account. A historical paradise and subsequent fall require a large dose of supernatural. If we accept that the universe is now in a fallen state, we must also postulate an original

³²⁰ Genesis 1.

state. This is problematic for naturalists and Christians who balk at divine intervention.

It is difficult to imagine an *unfallen* condition. My fallen brain has experienced only a fallen world with rotting things, sick things, and messed up things. Could there be a system in which death isn't a factor? Can an ecosystem exist without a predator? Can energy equations find an endless input of new energy? *The answers are yes, but they will forever remain faith-based in this physical world.*

Again, my goal isn't to prove this, but to lay it out as a reality that Scripture presents as happening both in our past and in our future. No, I don't understand how Eden's food chains functioned. I don't know whether erosion occurred. I can't explain what major changes must have occurred so that a non-predator becomes a predator. I can only imagine it was a phenomenal and horrendous event. But isn't that exactly what Scripture portrays? One of the longest threads running through the Bible is that sin is terrible, and its effects are monumental—so monumental that the Creator himself had to die. My Christian worldview demands an explanation of how things were, how they got the way they are, and how they will one day be.

I'm thankful that God in mercy didn't end the Story here. Before the curtain falls on the tragic scene of humankind's fall, the Creator promises a rescue. One is foreshadowed who will come and "bruise the serpent's head." It's comforting to know that the effects of the fall will be supernaturally reversed someday. Without understanding completely, I anxiously look forward to the day when...

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11:6-7).

The Flood

The story of Noah and the flood is so etched into our minds from storybooks and coloring pages that our natural inclination is to think

myth or fairy tale. After all, two-by-two, floating zoo, rainbows—it seems better suited for a bedtime story than for history.

But the flood story is one of the ugliest in Scripture—not just the eventual destruction of multitudes, but the debauchery that led the Creator to “regret” that he had created. Clearly, the flood account overall is a foreshadowing of Christ’s work. We are told as much in 1 Peter 3. God’s immediate purpose, however, was straightforward...

I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish (Genesis 6:17).

The incidents leading God to make this judgment are discussed in another chapter [p. 317], thus, we’ll examine only the consequences here.

Skeptics dismiss the flood account for two primary reasons. First, God’s actions seem extreme. Wasn’t it “overkill” for a merciful God to wipe the slate clean—literally? Again, our fallen minds have difficulty discerning the horrid nature of sin, but we’ll deal with this aspect later, as well.

Second, as with the other Genesis events, the account seems *too* supernatural. Every attempt has been made to minimize or naturalize the flood account, but the results tend to make the incidents more irrational since they also diminish the original purpose. Rather than analyze all of the evidence for a worldwide flood, let’s focus on the supernatural aspects that come into question.³²¹

Was the flood worldwide? Some Bible scholars point to the fact that if God’s intent was to destroy sinful people, perhaps he could have flooded only the Mesopotamian region since, arguably, that’s where the human population of the time lived. I see the logic of that idea, but it’s contrary to what a literal interpretation of Scripture provides. Also, if the flood was a local event, why require the extensive ark project? Why not just have Noah’s clan and the animals take a trip upland?

Is there enough water to cover the earth? Or as skeptics smugly frame the issue: There isn’t enough water on planet earth to cover Mt.

³²¹ For full analyses of the young-earth perspective of flood events, these sites provide extensive resources: www.creation.com, www.answersingenesis.org, www.icr.org

Everest. This brings up an important concept that is often pushed aside: *The flood was a monumental cataclysm...* Our tendency is to think relative to present-day floods, but that would be contrary to all that Scripture tells us about the deluge. *God can cause a worldwide flood as easily as a local flood.* Genesis 7:11-12 describes the actions of the flood...

...the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights (KJV).

Morris explains...

The reference to “broken up” merits attention, for it implies a wrenching of the earth's crust, a great tectonic event. The same word is used in Numbers 16:30-33 to describe the supernatural opening up of a great pit into which the rebellious Korah and his followers and their families fell...³²²

The flood was a *catastrophic* event sent to judge a *catastrophic* condition. We don't know the exact changes the flood wrought on the earth's surface, but there is no reason to set limitations on it based on the features we presently observe. Even after the deluge, God continued to supernaturally reform the landscape...

You covered [Earth] with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they fled; at the sound of your thunder they took to flight. The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth (Psalm 104:6-9).

Was the ark project feasible without supernatural intervention? The question divulges the irony. Why do we continue to push as far away from the supernatural as possible? I applaud those who do research on the physical parameters of the ark and provide information about what a colossal undertaking the project must have been. Ark replicas and museums are wonderful ways to visualize the vessel and imagine the

³²² John D. Morris, “All the Fountains of the Deep,” www.icr.org, 11 Aug 2012.

awesomeness of the scene. Good apologetics can allow us to marvel at the account, but we don't need to "prove" the ark story naturalistically in order to "prove" Scripture.

The veracity of the Scripture stands on its own legs. The lessons it teaches about the flood are about God himself. I believe we should apply the same standards to mega-miracles, such as the flood account, as we do to any biblical miracle. Will God always use the most miraculous methods possible? Usually not. By faith, we accept the supernatural component as validation of the message.

The flood ordeal exhibits a mixture of human and divine action. God could have miraculously protected eight people from the waters as he protected three from the fire of the furnace, yet he involved Noah's family for decades in constructing the ark. As far as we can tell, the family fed and cared for the animals, but it was a supernatural call that brought them to the ark. God *is* supernatural and *can* intervene supernaturally as he pleases.

I believe the best way to view the flood account is simply to take it as Scripture offers, applying natural and supernatural where and how they are presented. This is the precedent that Jesus himself set when referring to Noah and the flood. Any attempt to do otherwise would not only contradict the words of Jesus but would also negate the spiritual truths he was illustrating.

Babel

When the topic of the Tower of Babel comes up, skeptics rant about the foolishness of believing that God supernaturally "manufactured" all of the languages on earth at one time. Yet the linguistic aspect is eclipsed by the ensuing spiritual drama. The account begins in Genesis 11 with a simple summary of the period of time since the flood...³²³

³²³ Genesis 10 actually follows chapter 11 chronologically. It was common for Hebrew writers to summarize an event, then retell it with details. Chapter 10 identifies the clans that left Babel.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there (Genesis 11:1-2).

Geographically, Shinar (Mesopotamia) was roughly modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, and part of Turkey. It was a major portion of what has been called the “fertile crescent” and the “cradle of civilization,” so it’s no wonder the area would be suited for a large population. Also, if we accept the veracity of the flood event, then the Babel scenario is a logical development. It would also be reasonable to assume that if humanity had been unified up till now, they would have a common language.

The significance of the next actions is easy to miss when the meager passage is interpreted from a contemporary perspective...

And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:3-4).

Why was God so opposed to them building a city and forming a strong social union? When encountering unusual passages, it’s always prudent to trust in God’s holy character and assume that we don’t understand completely. Fortunately, though, from the context and other passages, we have some of the background for the situation. God’s intent for mankind from the very beginning was for humans to “be fruitful and increase in number... fill the earth and subdue it.”³²⁴ But the intent of the people here was clearly to snub this command and become one great, unified metropolis.

And remember, great-great-grandpa Noah was still around at this time. Can you imagine him sitting on the sidelines as all of these events are transpiring? I don’t doubt that the “preacher of righteousness”, as James described him, was actively reminding the population of God’s decree.³²⁵ Babel’s plan, then, was in flagrant, intentional disregard for

³²⁴ Genesis 1:28.

³²⁵ 2 Peter 2:5.

God. Not only did they conspire to form a great nation, but it was to be independent of the God of their father Noah. The context implies that they wanted a new identity, one that discarded the old-school God.

Hence the tower... This structure was obviously to be a ziggurat, a common worship structure in Mesopotamia, and a symbol of their united power. The phrase “reaches to the heavens” is a misleading translation. Obviously, the people had experienced mountains which were much higher than a tower could ever be built on a plain. Extant ziggurats are short with a flat area on top intended to be a place to meet with deities supernaturally. Yahweh God had already established his terms of meeting, and they didn’t need ziggurats. Again, we see the people’s desire to incorporate a god (or gods) of their choosing who would concur with their new national identity. God’s assessment was justly based on the rebellion he observed...

And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” (Genesis 11:6-7).

An omniscient God could foresee the consequences of the current trajectory. Interestingly, he used language to correct the course of his children, a gift given only to the humans of Planet Earth. This was a merciful move considering the rebellious and sinful bent of the recipients. The inability to communicate and likely the fallout from the event halted any future plans. Secular anthropologists naturally balk at this explanation, given their intricate theories of language evolution. Nevertheless, when forced to choose between contrived history and facts provided by consistently accurate Scripture, the choice is easy.³²⁶ The results were dramatic and historical...

³²⁶ Once again, an individual’s acceptance of a catastrophic event (language divisions) is dependent on the degree of acceptance of the supernatural.

So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:8-9).

Was the tower actually built? The passage is vague as to whether the plan to construct the tower was completed or even implemented. It seems that the people of Babel stopped building the city at some point. The tower could have been at any stage of completion. Some have doubted that the number of people involved would have been sufficient to accomplish such a feat.³²⁷ However, this depends on assumptions about a structure of unknown size and degree of completion.

An Unseen Babel

So far, we've seen a unified mass of humanity rebel against God, have their languages divided, and be scattered as the primordial nations of the earth. The account is a lesson in itself, and it provides some important elements in the Christian worldview. Obviously, supernatural intervention was involved, yet we may be looking at only the surface activities. Michael Heiser clarifies some outcomes of Babel that are often overlooked...

Deuteronomy 32 describes how Yahweh's dispersal of the nations at Babel resulted in his disinheriting those nations as his people. This is the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 1... wherein God "gave [humankind] over" to their persistent rebellion. The statement in Deuteronomy 32:9 that "the

³²⁷ "If the division of people occurred only 100 years after the Flood, there would not be many people in the world. However, the data behind the growth rates...indicate that under some scenarios it's possible to obtain a population size greater than 1,000 individuals in that much time. This occurred at all settings of minimum CBA [child-bearing age] with a minimum child spacing of 1 year, or with small minimum CBA and a minimum child spacing of 2 or 3 years. It's also possible to arrive at over 10,000 individuals with a minimum child spacing of 1 year and a minimum CBA ≤ 17 , and up to 40,000 individuals with a minimum CBA of 14, although these are not likely scenarios." Robert Carter and Chris Hardy, "Modelling biblical human population growth," *Journal of Creation*, 29(1):72-79, April 2015.

LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage" tips us off that a contrast in affection and ownership is intended.³²⁸

I agree with Heiser that without the proper view of Babel, Deuteronomy 32 would be enigmatic...

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you. When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.

Again, note the phrase "sons of Israel." Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other earlier translations, the consensus is that the term was originally *sons of God* (*beney Elohim* [p. 34]). Even from the context, this would make sense, since Israel wouldn't exist for centuries. Heiser goes on to say...

As odd as it sounds, the rest of the nations were placed under the authority of members of Yahweh's divine council. Whereas in Deuteronomy 32:8–9 God apportioned or handed out the nations to the sons of God, here we are told God "allotted" the gods to those nations. God decreed, in the wake of Babel, that the other nations he had forsaken would have other gods besides himself to worship. The other nations were assigned these lesser gods as a judgment from the Most High, Yahweh.

This may give us more information about the divine population of Heaven discussed earlier. Certain divine entities were placed in charge (to some extent) of particular people groups. Some see this as God "disowning" the rebellious humans. Each group would now have a new,

³²⁸ Michael S. Heiser, "What Really Happened at the Tower of Babel?" www.blog.logos.com, November 15, 2017. Heiser gives an excellent detailed explanation in *The Unseen Realm*.

but lesser “god.” A rather controversial, yet otherwise coherent idea is that these assigned entities were the basis for the various gods of mythology. This belief may have support in Daniel’s reference to angelic “princes” of nations.^[p. 327]

God, however, isn’t giving up on his plan to have *his own people*, despite Satan’s plans to the contrary. The saga begins in the very next chapter, Genesis 12. From the rebellious throng, God selects Abram to be the progenitor of a new nation—one that would be set apart (holy) from the others. Moreover, it would be the line from which his Son would eventually be born.

The Narrative Sequence Fallacy

The historicity of the Genesis 1-11 accounts is also important in understanding a serious error in reasoning I call a *narrative sequence fallacy*. This is the idea that the dates of the actual *recordings* of an event or idea define the original sources.

For example, say a group of people witnessed the assassination of JFK—different people, same event. That night, one of the observers was interviewed for a news article, and the account was published the next day. Then suppose fifty years later, a reporter doing a “historical” article interviews another of the witnesses and creates a fresh documentary. Someone now compares the two documents and exclaims “Plagiarism! The piece published later is obviously copied from the original!”

This mistake is very common among skeptics and Bible critics who aren’t aware of history or who choose to ignore it. We know that there are many ancient stories (older than Genesis) which include the first two people on earth who sin and are punished by their deity. Some of them include a garden or a snake, and they clearly mirror the biblical account. The same is true of the flood account. This may be disturbing to Christians who have been fed an exclusive diet of secularized beliefs about history.

Scripture paints a clear picture that our heritage can be traced back through the human population centered on the Plain of Shinar (Mesopotamia) after the flood, and beyond. Naturally, we would expect this monolithic culture to teach and share history to new generations.

They would have a common narrative for many events such as Eden, the fall, a serpent, angels, sin, a flood, and great-great-great grandparents who built a big boat.

As the groups dispersed, these narratives would go with them. Over time it wouldn't be surprising to find the accounts deteriorated or purposely embellished and altered to fit the new culture. Thus, when Moses finally wrote his version of the histories, it would carry the same foundational truths.

Now obviously, as a conservative evangelical, I believe that Scripture is inspired. Is it so incredible that God would preserve (supernaturally if necessary) a true rendering of events through to the mind of Moses? We would expect this accurate account to have many similarities to the lore of other groups, as well as some differences. The similarities become very significant then, since they provide corroborating evidence of the same event. Some of the earliest Mesopotamian/Canaanite literature quite often describes events similar to the Old Testament. *Gilgamesh*, in particular, contains many biblical parallels. Rather than stories borrowed from a preexisting source, as skeptics accuse, the biblical narratives are inspired accounts of the same incidents. These parallel accounts actually provide external confirmation of the credibility of Scripture...

Old Testament appropriation of Canaanite culture is a case of subversion, not syncretism—overthrowing cultural narratives as opposed to blending with them.³²⁹

³²⁹ Brian Godawa, "Old Testament Storytelling Apologetics," www.equip.org, Article ID: JAF3343, 8 Mar 2015.

22

Holy Ground

“Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ And he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” Exodus 3:5-6

My mother taught me well—“No running, no eating, no chewing gum—this is God’s house.” I still feel the “specialness” when I walk through the door of that country church. Recently, I heard an old pastor bemoaning the trend in many evangelical churches of replacing ornate worship areas and stained glass with steel buildings and spotlights. I have mixed feelings...

On one hand, I realize that the early Church certainly didn’t utilize grand cathedrals. Like many of the “house churches” in the world today, they met wherever they could, be it a home or a cave. Our doctrine is clear—the Church is a body, not a building. Yet like the old pastor, another part of me misses the “sacredness” of a place of worship.

There’s a fine line separating what one side would consider idolatry and what the other sees as irreverence. I believe a healthy view wouldn’t compromise either of these opinions by attempting to meet on middle ground. Instead, it would incorporate both of these truths simultaneously. No, in a biblical worldview a place or building cannot in and of itself be revered as something sacred. But, yes, a location may be prescribed specialness by association with the holy.

The terms *holy* and *sacred* may be confusing.³³⁰ In the most accurate sense, they mean “totally different than” or “set apart from” something else. I have a toothbrush that I use for cleaning the sawdust out of my scroll saw. In all ways, it’s the same as my tooth-brushing toothbrush. I could brush my teeth with the saw brush (my sawdust is relatively clean), but I don’t. The saw brush has been designated by me to be set apart (holy) for a particular role.

Intrinsic holiness is found only in God. He alone is completely and utterly “different than” all that is not God. However, he is free to designate any other person or thing as holy (set apart, made special) for a particular purpose or reason. The person or object isn’t any different intrinsically, but it’s now “holy” with respect to its assigned role. Thus, there is no magical force within a holy thing. Any power associated with it comes strictly from the one who ascribed to it its special status.

In Exodus 3, God warns Moses “Do not come any closer... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” People had crossed this site countless times in the past, but at this moment God was manifesting himself there. Even in the seriousness of the event, the point was not that the ground was supernaturally changed, but that God’s holiness had altered its status. Defaming the place ascribed by God would have been tantamount to defaming God.³³¹

Thus, for Christians, the holiness of a place exists only as a direct connection to the holiness and will of a (The) divine being. Non-Christian beliefs commonly embrace types of object-holiness. In most cases, their concept of holiness could derive from another source. Some Native American holy sites are thought to be empowered by a spirit or ancestor who is endowing a particular place with sacredness. But many belief systems attribute holiness to more of an impersonal force than an entity. Perhaps the specialness comes from an unknown physical source. This would fit the idea of paranormal.³³² Let’s examine some of the sacred places scattered around the world.

³³⁰ Greek *hagios*, Hebrew *qadosh*; set apart, otherly, different.

³³¹ So, my mother’s wise admonition in its full theological form would be: *God expects the place at which we worship him to be set apart for that purpose. It’s simply a building, but you will act differently here than elsewhere because it now represents God’s holiness.*

³³² Interestingly, it’s also the same classifications we saw in magic and prophecy.

Ley Lines

Since Pythagoras discovered how to handle angles and such, earth measuring (*geodesy*) has fascinated us. In the 1800s someone noticed that on maps, medieval churches, cemeteries, and other sacred sites seemed to make interesting lines and triangles. A few years later, the Germans picked up on the quirk and added even more sites. Connections among these locations were called *heilige linien*, (*holy lines*). supposedly, Nazis looked into this oddity as a justification of some of their land claims.

In 1925, British businessman Alfred Watkins wrote *The Old Straight Track* which put forth the idea that these *ley lines* may have been utilized in some way by prehistoric humans and early Romans. Ley line markers were typically an odd mix of stone circles, mounds, long-barrows, standing stones, cairns, ponds, springs, wells, hill notches, castles, churches, and forts. By the mid-1900s the concept flourished, mostly in Britain as a type of pseudoarcheology.

The first paranormal aspect conjured by this idea is how early humans knew the geometry of sites on such a large scale. Did they possess a complex science that is unknown today? Were they able to detect strange force lines on the earth? Was there supernatural assistance available?

It does seem to be a mystery. A popular example is the near 3-4-5 right-triangle formed by connecting Stonehenge, Bryn Celli Ddu, and Arbor Low. Others show interesting geometries at the Great Pyramids, Machu Picchu, and similar sacred or historic sites. These are often hundreds, even thousands, of miles apart and separated by mountain ranges and bodies of water.

Explanations tend to be untestable (hence, pseudoarchaeology). A popular interpretation is that ETs had to be involved since either GPS or a high birds-eye-view seems to be required. We might ask, however, why aliens would want us to build geometrically. Alternatively, if there are some sort of force lines involved, they don't seem to correspond to any energy known to science.

An explanation might be a type of pareidolia in which humans tend to extract sensible images out of random patterns. It's possible (not probable) for three random points to coincidentally form a straight line or a right triangle. But the more points I add to the mix, the more

possible lines or shapes are perceived. If I randomly placed five beans on a table, there is a small possibility that they may form a rough shape of something. If I spill 1000 beans on a table though, I could easily connect *selected* beans to form the face of William Shatner.

Stonehenge

One of the most mysterious and popularized archeological sites in the world, Stonehenge has close to a million visitors each year. The present remains are the result of over 5000 years of sporadic work. Since this would involve multiple generations (and perhaps even multiple cultures) the objectives of the builders are difficult to discern.

The first artifact at the site was simply a circular bank-and-ditch structure (*henge*) approximately 360 feet in diameter dated to about 3000 BC. The chalky material dug from the ditch was thrown to the outer side to form the bank. A large unexcavated section of the circle, perhaps a doorway, was located on the northeast side with a smaller one on the southern. Just to the inside of the ditch, another circle of 56 holes was dug. Each of these *Aubrey holes* was a little over 3 feet in diameter. It's speculated that these holes held wooden timbers or the tall pieces of *bluestone* located around the site.

About 500 years after the initial henge was excavated, what appear to be two concentric circles of holes were dug in the center of the site. The holes held up to 80 standing stones, 43 of which remain on-site. These bluestones were transported from over 100 miles away.

Over the next 200 years (2600 BC to 2400 BC), the familiar circle that most people think of as Stonehenge was constructed. Thirty enormous *sarsen* stones were transported to the site, possibly from a quarry about 25 miles to the north at the Marlborough Downs. These stones were sculpted with very precise mortise and tenon joints then erected as a circle of *standing stones*, 108 feet in diameter with a ring of 30 *lintel stones* placed on top. The standing stones average around 13 feet high by 7 feet wide and weighed around 25 tons. The inward-facing surfaces of the stones seem to be smoother than the outer surfaces.

Within this circle, five sarsen *trilithons* were arranged in a horseshoe shape about 45 feet across with its open end facing northeast. Each trilithon consisted of two standing stones with a straight lintel on top. The smallest of the trilithons was about 20 feet tall, and the *Great Trilithon* at the southwest end is 24 feet tall.

As with other ancient circles and henges, there has been debate over the precise placement of the stones. Fortunately, the original structure of Stonehenge is a bit more discernible than other sites for three reasons. First, the chalky gravel of the area retains signs of excavation better than some substrates. We can tell more easily where stones might have stood or where significant digging has occurred.

Also, the henge and avenue formations are most likely in the original positions since it would be difficult to move a ditch without some trace. This helps to estimate the centers and borders of the stone components. Finally, the interlocking mortise and tenon circle for the lintels gives an accurate measure for the entire original structure and possibly the missing stones. Many scientists believe that current models of Stonehenge are reliable and may be used to determine possible uses.

I've given the preceding details to emphasize the incredible amount of manpower and skill required for such a structure. More notable though, is that a major undertaking would seem to require a major motivation—one that would energize multiple generations.

The purpose of Stonehenge has been argued for centuries. Researchers agree that the position of its stones coincides with several astronomical alignments. One obvious feature is that the trilithon horseshoe and the Avenue are aligned with the summer solstice sunrise. Some researchers maintain that the entire site, along with other henges and stone circles, were primarily used as ritual or burial sites. Others suggest that Stonehenge may have been utilized in multiple ways by various civilizations over its long existence.

The complex nature of the site, the implications for its use, and our lack of knowledge fuel paranormal claims about Stonehenge. Foremost, the site is associated with the Druids.³³³ What little we know of this pagan Celtic group comes from the descriptions by Julius Caesar after

³³³ Most of Stonehenge was completed before the first known records of druidry. John Aubrey in the 17th century connected the two. I think it likely that the civilization related to the Druids were responsible for Stonehenge, lacking any other prospects. We do know that since the resurgence of druidry, the stone circles have been important holy places.

his conquest of their land and medieval Irish writings. Druidry seemed to be the quintessential pagan religion, embracing sorcery, astrology, and human sacrifice. Modern Druids are a loose mix of nature religion and New Age ideology.

The mysterious nature of druidry kindles all manner of paranormal ties to Stonehenge and other circles. Having studied some of these sites in-depth, I believe they had astronomical significance. There are too many celestial indicators in Stonehenge for it to be coincidental. These indicators suggest a highly educated group of stargazers. Whether scientific, religious, or paranormal, we may never know.

Nature Religions

From antiquity, nature religions have been a cross-cultural phenomenon. Beliefs vary widely, but a common tenet is that the natural world is the embodiment of divinity, ancestral spirits, or a type of impersonal force. Divinity could be expressed as mono- or polytheism. This force/spirit may exist *in*, *among*, or *as* objects (animals, plants, rock, sky, etc.) depending on local belief. Many indigenous peoples have elements of nature religion in their traditions. Similar practices are also common among modern groups with New Age connections.

Typically, “location” is important in these beliefs, since the particular environment is made up of the indwelled objects. A region, mountain, river, or other geographic feature may be singled out as the holy place. Burials may also be performed at the site, making it even more sacred. Once again, the erroneous idea persists that a location isn’t simply revered, but is endowed with a vague, mystical quality of “holiness.” In our age of hyper-tolerance, adherents to nature religions are often held up as examples to be emulated...

Whatever is native or indigenous is indiscriminately praised, and woe to those who have the temerity to point out any flaws

in native cultures or religions.³³⁴

Practitioners usually have strong ties to the land and tend to care for the natural environment. This is certainly a good thing for our ailing ecosystems. But in the worldwide “green” economy, any set of ideologies that include an eco-friendly component are often accepted wholesale with little acknowledgment of other weaknesses. Sadly, evangelizing these groups is often condemned as an encroachment of evil Western traditions. Our task as Christians is to lovingly build opportunity bridges that maintain rich heritage and traditions, yet clearly hold fast to Scriptural truths.

Bermuda Triangle

While sailing near Bermuda, Christopher Columbus recorded a fiery ball crashing into the ocean accompanied by erratic compass readings. Over four centuries later, five military planes go missing, subsequent articles and books are produced, and a paranormal legend is born. The Bermuda Triangle is now probably the most talked-about paranormal region on the globe. (Area 51 may be gaining ground.) Seventy-five planes and hundreds of boats have been lost in the half-million-square-mile area.

Explanations abound for the disasters and disappearances, rivaling UFOs in frequency and diversity. Natural and supernatural explanations include weather, aliens, unusual waves, energy fields, demonic activity, curses, mud volcanoes, sea monsters, and conspiracy theories. So far, none of these is in the lead as a plausible cause.

The Bermuda Triangle mystery is an excellent case study in the development of a paranormal myth, perhaps providing a prototype for analyzing some other alleged paranormal phenomena. Weather may be involved, but another, more subtle “perfect storm” is likely the culprit. I believe a convergence of several factors has led to the notoriety of the area...

³³⁴ Dave Hunt, *Occult Invasion: The Subtle Seduction of the World and Church*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), p. 133.

1. *A notable historic connection.* Columbus's encounter alone didn't draw much attention. It was in hindsight that historians noted the occurrence.

2. *A highly publicized contemporary incident.* In 1945, five bombers (Flight 19) lost contact with their base while over the area. Ultimately, all were lost along with a rescue plane.

3. *Other historic events connected.* With the mysterious disappearance of Flight 19, several prior disasters were called into remembrance: In 1918 the cargo ship *USS Cyclops*, 1919 the *Carroll A. Deering*.

4. *Subsequent supporting events.* Now that an embryonic legend is developing, new events are correlated with the former. 1948 Douglas DC 3, 1949 *Star Tiger* and *Star Ariel*, 1955 *Connemara IV*.

5. *A large sample area with many data points.* The Bermuda Triangle is a very large area in the very heart of major shipping lanes. Statistically, we would expect a larger number of incidents (although still proportional to other areas).

6. *Increasing publicity, decreasing fact-checking.* Mystery draws attention, and over the past 70 years, a plethora of pop media productions have accumulated. As we are now witnessing at light-speed on the Internet, information overload often leads to zero accountability.

I suspect that several different paranormal claims derive from similar convergence of evidence. The facts related to the Bermuda Triangle phenomena aren't that difficult to locate, even from original sources. Interestingly, insurance giant Lloyds of London hasn't found actuarial risks significantly higher in the area, which says a lot. When we examine the individual "mystery" cases involving missing and crashed craft, there are few if any with no natural explanations. Investigations of Flight 19 and others reveal clear instances of pilot or mechanical error. This is typically overlooked by the pop media.

Nevertheless, the Bermuda Triangle has a life of its own now. I suppose most cruisers and fliers will still hold their breath while passing through. On the upside, it never hurts to exercise more safety than needed.

Vortexes

Late one night while driving alone on a secluded highway, I sensed something was wrong. I turned down the radio to hear the low buzz that seemed to originate above the car. A dizzy, disoriented feeling moved over me. Could it be a vortex? No, as it turned out I should have known better than to eat the last deep-fried chili-cheese dog on the convenience store rack.

This description of a vortex is about as good as any other. I couldn't find a definitive study on vortexes (or *vortices* for the academics). Supposedly, these are unusual energy fields found at various locations or, more mystically, a site where "the veil between worlds is thinner." The concept seems universal in human cultures—a mysterious place where assorted paranormal events are more likely to occur or are more frequently reported. Some New Agers and psychics claim the ability to sense vortexes. Many are said to be regenerative, leaving one refreshed, energized, and in tune with the cosmos. Thousands visit the alleged Sedona Vortex annually for that very purpose. A Sedona website touts "It is a cathedral without walls. It is Stonehenge not yet assembled."

What is the energy behind a vortex? Depending on whom is asked, it could be natural energy such as electromagnetism and gravity, or paranormal/supernatural. Alleged paranormal sources are ley lines, chi, or spirit energy. Those leaning more toward the physical believe a vortex could be an interdimensional portal connecting two worlds. Almost every paranormal phenomenon has been associated with vortexes in one way or another—Stonehenge, the Bermuda Triangle, sacred sites, UFO hotspots, ghosts, and even Bigfoot appearances.

One popular vortex is a tourist stop in Gold Hill, Oregon. Historically, the area was avoided by Native Americans as a cursed site. Early reports also tell how horses would refuse to go near the location. In the early 1900s, an assay office located there shifted on its foundation and landed in a slanted position. Shortly after, the building changed hands and the new owner claims to have witnessed paranormal events,

mostly related to gravity and disorientation (probably not unusual in a tilted house). In the 50s, the building became a destination for paranormal-pursuing tourists. Visitors are intrigued by strange phenomena such as size distortions, dizziness, camera aberrations, and the occasional glowing orb. Like most other vortexes, this one is invisible to senses and instrumentation, thus believers are at the mercy of psychics and indirect evidence.

I was able to examine a local vortex recently. At the base of a small mountain in southern Oklahoma, lies a stretch of road where out-of-gear vehicles supposedly roll uphill. I tested the phenomena several times with my truck. It did roll right up to the base of the mountain, seemingly against gravity. The scientist side of me said it was an optical illusion caused by the mountain in the background. Unfortunately, the wimpy side of me said it was getting dark and the place was creepy, so I didn't get to do any further analysis.

One of my life rules is to never visit a paranormal site that charges admission. I haven't been able to visit any other free sites to do my own research, but I'm almost certain there's a vortex in the back of my sock drawer. I've experienced several years of losing one of each pair. A few weeks ago, I remedied the situation by throwing away all the unmatched socks and buying five pairs of plain, black, uni-foot socks. I'm down to seven socks now, but at least they all match.

Crop Circles

Circular shapes in fields have been reported for centuries, the usual culprits believed to be whirlwinds or dust devils. It's also common to find circles of plants that appear different from the surrounding ones due to soil variations. Mushroom fungi can produce interesting formations called *fairy rings*. As the underground fungal hyphae spread, the sporulating mushrooms pop up on the perimeter making neat, but mysterious circles. Legend says that if you step within a mushroom circle, you'll be kidnapped that night by either fairies or the devil. I tested it with my cat, and she's still here.

Inspired by such oddities, two Brits began covertly creating elaborate crop circles in 1978. They claim to have made hundreds

around the English landscape as the legend grew. Soon, copycat circles were appearing worldwide. Some of the more detailed and beautiful crop circles are made with GPS and transits. Paranormalists jumped on the new phenomenon pointing to demons, ghosts, UFOs, and strange energy fields.

Interestingly, some circles do have a paranormal connection of sorts. A group of artists calling themselves Circlemakers is responsible for many of the most intricate crop circles. There have been a significant number of incidents in which observers experience physical ailments at the sites. Gary Bates writing about Circlemakers notes that “before they entered the lucrative commercial market, they called themselves Team Satan. This is a very bold name and might be suggestive of their intent.”³³⁵

Circlemakers admits...

Our crop formations are intended to function as temporary sacred sites... We are certain that our artworks are subject to the attention of paranormal forces and act to catalyze other paranormal events.³³⁶

In other words, the claim is that circles cause or attract the paranormal. As a simple experiment, I mowed a rather intricate pattern in my backyard (next to the mushroom circle). So far—nothing except perplexed neighbors.

Feng Shui

Pronounced “fung shway,” this is another Eastern mystical practice that has nestled itself comfortably into the American tradition. Some of the largest corporations and wealthiest families have gone to great lengths in designing work and home spaces that channel spiritual “energy” freely and productively.

³³⁵ Gary Bates, *Alien Intrusion: UFOs and the Evolution Connection*, (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2018), 218.

³³⁶ John Lundberg and Rod Dickinson, “Press release: Crop Formations: We Are Artists, This Is Our Work,” www.circlemakers.org, 1997.

Originating in Chinese Taoism, feng shui is the practice of placing architectural features and furnishings in a way that facilitates the flow of *chi* (or *ki*) energy. In Taoist cosmology, chi is the force that binds all else together. The “wrong” arrangement of physical objects (in homes and nature) can hinder the smoothness of chi currents.

Some random feng shui guidelines are...

1. Avoid houses situated near power lines, cemeteries, and junkyards.
2. Don't align the front door with the back or chi will flow right through.
3. Close toilet lid before flushing to remain wealthy.
4. Put a mirror on the inside of the bathroom door to keep in negative chi.
5. Never have the kitchen door facing a bedroom.
6. Place beds diagonal to doors and windows.
7. Oil squeaky hinges and knobs which divert chi.

Feng shui is a good model for studying the appeal of Asian philosophy to westerners. Asians' rich traditions have given the world many useful ideas and practices. The biblical worldview and empirical science, however, are very much at odds with Eastern metaphysics. Westerners (many Christians included) who would otherwise reject folklore and myth, seem to ignore illogical and unsubstantiated tenets carrying the far-east stamp of approval.

At best, feng shui seems to be a waste of effort since no scientific studies have correlated its practice with its alleged outcomes. At worst, it's a misleading substitute for biblical principles governing our lives. Instead of placing faith in the providence and goodness of God, mere dabbling in practices such as feng shui open the door to pagan concepts, a tainted witness, or possibly worse.

Spiritual Geography

“I pushed the enormous plank door open just enough to squeeze inside. Immediately, the massive staircase seemed to

open its mouth wide and breathe me up the dusty steps. A certain evil lit softly on my back prodding me onward. The ectoplasmic force was as palpable as any solid object I had ever touched...”

Yes, this is possibly some of the worst Gothic fiction ever written, but for a moment, look past the slush. A common theme, especially in ghost stories is the haunting of a *place*. Do ghosts prefer certain locations? Or in a broader sense, do certain sites “attract” paranormal activity?³³⁷

Superficially, this seems to be the same idea as a *holy* or *sanctified* place. Recall, though, that a place or object that is made holy has no “mystic force” of holiness applied to it. On the contrary, the place has been “set apart” for a particular purpose *by* a holy being (namely God). There is no intrinsic holiness in a location and no being is believed to be “attached” to it. For example, the Holy of Holies in the temple was not necessarily *linked* to God but was *designated* special by God for the purpose of meeting with humans. Its sacredness was not inherent but was representative of the God who had sanctified it.

The idea of “unholy” geography doesn’t seem to fit this pattern. Proponents of *territorial spirits* generally understand this phenomenon to be fallen spirits that are somehow attached to a location or who have made it their residence. It isn’t simply set apart to be *unholy* in the same way that God makes a place *holy*.

The book of Daniel speaks of at least two fallen spirits who seem to be assigned to earthly sites. Also, in Revelation 2, Jesus spoke of Pergamum as the place of “Satan’s throne” and of the synagogue at Smyrna as “belonging to Satan.”

Several years ago, a prominent evangelist organized a series of prayer activities to bind or drive out territorial “demons of perversion” that he claimed had settled in San Francisco. I applaud anyone who acts on the call to immerse an area in prayer. The nuances of how we stand against Satan should never become a dividing point in the Church. However, I do believe it’s to our advantage to “fine-tune” our thinking and praying to better coincide with the realities revealed in Scripture.

³³⁷ This will also apply to relics. Can certain objects become “unholy” or associated with a supernatural entity? The question is often asked regarding charms, talismans, and idols.

It's worth noting that while numerous demons were cast out of individuals, Jesus and the apostles never confronted territorial spirits. Once again, the Ephesians Hypothesis is applicable. After listing some of the demonic categories (it's possible that some of these are territorial spirits) Paul lays out the battle plan—*put on your armor and stand*. Do these components of armor seem a bit familiar? Righteousness, honesty, eagerness to spread the gospel, a clear doctrine of salvation, knowledge of the Scriptures... Of course, it's simply traditional spiritual discipline! The Christian's armor isn't so much a unique incantation for exorcism as it is an encouragement to maintain and practice holiness, spiritual growth, and faith. But Paul isn't finished. He adds one more crucial element...

...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance (Ephesians 6:18).

Obedience and spiritual discipline prepare us, but the power for opposing the demonic is *God's power* through our prayers. Although binding and rebuking Satan may support our *attitude* against evil, it may tend to pull resources away from biblical strategies. I believe the most efficacious battle plan is to build a solid relationship with Christ and exercise biblical spiritual discipline...

Spiritual warfare is not about naming territorial spirits, claiming ground, or binding demons... It is to live a gospel life, to preserve gospel unity and to proclaim gospel truth.³³⁸

It may be that fallen spirits tend to operate more flagrantly in particular places, but we'll likely discover that they aren't nearly as attached to the place as they are to the people of that place who grant them free access.

³³⁸ Timothy Chester, *The Message of Prayer: Approaching the Throne of Grace*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 231.

PART III

Stranger Things Have Happened

23

Elvis on the Grassy Knoll

*“O conspiracy,
Sham'st thou to show thy dang'rous brow by night,
When evils are most free?”*

William Shakespeare

*“The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that
it is comprehensible.”* Albert Einstein ³³⁹

Cna yuo blveiee taht yuo cna actualty uesdnatnrd waht yuo aer rdanieg? Teh huamn mnid is azanmig!

The human mind is, indeed, amazing. God has endowed us with mental features able to connect with *him*, the unbounded, eternal Creator of all that is! Even with our fallen mental capacities, our minds can manage the billions of random data points entering through our senses, fashioning them into a coherent story line. Perhaps we could augment Einstein's quote to read: *“The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that there are minds that can comprehend it.”*

Part of our standard brain equipment is the desire and ability to make sense of data that might otherwise be senseless. A newborn scans her room and takes in a tangle of lights, colors, sounds, smells, and touches. Her little brain is already up to the task, sorting, filing, merging, deleting... In virtually no time, her world is now beginning to

³³⁹ Albert Einstein, "Physics and Reality," in *Ideas and Opinions*, trans. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Bonanza, 1954), p292.

be comprehensible. The process will continue all the days of her life. But mental tools aren't without drawbacks. Sometimes the data *really are random*.

We also have a strong need as humans to know the whole story and for it to make sense. Many events and circumstances that come our way don't quite make sense to us, and that's a frustrating feeling. A productive remedy would be to investigate the true nature of the problem and implement solutions, but that's usually harder than it sounds. Often, random things just happen. We live in a fallen world where it "rains on the just and the unjust." When the Story lacks evidence, though, it's much easier for our minds to fill in the blanks with the deliberate actions of a protagonist whose aim is to make us miserable, even when none exists.³⁴⁰

Conspiracy Theories

In 1976, a self-published author claimed that NASA had faked the entire Apollo moon program. A handful of conspiracy theorists joined in, and a few believed them. Today, forty years later, 10% of Americans still believe our exploration of the moon was a government-orchestrated fraud, conducted to funnel lots of money to secret recipients.³⁴¹ Perhaps some of this budget is going to the Men in Black? After all, 68% of Americans believe the government is hiding information about ETs and UFOs.³⁴² At the heart of any good conspiracy is the idea that knowledge is being withheld for sinister purposes.

A friend once told me, "Paranoia is only bad if there isn't really someone trying to kill you." As far as I know, that's true... We live in a world of secrets, caught somewhere on the continuum between paranoia and naivety. Conspiracy theories aren't necessarily paranormal, but it often seems difficult to find one without the other. It may not be healthy to suspect conspiracies, but I do believe it's a

³⁴⁰ This same accusation is sometimes leveled by skeptics against Christians. This is why it's so important to seek, pray, meditate, study Scripture, and use solid apologetic reasoning.

³⁴¹ Eric Griffith, "1 in 10 Americans Don't Believe the Moon Landing Really Happened," www.pcmag.com, 18 Jul 2019.

³⁴² Gallup 2019.

congenital part of our nature. Most of us have been burned as a result of someone conspiring against us, so it's a reasonable anxiety.

Once in ages past, Lucifer the Anointed Cherub had the thought that perhaps the Creator was not as he seemed. He acted on that thought and set his sights on the Throne of the Universe.

Lucifer acquired the knowledge he sought but found he was not the Creator's equal. Since his fall, the Rebel's schemes have echoed the same theme. Humankind's original parents succumbed to the same weakness. Knowledge, even though forbidden, seemed to be their golden ticket to get from *here* to *there*.

The apple didn't fall far from the tree. Knowledge is still equated with power, and the darker the data, the more precious the power. Certainly, this isn't to say that the pursuit of knowledge is bad. Scripture commends learning and wisdom...

- The lips of the wise spread knowledge (Proverbs 15:7).
- The discerning heart seeks knowledge (Proverbs 15:14).
- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

But unless this pursuit originates in "the fear of the Lord," the results are usually catastrophic. Let's examine how conspiracies stack up to the biblical worldview.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a philosophy that can easily and subtly infuse itself into almost every religion. Much like the New Age movement, Gnosticism is a complex set of beliefs that can vary among its proponents. The term *gnostic* means "having knowledge." An underlying presumption is that most people don't have this special knowledge, thus, those who do have it are superior to the rest of humanity. Even though the ideas grew within 1st-century Judaism and Christianity, its tenets deny many aspects of both.³⁴³ Gnostics often

³⁴³ Some Gnostic ideas are also similar to earlier concepts from Buddhism and other religions.

claim that Judeo-Christian beliefs are a “start” but that much more information and growth is needed.

Rather than trace the complicated details of the many forms of Gnosticism, I’ll take the risk of over oversimplifying and amalgamating the commonalities of this belief system. Here are the basic ideas...

- The ultimate God (*Ein Sof*) is unknowable.
- God generated lesser gods called emanations.
- An emanation called Sophia (Wisdom) sinned and created Demiurges.
- Bad Demiurges created the world.
- In this creation, sparks of life were embedded in physical bodies (us).
- Thus, the physical world is bad, the spirit world is good.
- Demiurges made lesser bad entities called Archons as helpers.
- Demiurges and the Archons try to keep us from finding the truth.
- Angels bring us information.
- Jesus came in spirit (not body) to try to tell us the truth.
- By studying Gnostic “truths” we can be free from this evil, physical world.

Gnosticism assimilated a related belief called *Docetism*. This heresy claimed that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, was too holy to ever be a physical human. One of Docetism’s explanation of the earthly Jesus, was that his physical form was simply a projection or illusion. Another was that the Christ spirit descended as a dove at the baptism of the man Jesus, inhabiting his body until death. The dangers of Gnosticism are apparent. It completely rewrites the biblical concepts of God, man, and especially Christ’s incarnation. When any of these are wrong, there is no hope of atonement for our sins.

Gnostic heresies were already spreading through the early 1st-century Church. Many New Testament passages are aimed specifically at the errors of Gnosticism. Certain passages make more sense in the context of these false teachings...

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily... (Colossians 2:8-9).

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him (Colossians 1:15-16).³⁴⁴

Gnosticism still operates today, but its real danger is when it's disguised within mainline doctrines. It typically appears as the over-emphasis of the spiritual and dismissal of the physical. God made us as unique creatures, possessing *both* spiritual and physical components. Although it's unclear exactly how these two interface, we are assured that both are important. Scripture demands that we concern ourselves with the physical needs of our neighbors as well as the spiritual. We are also instructed to view our bodies as the "temple of God." Furthermore, our bodies will be important throughout eternity. Chuck Swindoll notes...

Unfortunately, traces of Gnostic thought continue to permeate the thinking of many well-meaning Christians today. For example, some Christians think that only two things will last into eternity: God's Word and the souls of men and women — an emphasis on the spiritual and an exclusion of the physical. But this is wrong. The Bible explicitly teaches that not only

³⁴⁴ Emphasis added to indicate phrases directed at Gnostic heresies.

will these two last into eternity but so will our bodies, in a glorified state (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44).³⁴⁵

God has willed that our spirits be clothed in a physical (though glorified and immortal) body in his heavenly realm. The importance of this balance between the physical and spiritual realms is in stark contrast not only to Gnosticism, but to New Age and other pantheistic counterfeits.

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

I have lots of books on my shelf—so many that I have to constantly sort through and dispose of the lesser-used. Yet some have permanent homes in my library. Among those are several Bible translations as well as good commentaries and a few with more sentimental value than utility. The others range in usefulness depending on my current needs. There are even a few quite heretical ones that help inform my worldview and reveal some of the Enemy’s tactics.

When I study Scripture, I depend on good translations and lexicons of the Old and New Testaments, but I have additional spiritual sources. I’ve found Lewis, Tozer, and Schaeffer immensely valuable, as well as more recent authors such as MacArthur, Hitchcock, and Packer. These extra-biblical writers (none of whom would ever claim divine inspiration) have helped me understand many biblical principles over the years. Their works have pointed me to verses of comfort in the Psalms and have explained passages in Romans that seemed over my head. *I have many books that help me spiritually. I have one book that is the inspired Word of God.*

We might imagine the Apostles and other New Testament writers locked in their studies with a single set of the Old Testament (Torah) scrolls, too pious to read the popular rags. No doubt all of these good Jewish boys were well-versed in the Scriptures, and they did read and study their Torah. However, we know that second-temple Jews (and early Church members) read the literature of the day extensively. It surprises some to discover that just as today, writers were commenting

³⁴⁵ Chuck Swindoll, “Mind Over Matter: The Heresy of Gnosticism Both Then and Now,” Insight for Living, Accessed from www.oneplace.com, 27 June 2020.

on religion, politics, and life at large. And like modern books, the works ranged from ignorant to enlightened.

There is good evidence that second-temple Jews read a wide variety of secular and religious books, in addition to the Torah and newly circulating apostolic letters. A collection of the more popular religious writings of that time has become known as the *Apocrypha*. These were produced by various Jewish thinkers roughly from 300 BC to 100 AD. A few within Judaism (and later in the early Church) believed that various apocryphal writings should be included in the canon.³⁴⁶ It's clear, though, that Jews, in general, distinguished between the inspired Word of God (the Torah) and these other writings. The 1st-century historian Josephus says...

...our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the [Torah] by our forefathers.³⁴⁷

The Babylonian Talmud also affirms that during the intertestamental period, Jews believed that no inspired works were given...

When the latter prophets died, that is, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, then the Holy Spirit came to an end in Israel.³⁴⁸

A larger group of writings called *pseudepigraphs* were also known to second-temple Judaism. The term literally means "written under a false name" since authors of this genre wrote assuming the words *would have been* spoken by a particular figure. For example, we have the *Book of Thomas* and the *Books of Enoch*, both of anonymous authorship. Like my library, extra-biblical works ranged in usefulness and authority.

Writers of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books typically didn't claim inspiration or authority. On the contrary, they often allude to *other* prophetic writings as truly inspired. Many have doctrinal and

³⁴⁶ Catholics, Orthodox, and others do include some or all of the Apocryphal books in the Canon. Catholics refer to them as the Deuterocanon.

³⁴⁷ Josephus, *Against Apion*.

³⁴⁸ Tosefta, Sotah 13:3

historical mistakes or contradictions (as we might expect from modern writers, also—this author included) since they are the works of flawed humanity. Perhaps most informative, New Testament writers do cite phrases from these non-inspired books, yet never imply inspiration or undeniable accuracy (much as when Paul quoted Greek writers).³⁴⁹

Books of the Apocrypha*

- 1st Book of Esdras
- 2nd Book of Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- Additions to the Book of Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus
- Baruch
- Letter of Jeremiah
- Prayer of Azariah
- Susanna
- Bel and the Dragon
- Prayer of Manasseh
- 1st Book of the Maccabees
- 2nd Book of the Maccabees

*(the list will vary among different groups)

³⁴⁹ The movie *Chariots of Fire* was released in 1981. It was based on the historical events in the life of Eric Liddell in the 1924 Olympics. I recall a pastor at that time using an example from the movie as a metaphor in his sermon. So, why would a godly pastor pull sermon material from an “uninspired” Hollywood drama? The illustration made sense to the congregation, since most of us had seen the movie. The pastor believed the movie to be an accurate portrayal of the real events, and even though he would likely object to Hollywood’s products in general, and perhaps even parts of the movie, that particular bit was useful in his sermon. Similarly, Jude, the NT writer uses content from the pseudepigraphal book of 1st Enoch in verses 14-15. Some early church leaders believed Enoch should be viewed as inspired, but the majority did not. It’s obvious that Jude knew the work quite well, and whatever he believed about its inspiration, he thought the content was appropriate for making his point. Also, since the book of Jude itself is inspired, can’t we be assured that the Holy Spirit deemed the usage of that particular phrase appropriate? More recently, the *Book of Common Prayer* affirms that even though the extra-biblical books were not doctrinal “the church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners.” Many leaders among the Reformers and the Puritans used these writings.

Selected Pseudepigraphal Books

- 3rd Maccabees
- 4th Maccabees
- Assumption of Moses
- 1st Book of Enoch
- 2nd Book of Enoch
- Book of Jubilees
- 2nd Baruch
- 3rd Baruch
- Letter of Aristeas
- Life of Adam and Eve
- Ascension of Isaiah
- Psalms of Solomon
- Sibylline Oracles
- Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

The relevance of all this today is in the misjudging of these extra-biblical writings on both extremes. Since Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, much attention has been focused on non-canonical sources. Brown's story refers to the *Gospel of Thomas*, a Gnostic work written sometime around the end of the 1st century. An exciting fictional account with intriguing, yet erroneous secrets can be highly influential. People who had no clue about pseudepigraphs suddenly became enamored with the quest for "secret" knowledge that might be hidden in these books.

There are no real secrets in these documents. Heretical ideas abound, especially in the Gnostic material, but they have been studied and analyzed by some of the best minds in Christendom for centuries. Doctrinal oddities have been thoroughly debunked by scholars. However, with most Christians unfamiliar with apologetics and Church history, those opposed to Christianity get their fifteen-seconds-of-fame when a new "scandalous" doctrine is discovered in an ancient source.

Some shun these extra-biblical works passionately, but non-canonical works of the second-temple period can have significant value in our understanding of Scriptural context. The unique phrases and idioms of the day used by these authors are sometimes better exemplified than the same ones in New Testament books. They also enhance the historical context of the 1st century, revealing the traditions and politics of the time.³⁵⁰ Perhaps most important, several of the extra-biblical sources are commentaries on inspired Scripture. Understanding the concepts familiar to contemporary writers (whether right or wrong) is often useful in our comprehensive knowledge of Scripture.

Bible Codes

Math is weird. That's not just my opinion while in fifth grade. Before the beginnings of recorded history, thinkers were noticing unusual correlations between mathematics and the physical world. In his *Timaeus*, Plato noted "the handiwork of a divine Craftsman who, imitating an unchanging and eternal model, imposes mathematical order on preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe."³⁵¹ Modern scientists are still finding the same peculiarities in the physics of the cosmos.

Lacking a separate numeral system such as ours, the Hebrew language uses letters to represent numbers. Similar to our alphanumeric usages (1-800-BUY-THIS!), it's easy to see how words began to represent numbers and vice versa. Some early Jewish cults used numerology as a mystic device for dealing in "secret" knowledge.³⁵² The system, known as *gematria*, is still common today. Practitioners perform all kinds of mathematical gymnastics with word-numerals. Since words are made of letters that represent numerals, the sum of letters carries a numeral for a word. For example, if I calculate the sum

³⁵⁰ We'll see later the importance of the 1st Book of Enoch in understanding language and context.

³⁵¹ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, www.stanford.edu, Accessed Mar 10, 2020.

³⁵² Much of Jewish numerology was crystallized into the fourteenth-century book the *Zohar*. By the Renaissance, the mystic Cabala (Kabbalah) cult was well-established and quite popular among Jews. In the early 1900s, a book by E.W. Bullinger pushed these ideas into Christian circles. Many modern "prophets" still use his teachings.

of the letters in my name, JOHN = 47 (based on the English alphabet, a=1, b=2, c=3, etc.).

But as you might guess, math can get very complicated very quickly. Here is a sample extrapolation of Genesis 1:1 by a numerologist...

The numeric value of the first word of this verse is 913; of the last 296; of the middle, the fourth word, 401; the numeric value of the first, middle and last words is thus 1610, or 230 sevens; the numeric value of the first, middle, and last letters of the 28 letters of this verse is 133, or 19 sevens. If now the first and last letters of each of the seven words in this verse have their numeric value placed against them, we have for their numeric value 1383, or 199 sevens.³⁵³

Biblical numerologists have claimed to find volumes of hidden information in Scripture such as the identity of the author of Hebrews and proof that God is a trinity. Realistically, numbers can be manipulated to mean just about anything the numerologist desires, as shown by the preceding quote.

Yet this isn't to totally discredit the significance of biblical numbers. God frequently and consistently used numbers symbolically in Scripture to emphasize certain concepts. For example, the number 7 typically points to the concept of *perfection* or *completion*. In the book of Revelation alone, there are 7 churches, 7 spirits, 7 bowls, 7 trumpets, 7 eyes, 7 plagues, 7 angels, 7 lampstands, 7 stars, 7 crowns, 7 horns, 7 kings, and 7 seals.

Another example is the number 40 which indicates *trials* or *judgment*—40 days of rain, 40 years of wandering, Saul, David, and Solomon each ruled 40 years, 40 days of fasting, 40 days of temptation, Goliath taunted 40 days, Moses on mountain 40 days, Moses tended sheep 40 years. It should be noted that this type of numerology doesn't attempt to locate secret knowledge, rather the *known* number-symbols support the particular context.

³⁵³ Ivan Panin, "Bible Numerics," *Things to Come* 17, Dec 1911, 140.

There is one conspicuous use of a number code in Scripture. The book of Revelation describes the “number of the beast” (Antichrist)...

[The Beast] causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666 (Revelation 13:16-18).³⁵⁴

Some Symbolic Numbers in Scripture

- 1 – Unity of God
- 2 – Division
- 3 – Nature of God
- 4 – Universal truth
- 5 – Goodness and grace
- 6 – Nature of man
- 7 – Completion
- 8 – New beginnings
- 9 – Finality
- 10 – Fullness
- 11 – Chaos.
- 12 – Government
- 13 – Rebellion

The implication does seem that some numerical translation of Antichrist’s name will be the identifying mark of allegiance to him.

³⁵⁴ This is an intriguing passage, and it has certainly filled the midnight hours of many would-be prophets. Granted, the verses are enigmatic, but a straightforward reading offers several clear facts. During the tribulation, Antichrist will set up a system to control commerce. It will be a cashless system involving a mark on individuals’ forehead or right hand. Without the mark, a person won’t be able to buy or sell, which makes this a life-and-death situation. Exactly what form the mark will take is unclear. Some suggest tattoos or high-tech microchips. It’s interesting that until recently, this all would have seemed impossible. With modern technology (already being used), a system such as this could be implemented worldwide literally overnight.

However, the question has always been “Which code?” It doesn’t seem likely that an English alphabet would work (yet many try). So, do we go with Greek, Latin, Hebrew? And do we let $a=1$, $b=2$, etc.?

If all this tempts you to buy a new supercomputer, relax. In context, these admonitions are aimed at those living in the Tribulation. To the dismay of many, none of us is likely “the one who has understanding.” Although we may see signs of that day approaching, I think Hitchcock has wise advice...

Nothing today is the mark of the beast. People can get so afraid that their social security card or this and that is the Mark of the Beast. The Mark of the Beast will be given out after the Rapture. It will be something that people will know they are taking. Those left behind will be making a conscious choice, and we know this because God is going to hold them eternally accountable for what they decide.³⁵⁵

In 1997, Michael Drosnin's best-seller *The Bible Code*, introduced westerners to a related theory—*equidistant letter sequences* (ELS) in the Jewish Torah. Based on an earlier work by Israeli mathematicians, Drosnin claimed that an incredible number of “prophetic” words and phrases were hidden in Jewish Scripture, in addition to many modern-day references.

ELS works by finding words whose letters are spaced equally within the text, such as the term “UFO” hidden in this English sentence:

YOU ARE A FINE DOG.

Note that the letters are at 5-letter intervals. Of course, for this to work, we must define the parameters such as to use 5-letter spacing, disregard spaces, etc. Proponents get even more excited when the underlying code seems to fit the superficial text:

WHY DO YOU FEAR THE FLYING OF ORBS?

³⁵⁵ Nathan Jones, “Mark Hitchcock on the Mark of the Beast,” www.bibleprophecy-blog.com, 2 Feb 2010.

With the aid of modern computers, entire texts may be rapidly searched for an almost endless combination of letters at any spacing.

An interesting example is that every fiftieth letter of Genesis starting with the first *taw* (t), produces the Hebrew word *Torah*, and the same happens with the text of Exodus. Other results claimed include...

- Every 666th letter in the Torah spells out *satan.the.accuser* seven different times.
- A twelve-letter reading of Isaiah 53 gives *Jesus.is.my.name* and dozens of place names from the ministry of Jesus.
- The close-proximity group *shakespeare.macbeth.hamlet.stage* as well as *president.kennedy.to.die.dallas*.
- Overlapping *twin.towers.airplane*.
- Grouping of *the.sin.the.crime.of.bin.laden*, in the same passage with the actual phrase “They saw the smoke rising above the land like the smoke of a furnace.”

...And *ad infinitum*. Similar examples proliferate as more computer hobbyists have more time on their hands.

Proponents of Torah codes point out that it isn't simply finding words, but finding related words in close proximity to each other, or overlapping each other. For example, one searcher found the names of Princess Diana, her boyfriend, and their chauffeur during the tragic wreck, all overlapping in a Torah passage.

One of the obvious limitations of ELS code is that the searcher must know the desired term before searching. In other words, there is no way to randomly search and find a prophecy about a future event. A specific phrase such as “twin towers” must be entered, then searched at various ELSs. In a way, I suppose it's more of an “un-prophecy.”

Several Christian teachers have promoted Bible codes as evidence of the Scripture's divine inspiration. I admit that the codes are interesting, but there are skeptics. Unfortunately, it takes someone well-grounded in math and statistics (and some Hebrew language) to fully understand, much less critique the phenomenon. Some claim that given a large enough text set and a huge number of possible intervals, start points, and lengths, we would expect many orderly, yet random phrases. It should also be noted similar results have been produced when using nonbiblical texts such as Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Perhaps this is a good case to use the could-he-would-he test. Could God in his unlimited knowledge and creativity encode thousands, maybe millions of prophecies and secret references in Scripture? Of course. Would he? Therein may lie the issue. If we consider this a form of signs-and-wonders, does Scripture need a little “kick-start” in the PR department? Or in practical terms, is the code phenomenon drawing multitudes to the gospel as did NT miracles?

So far, Bible codes are thought-provoking, but their overall value to evangelism or edification is questionable...

ELS is simply a high-tech version of a Ouija board or tarot cards, and the biblical injunction against divination applies.³⁵⁶

Best-case scenario—one more piece of evidence that God is creative and intelligent. Worst-case—believers spend valuable Kingdom resources and defy God’s principles regarding secret knowledge...

The Illuminati

The years surrounding 1776 were turbulent in other countries besides the newborn United States. In Bavaria (Germany), intellectuals were concerned that leaders in the Catholic Church and state government were abusing powers. Jesuit priest and professor Adam Weishaupt formed the secret Bavarian Illuminati. Perhaps the quintessential conspiracy theory, their stated objective was to covertly “put an end to the machinations of the purveyors of injustice, to control them without dominating them.”³⁵⁷

Subsequently, this group along with other “secret societies” such as Freemasonry was outlawed. The underground Illuminati presumably operated secretly through a network of members in places of government, military, academic, and church leadership. Some believe their secret activities significantly affected the history of Europe and perhaps the world.

³⁵⁶ CRI Statement, “The Bible Code,” www.equip.org, article ID: DB309, Apr 7, 2009.

³⁵⁷ Richard van Dülmen, *The Society of Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

Rumors of the Illuminati never died out. Many are convinced that the network continues to work behind the scenes all over the globe today, secretly controlling, politics, religion, economics, and wars. The term *New World Order* (NWO) has become the catch-all for the secret societies alleged to be controlling world events. Their agenda is said to be moving all independent nations toward a single world government of which the members would have control. According to conspiracy theorists, wars, crises, business activities, and politics are managed in an effort to desensitize and indoctrinate the population. More extreme ideas have the NWO responsible for UFOs, Kennedy's assassination, and other "smaller" conspiracies. In the 1990s, some Christians began to connect the NWO to the goals of the prophesied Antichrist.^[p.348] A book by televangelist and presidential candidate Pat Robertson, *The New World Order*, drew much attention to the subject.

Knights Templar

After the medieval Church recaptured Jerusalem from the Muslims in 1099, Christians from Europe began pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Many were robbed or murdered during this time by renegade bands of Muslims. A group of enterprising men formed one of the first "church ninja" organizations to meet the threat. The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (later shortened to Knights Templar) received papal approval in 1129.

These highly trained soldiers were the epitome of SWAT tacticians, able to swoop in and neutralize enemies of the Church at the drop of a *mitre pretiosa*. Members exercised the strictest discipline—no drinking, swearing, gambling, pointed shoes, or kissing women (not even their mothers). Knights Templar expressed primary devotion to the Virgin Mary. Their icon became a red cross on a white background.

Soon, the organization began a very effective banking system. The strategy was to allow pilgrims from all over Europe to invest money in their hometown so that they could travel safely on their pilgrimages. Cash could be withdrawn at any KT bank along the way. This system made the Knights wealthy. Eventually, the Knights Templar established shipping companies, castles, and fortresses. The group traveled extensively battling Muslims.

But by the 1300s, the Knights were falling out of favor with governments and the populace, eventually to be outlawed and eliminated across the Christian world. Our interest here, though, is the legacy of the Knights Templar as a secret society. With wealth comes means and influence. The KT were believed to have control of most of the Christian world during their short reign. As we all have heard, old soldiers never die. Conspiracy theories have this huge cohort of unexecuted, fugitive Knights, responsible for all sorts of secret missions and adventures. Some are thought to have regained powerful positions in world politics. Others allegedly established or joined other secretive groups such as the Freemasons.³⁵⁸ Many attempt to trace the KT lineage to American founding fathers. Even before the *National Treasure* movies, murmurings of KT treasures troves and shadow governments were common.

Did the Knights Templar visit North America? This is a common allegation. Several runestones and other artifacts have been discovered, bearing KT emblems, scripts, and iconology. The Cross of Lorraine shape (a vertical line with two cross lines) is a sure sign to some of KT influence. Geologist Scott Wolter offers several archaeological clues to their pre-Columbian presence in America.³⁵⁹

Do the Knights still operate covertly today? Many conspiracy theorists think so, pointing to the KT symbols that seem to pop up everywhere such as the Exxon sign and the impression on Oreo cookies. Undoubtedly, the Knights Templar had a significant and lasting

³⁵⁸ Freemasonry took on many Knights Templar symbols and rituals including the red Cross of Constantine.

³⁵⁹ Wolter's ideas are classified as *pseudoarchaeology* by scientists. This is an example of the tendency for branches of science and academia to exclude ideas that oppose the central dogma. On the positive side, academia is peer-reviewed which certainly is an organized way to keep the discipline on course. This "majority rules" system has worked reasonably well for centuries, and is necessary in a world of untestable or untested proposals. It's problematic, however, when the system excludes ideas that have some legitimate evidence simply because they question major tenets. For example, one of the central tenets of biology is naturalistic Darwinian evolution (evolution with no need for theistic intervention at any point). Within this system, creationist (or supernatural) views are not allowed in the "legitimate" discourse. In the case of Wolter and others, any evidence of pre-Columbian Europeans in North America won't be considered. The point is not whether outside views are correct, but whether the criteria for inclusion in the arena of ideas should be broader than the worldview of the current academic leaders.

influence on the world. This influence is still present whether bodily or not.

The Deep State

Does the government/military establishment lie? Without a doubt! The most recent, significant lie was over whether there were any recent investigations of UAP (UFOs). The official response at many different levels from many government leaders was “absolutely not.” Then, in 2017 the confession was made that the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) had operated from 2007 to 2012 with a budget of 22 million. I do have mixed feelings about this. Government secrets are necessary for many security reasons, but isn’t confidentiality possible without blatant lies? I’ve heard Christian leaders excuse this by claiming that only individuals can sin in lying. Who is responsible when groups lie?

So, on at least one level, there was a government conspiracy to form and operate a UFO research program while denying its existence. Sadly, more people believe that the government is withholding evidence of alien life than believe that Jesus is God’s son.³⁶⁰ I’m not so naïve as to think there aren’t other falsehoods floating around in government, nor am I so paranoid that I don’t believe anything coming from my civic leaders.

There have also been disturbing allegations in recent decades that a *deep state* or *shadow government* is controlling certain aspects of the federal government. This system is described as a group of entrenched, non-elected government leaders, with long-term tenures who are networking to influence the visible government.³⁶¹ Some claim the

³⁶⁰ Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, “Why Alien Abductions Are Down Dramatically,” www.bostonglobe.com, 12 Jun 2016.

³⁶¹ A mysterious entity who self-identifies as QAnon has recently been flooding the Internet with outrageous claims regarding the alleged shadow government. As a brief sampling, QAnon accuses various political leaders of sex-trafficking, devil worship, cannibalism, and just about every other sordid action. Could this person(s) be right about some things? Possibly, but Q has already been proven wrong on several accounts. My concern is that Q seems to have a pied-piper effect on many Christians because some of his ideas align with Christian ideals. In fact, many see the Q movement morphing into a religious movement, at a time when conspiracy theorists feel the need to be part of their own conspiracy. QAnon’s

group is also tightly connected with the military-industrial complex. (Yes, it does sound like other conspiratorial groups, except this one is actually within the government.) Supposedly, this network has agendas and implementation abilities that bypass the president, Supreme Court, and most of Congress. Operations are said to be on a “need to know” basis, which typically precludes short-term elected and appointed officials such as presidents and their staffs. Speculation is that the budget for deep state operations could come from the over 20 trillion in unaccounted DoD funds.³⁶²

The Real Conspiracy

I won’t pretend to have evidence for or against the existence of the New World Order, deep state, or any other global conspiracy. But as Christians, we *know* with certainty there is a genuine, organized conspiracy at the highest level. Though many of Satan’s daily workings might be obscured, his corporate mission is laid out clearly in Scripture—devour, lie, confuse, destroy, accuse, and deceive.

We are given warnings, weapons, and armor in order to discern and disrupt Satan's top-level conspiracy, yet it’s the mid-level of which we are uncertain. Some modern conspiracy theories are obviously overthought. Others may be legitimate. As Christians, we should be aware of these earthly schemers knowing that they are mere flesh-and-bone shadows of the heavenly battle...

Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear... (Isaiah 8:12-13).

Believers will undoubtedly be the focus of conspiracies at several levels. Almost daily, new secrets sweep cyberdom—microchips,

ideas have many elements that are antithetical to the teachings of Christ. I believe Christians should use a great deal of discernment when analyzing and aligning with the Q movement.

³⁶² \$21 trillion lost from 1998-2015; Laurence Kotlikoff, “Is Our Government Intentionally Hiding \$21 Trillion In Spending?” www.forbes.com, 21 Jul 2018.

shadow governments, gold, 666, viruses, Men in Black. Christians are perhaps more vulnerable simply because we tend to care deeply about things. And in no way am I suggesting that any of these ideas are unworthy of consideration. Believers *must* stay tuned in to our mission field and to world events. Jesus leaves no question about our situation or our need for discernment...

I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16).

However, this type of discernment comes at a price—the spiritual discipline of knowing God through prayer and the study of his Word. Without firm grounding in God’s truth, we end up burning straw men and wasting resources on make-believe enemies. On the other extreme, the Enemy wins when we ignore true attacks on truth and freedom. Moreover, if we give in to Satan’s conspiracy to destroy our families and churches, what good will it do to expose lesser secrets? Spirit-led priorities are crucial. Believers should set the bar for clear thinking and wisdom in discerning truth.

The Final Word

It’s unfortunate that in the search for supernatural secrets many overlook the most important supernatural database of all time—*God’s own thoughts in the form of his written Word*.

My beliefs about Scripture are probably no secret by now. I believe a supernatural God is more than able to provide me with his perfect, exact, and knowable Word. *How* could an omnipotent being do less? *Why* would a perfectly loving being do less? I have no doubt that the original manuscripts of the biblical writers are 100% as God wanted.

I also trust that a sovereign God can *preserve* his Word through the ages so that I have access to that 100%. Does God supernaturally preserve Scripture? Yes, but it’s difficult to say at which supernatural level. Much of the preservation has been through God’s providential guidance of translators, scholars, and teachers through the centuries.

This isn’t to say that every translation and teaching is inspired and without error. We have God’s truth in his written Word, but again, the

Spirit reveals this truth through spiritual disciplines of prayer and deliberate study of Scripture. We must be made “a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”³⁶³ For some, this may mean the hard work of comparing early manuscripts in original languages and studying pseudepigraphs for contextual meanings. For others, it could mean prayerfully locating a church that believes and teaches that the Bible is, indeed, the supernatural, inerrant, complete Word of God. It could also mean that you as an individual take seriously that...

You have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

³⁶³ 2 Timothy 2:15

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Relics and Rituals

“Okay Jones, you win! Blow it up. Yes, blow it up! Blow it back to God. All your life has been spent in pursuit of archaeological relics. Inside the Ark are treasures beyond your wildest aspirations...” Belloq³⁶⁴

Ancestral relics have held significance since our earliest recorded history. I feel a connection when I use one of my grandfather’s tools or eat from a dish my grandmother used. Humans have a tendency, though, to extend sentimentality into the spiritual. Early Greeks were known to keep certain belongings and body parts of their war heroes as encouragement and a sign of patriotism. It didn’t take long for these items to become charms for protection or good fortune.

At the death of Buddha, his body was cut into eight pieces and distributed to various temples as reminders of his teachings. But by far, the most prevalent veneration of relics has been within Christianity. Mostly a practice associated with Catholicism, the goal of collecting and preserving “sacred” artifacts is believed to be more supernatural than sentimental.

There are precedents in Scripture for personal effects (and personal parts) to produce miraculous effects. An unusual event is recorded regarding the corpse of the prophet Elisha...

Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band

³⁶⁴ *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981, Lucasfilm, Ltd.

was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet (2 Kings 13:20-21).

The tomb was likely a type of mausoleum with cells carved into a hillside, designed to hold bodies. As the men were chiseling out another cell for a body, the sudden appearance of the invading Moabites caused them to quickly hide what they were doing and take cover. In their haste, they likely shoved the body into Elisha's cell. When the dead body touched the prophet's remains it miraculously came back to life.

As with other biblical miracles, this was no gratuitous act of grandstanding, but a deliberate supernatural act with a specific message aimed at a specific audience. Elisha lived in a time of idolatry and disbelief. He had previously given prophecies regarding several important events. Contrary to the belief that there was "magic" in his bones, the recipients of the prophecies would see this miracle as confirmation that truth is established on God's faithfulness, not a mere prophet. God could use the remains of his messenger just as well as the living man, thus, his word would remain true, even after the death of the bearer of the Word...

The primary effect of the miracle was, no doubt, greatly to increase the reverence of the Israelites for the memory of Elisha, to lend force to his teaching, and especially to add weight to his unfulfilled prophecies.³⁶⁵

In the New Testament, we find the Apostle Paul—or rather his belongings—involved in healing miracles.³⁶⁶ His garments themselves could heal and cast out demons. Once again, within the context, there was a clear message conveyed through these events. Paul was not one of the original apostles, and his authority could use a little verification among certain people. Those who witnessed these miracles would be inclined to accept the authority of Paul's message. Note that in each of these cases, it isn't necessarily the object that possesses the supernatural

³⁶⁵ *Barnes Notes on the Bible*, 2 Kings 13, www.biblehub.com, Accessed Feb 25, 2020.

³⁶⁶ Acts 19:12. Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons could heal.

power, but God who reveals his power through the objects. Hang on to that thought and let's look at some other relics.

The Shroud of Turin

There are several pieces of fabric claimed to be the burial cloth of Jesus. It would be easy to see how Jesus' followers might have preserved such a historic object, but the chain-of-custody for any of these artifacts has long been lost. The most famous of these is kept at the Cathedral of Turin in northern Italy. The earliest record of the five-meter piece of linen is from the 14th century, which leaves a long gap of uncertainty.

The piece got a PR boost in 1898 when a photographer noticed the photo negatives of the stains on the cloth showed a positive image. In other words, the stains were actually the negative image of a body. Some had previously assumed that the shroud images were merely painted forgeries of a man's body with stains at the appropriate places to indicate crucifixion. Painted forgeries were known to exist, but this negative aspect was unique.

Was this aspect proof of authenticity? Why would someone fake a negative image? Theories abound. Was the image a miracle? Did spirit energy radiating from Jesus' body print the image? Much research has been conducted on the cloth (as much as allowed on a holy relic). Radiocarbon dating seems to give an origin of only 1300 to 1400 years ago. So far, nothing conclusively indicates that the shroud is physically different from any other ancient fabric. Officially, the Catholic Church neither confirms nor denies the authenticity of the shroud, but the image itself has been deemed worthy of veneration.

The Ark of the Covenant

If ever an artifact could possess a supernatural nature, one would think the Ark of the Covenant a prime candidate. God designated this object to be the temporary interface between the physical world and his divine, earthly presence. The 50x30x30-inch box contained the rod of Aaron, a pot of manna, and the stones upon which God wrote the

commandments. The most important feature, however, was the Mercy Seat on the lid of the box. On this surface, between two golden cherubim, God would supernaturally manifest a physical presence.

Scripture gives an extensive list of rules regarding the ark. Representative of God himself, it's no wonder that the Ark of the Covenant was expected to be revered. Yet despite the strict rules for holiness, the ark itself had no intrinsic power. Its uniqueness was in its role as a place that God designated as special. Any irreverence shown to the ark was irreverence to God. Thus, the harsh consequences when against God's clear warning, Uzzah touched the ark.³⁶⁷

There has long been a type of "ark mania" among some Christians, even before *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I admit it would be exciting to actually find the Ark of the Covenant. Some speculate that it must be found before Jewish temple worship is reestablished during the Tribulation.

Tales abound about whether the ark still exists and where it may be today. Was it taken to Ethiopia by the Queen of Sheba? Is it hidden in secret tunnels below the Temple Mount in Jerusalem? Or is it in a military warehouse in an unmarked crate? Wherever it is, it would be a remarkable historical artifact.

Does it still have its holy designation? I wouldn't think so. The book of Hebrews details how the new covenant far surpasses the old (including the ark)...

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever (Hebrews 6:19-20).

The Ark of the Covenant and the rest of the temple furniture served a crucial purpose under the old covenant. They were earthly shadows of workings in the unseen realm. Compliance with the associated rules

³⁶⁷ Some complain that Uzzah was only trying to help by steadying the ark, and that God overreacted in killing him. This shows an ignorance of God's nature on several levels. God is merciful and loving. When he kills someone there is a just reason. Uzzah likely acted in disregard for the clear instructions.

pictured real actions of supernatural counterparts in ways we may someday comprehend.

Yet as important as these earthly actions were at the time, they have all been completed in Christ. Jesus is the perfect priest, having offered the perfect sacrifice. Amazingly, God's new meeting place with Man is now his very Spirit residing in the believer. There is a continuing supernatural event occurring in the heart of Christ's true followers!

The Cross of Christ

I'm not sure what the general feeling would have been among Christ's followers regarding his cross. From our sanitized modern perspective, the cross is an artwork and decoration. Would a 1st-century Christian, be motivated to preserve an instrument of death, or would the Romans even allow it? Whatever the answer, by medieval times, philosopher Erasmus mused...

So they say of the cross of Our Lord, which is shown publicly and privately in so many places, that, if all the fragments were collected together, they would appear to form a fair cargo for a merchant ship.³⁶⁸

In response, the 19th-century French architect Charles Rohault de Fleury took it upon himself to locate and measure every known alleged fragment of the cross. His research led to the conclusion that only one-third of the mass of the cross was to be found in the relics.³⁶⁹

Various Catholic groups have lengthy histories of the cross. Legends claim the wood originated in Eden as a piece of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, or a Tree of Mercy planted by Seth. Some go on to say that the wood was used by Solomon to build a bridge for the Queen of Sheba. Then the timbers were reused by the Romans to construct the cross of Jesus. Historically, Protestants such as Calvin have debunked the legends and the idea that any of the relics were genuine.

³⁶⁸ Thomas J. Craughwell, "Taking the Measure of Relics of the True Cross," www.ncregister.com, March 25, 2016.

³⁶⁹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "The True Cross," www.newadvent.org, Accessed Feb 25, 2020.

Miscellaneous Body Parts

Sometimes, collection of relics goes beyond personal possessions. Body parts of the deceased may achieve holy status in the eyes of followers. Many cultures have preserved the bones of heroes and ancestors as a form of honor and respect. The complete head of the Greek poet Orpheus was preserved as an oracle.

Reliquaries are filled with bones, teeth, and hair of those considered holy (mostly a Catholic, Buddhist, and Muslim practice). The heart of Saint Camillus is safely packed in salt as a holy relic. Saint Anthony's tongue and vocal cords are kept in a Cathedral in Padua, Italy.

Compared with "holy" objects, human body relics bring up a different issue. Biblically, there is no reason to believe an embalmed saintly finger has any more innate holiness than even the cup Jesus used at the last supper.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the human body has a unique form of holiness. This isn't an intrinsic holiness as much as a sanctity assigned by the Creator.

Christianity differs from most other religions in its two-fold view of the physical body. Unquestionably, Scripture places a high priority on the spirit portion of the human being. But therein is the paradox—we are a human *being*. As Paul says, our supernatural spirits reside in a physical body, yet in a way we can't fully understand, those two components are intimately fused into one being. There are entities who are pure spirit with no need for bodies, however, that isn't the way God made us. Our bodies are important. We won't someday lose our physicality, rather "this mortal shall put on immortality."

Eastern religions and others view the body as a rotting albatross that needs to eventually be put far away and never remembered. True Christianity has always revered the body, even after death, hence the traditions relating to respect (not necessarily veneration or worship) of the remains of an individual.

The question often arises as to whether Christians should practice burial or cremation. Burial is a Judeo-Christian tradition based on the

³⁷⁰ Luther and other reformers attempted to eradicate the veneration of relics. Most Protestant groups have the same view.

belief that believers' bodies will one day be reunited with their spirits. Cremation, on the other hand, is typical in most non-Christian philosophies. More are choosing cremation today for reasons such as cost, practicality, and concern for the environment. This issue might be similar to Paul's view of holy days. In whatever method, "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" and maintain a biblical respect for the physical "clothing" God has provided.³⁷¹

Exorcism

Although the Catholic Church doesn't keep specific records, leaders say that exorcisms are at an all-time high. The designated exorcist for the Indianapolis Archdiocese claims 1,700 requests for the procedure in 2018.³⁷² Many world religions and denominations perform some type of demon expulsion, but Catholics, by far, experience the most and have developed a well-structured ritual for managing them. We've previously established that demon-possession is possible. [p. 49] Our focus here is whether exorcism is the solution to the condition. A good starting point is to see how the malady was handled in the New Testament.

There are eight "exorcisms" recorded in the Gospels. The term *exorcism* isn't used in Scripture and isn't a good descriptor for the biblical events. Exorcism implies a ritualistic procedure for inducing the action, whereas in the ministry of Jesus, casting out demons was an act of healing. In the epistles, casting out demons was associated primarily with the Apostles...

...the New Testament epistles never mention the practice of casting out demons. However, they do teach that miracles and

³⁷¹ Early Christians as well as many today worry with loved ones who might not have had a "Christian burial." Although respect and Godly intent are important, I don't believe this is a primary issue within Biblical doctrines. Some are concerned about loved ones whose bodies are lost at sea, MIA, or destroyed in accidents. I truly believe we can rest in God's love and grace with issues such as this. Certainly, the Creator who governs every subatomic particle in the universe will have no problem reassembling my body, even if all of my molecules are spread to the four corners.

³⁷² Mike Mariani, "Why Are Exorcisms On the Rise?" www.theatlantic.com, Dec 2018, Accessed 24 May 2020.

healing, including casting out demons, were special identifying signs of an apostle.³⁷³

As a type of charismata, exorcism should operate under the same conditions [p. 62]. Thus, we would expect this sign to have use in the early church, but not necessarily after the completed New Testament.

Perhaps more importantly, *who* can be demon-possessed? From a biblical worldview, I don't think believers (the temple of the Holy Spirit) can be possessed. A person who is truly possessed then is an unbeliever. They have a problem much worse than an inhabiting demon!...

...the proper biblical way to deliver an unbeliever from demons is to preach the gospel to him. It doesn't benefit the victim for someone to cast out demons (if possible) only to have him remain in his unsaved condition.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to Questions About Satan, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014), 157.

³⁷⁴ Robert Dean Jr. and Thomas Ice, *What the Bible Teaches About Spiritual Warfare*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000, 2nd), 146-7.

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Supermen

“The Bible talks about angels, archangels, seraphim, cherubim, watchers, holy ones, principalities, and powers. However, we insist on only people; that is all. We are afraid to rise and let our faith-filled imagination enjoy the wonder of the universe.” A.W. Tozer³⁷⁵

“While reason is the natural organ of truth, imagination is the organ of meaning.” C.S. Lewis³⁷⁶

Some ideas have become so pirated by the fringe that it’s difficult to dialog about their true, untarnished origins. The assassination of JFK has generated enough explanations to fill volumes, but there *was* an actual, historic event that ignited the firestorm of esoteric theories. It would be illogical to disregard the incident simply because so many crackpot ideas have been connected to it.

As previously discussed, the first eleven chapters in Genesis are perhaps the most controversial in all of Scripture. That should be expected since the text portrays blatantly supernatural activities, with serious worldview implications. The cynicism resulting from academic biases and ignorant pop-culture interpretations make these accounts seem better suited for Gothic novels and science fiction than Scripture. Chapter 6 relates one of these strange occurrences...

³⁷⁵ A.W. Tozer, *The Crucified Life*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, compiled 2011), 145.

³⁷⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” (First published in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays*, 1939; Later reprinted in *Selected Literary Essays*, 1969).

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown (Genesis 6:1-4).

As with all curious passages, there are numerous interpretations. Once again, preferences among them seem to be based on the degree to which one is willing to accept the supernatural. The *Sethite* interpretation sees the sons of God as simply the descendants of Adam and Eve’s third child, Seth. The idea is that some of the men in this “righteous” line married the “cursed” daughters of Cain’s line.³⁷⁷ Another interpretation, the *human ruler* view, asserts that “sons of God” refers to human kings who in Near East tradition were considered divine. These leaders took multiple wives which is supposedly being condemned here.

Both views are problematic in that the term “sons of God” is used throughout the Old Testament almost exclusively for beings who inhabit the spirit realm. Also, neither interpretation explains the birth of the unusual Nephilim. Until the objections of Augustine in the 4th century, Jewish and Christian scholars believed in a supernatural exegesis of the passage. The simple, literal view suggests that divine beings, in rebellion against God, cohabited with human women who bore children with unusual characteristics.³⁷⁸ Yet that strikes a 21st-century, naturalistic nerve. Can a Christian worldview handle demon-human unions, or should the idea be rerouted into mythology? Other

³⁷⁷ Cain had been cursed by God for killing Abel (Genesis 4:10).

³⁷⁸ Assuming these are divine beings (sons of God, *bene Elohim*), they are not clearly identified. We have reason to believe that there are several types of *beney Elohim* [p.34] Obviously, they aren’t “good guys,” so they either became “fallen” at this point, or they were already among the fallen beings of the spirit realm. I don’t hold the belief of some who claim these particular evil spirits are synonymous with the demons who now follow Satan. Whatever their origin, we know that God considered their sin especially heinous and now has them bound in a realm called Tartarus, while other fallen entities are still free.

passages may shed light on this one. First, what about the fact stated by Jesus...

For in the resurrection [people] neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven (Matthew 22:30).

Many scholars don't take this as an axiom for the behavior of all divine beings. In context, Jesus is saying that in the natural order, heavenly angels *don't* marry.³⁷⁹ This doesn't necessarily address the ability or motivation of all angels to procreate, or of fallen angels to so choose. And, the account seems to imply that these divine beings were, indeed, acting in flagrant disobedience, and not in accordance with the prescribed norm. We also have verses in Jude that seem to refer to Genesis 6...

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. (Jude v.6-7).

If this is the same event, we are told straight up that these are divine beings, who chose to reject their assigned roles. Because of this disobedience, these beings are currently held captive awaiting God's final judgment. Also, Jude clarifies that their sin was *extreme* sexual perversion, comparable to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. The KJV rendering of this perversion is "going after strange flesh" which would seem to be an appropriate description here. The Apostle Peter gives more insight...

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness,

³⁷⁹ Or a better question, do they procreate? The literal translation, "took women for themselves," can just as easily apply to sexual relations.

with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority (2 Peter 2:4 ff.).

Peter links the incident to both the wickedness of the two cities and the immorality of the antediluvian population. It's clear that the emphasis is on the similarity of the sins. In all cases, it involves defiance of authority and sexual behavior outside of that which would be considered natural.

Second-temple Jews also had access to several extra-biblical accounts of the events described in these verses. Jude's account reflects familiarity with the predated pseudepigraphal Book of 1st Enoch. I've included the entire account for comparison...

And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: "Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children."

And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it.

And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them... And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells. Who consumed all the acquisitions of

men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind...³⁸⁰

For our purposes, let's disregard the details that are added by the Enoch document, although they are interesting as non-inspired, possibly-historic information. The pseudepigraphal works were well-known among second-temple Jews including Peter and Jude. As mentioned previously, biblical writers, although fully inspired by the Spirit, still wrote in the context of their experiences and personalities.^[p.293] I think it's relevant that both seemed to implicitly bring the Enoch text to their readers' minds without noting any problems with its basic content.

This doesn't mean that these extra-biblical sources, or Jewish traditions, are elevated to inspired status. The point is that Jews and early Christians acknowledged the Enochian supernatural event (not necessarily the added details) and considered it compatible with the truth of the Old Testament account.

The Nephilim

Perhaps even more disturbing than the actions of the rebellious *beney Elohim* are the children resulting from their sinful sexual unions. Who are these "mighty ones" and "men of renown" who were apparently fathered by demons? The word *Nephilim* is debated. The Septuagint translated the term as "giant" but many Hebrew scholars connect it to the root word for "fallen" or "earth-born." The association with giants likely came from 1st Enoch or subsequent dealings with the Nephilim in the conquest of Canaan...

The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them (Numbers 13:32-33).

³⁸⁰ 1st *Book of Enoch*, from chapters 6 and 7.

Thus, some or all these offspring could have been giants, but the term doesn't designate that fact. Whatever their stature, the implication is that they were categorically different from humans. Beyond this, little detail is given here about these beings. By the context, though, the author expected early Jewish readers of the Genesis 6 account to remember or be familiar with the historicity and deviations of these "renowned" men.

We'll look at more esoteric ideas later, but the biblical fact is that the Nephilim *did* exist, and the circumstances were certainly strange. Tozer rightly noted that when it comes to supernatural things, "We are afraid to rise and let our faith-filled imagination enjoy the wonder of the universe."³⁸¹ Very likely, the complete Nephilim story is even more intriguing than our speculations.

There is the question as to whether in committing their perversions, the demonic fathers of the Nephilim took on a new physical form or simply inhabited the bodies of willing human men.³⁸² If the former is the case, then the Nephilim offspring had "foreign DNA" not present in the genome of the human line created by God. This would have serious implications for God's original plan for humanity. How many prophecies and doctrines might be affected by non-human genomes scattered through the population? Some claim that these actions by the evil sons of God (through Satan's leadership) were intended to corrupt the offspring (seed) of Eve whom God was planning to use in redeeming the fallen world...

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

In other words, Satan may have believed that the promise of the Messiah (Jesus) could be thwarted if his genetic line was not completely human (God-made). A.W. Pink writes...

³⁸¹ Tozer, *The Crucified Life*.

³⁸² E.g. Mark Hitchcock has the former view, John MacArthur the latter.

Apparently, by this means, Satan hoped to destroy humanity (the channel through which the woman’s Seed was to come) by producing a race of monstrosities. How nearly he succeeded is evident from the fact, that except for one family, “all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”³⁸³

Pink goes so far as to suggest that God’s purpose for the flood was not only to destroy the rebellious human population but to purged those contaminated with this “foreign flesh.”³⁸⁴ This would certainly be consistent with God’s extreme response: “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land.” In the Genesis passage, note that God mercifully allowed 120 years before he would send the flood judgment. Perhaps even after the warning and grace period, every human except Noah’s family had become genetically tainted.

If all of this seems a mythical fairy tale, completely out of place in Scripture, then you are likely viewing the event with the same seriousness as did God. According to Unger, that’s why this and the associated Scriptures...

...unanimously represent the whole episode as being a unique and shocking abnormality, breaking down every God-ordained law for both the physical and spiritual realms, and producing outrageous confusion in both.³⁸⁵

Giants in the Land

So, whatever became of the Nephilim? As noted earlier, *Nephilim* may not literally mean *giant*, yet the two seem to be associated in Scripture. One of the Hebrew terms for a giant is *raphah* (pl. *raphaim*).

³⁸³ A.W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*, (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1922), 93.

³⁸⁴ Another mystery is why the Nephilim in Numbers 33 are still on earth *after* the flood. Some suggest that one of Noah’s daughters-in-law may have carried Nephilim genes, or a number of Nephilim escape the flood. I believe both of these are less likely than a scenario in which the same type of demonic unions occurred after the flood. The fact that the human lineage may have been “contaminated” by Nephilim genes once again has been used to explain why God’s command to purge certain Canaanite groups seemed so urgent and harsh.

³⁸⁵ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 51.

Goliath, arguably the most popular giant in the Bible, was a descendant of Rapha, the possible origin of the designation. But the Old Testament mentions many more Nephilim—not just individuals but entire tribes:

- The Emites and Anakites (Deuteronomy 2:10).
- The Zamzummim (Deuteronomy 2:20).
- The Anakim (Numbers 13:33).
- The Amorites (Amos 2:9–10).
- The Gittites (2 Samuel 15).

The land of Canaan seemed to be crawling with giants, challenging the Israelites at every turn. When heights are given, they range from 7 to 15 feet. An aggregate description of the Nephilim gives the implication that some were not simply large, but terrifying, awesome, or monstrous. Often, they were described as hideous yet consummate warriors (unlike a person suffering from the hormonal defect *pituitary gigantism*). It wouldn't be unreasonable to assume that these demon-human offspring and their descendants possessed a variety of unusual traits. We can only guess what oddities might emerge from subsequent matings among Nephilim over generations, especially if we assume their DNA was not designed by Creator God.

There is no biblical evidence that friendly relationships existed between humans and Nephilim. Israel was continually frightened, threatened, and tormented by them. Nephilim characteristics also seemed to be heritable, as we might predict from their origin and the principles of genetics. We are told that Goliath's had four brothers who were also giants.

Those who believe the inspiration of Scripture shouldn't be surprised by the number of extra-biblical historical reports of giants. Some folklore exaggeration might be expected, but as we often see, legend can have some basis in fact. Many cultures, from Egyptian to Native American have historical traditions that describe abnormally large, monstrous people. Pawnees tell of a race of 15-foot-tall men who could outrun a buffalo and grab it up under one arm. Paiutes claim their ancestors had to kill off a band of *Si-Te-Ca* described as very tall, vicious, red-haired cannibals. Interestingly, some common features emerge among global accounts. Tales of legendary giant clans

consistently include red hair, two rows of teeth, fierceness, cannibalism, and six digits per appendage.

Have descendants of any of these groups actually survived until modern times? The discovery of a true giant (not a hormonal condition) wouldn't be inconsistent with Scripture. Many "giant hunters" are on the trail and Internet images of enormous skeletons are common. So far, no physically archived evidence has been verified.

There are anecdotal reports of modern giants. L.A. Marzulli tells of interviewing a member of a special ops task force that had worked in Kandahar Afghanistan in 2002.³⁸⁶ The individual recounted the attack of a 12-foot man near a desert cave. This giant speared one of the soldiers before being killed by the force. According to the witness, the giant had scarlet hair and beard, six digits, and a horrendous smell. The body was said to have been airlifted away from the site. Several other witnesses have verified the story, but the military denies any knowledge. Marzulli and others link giants such as these to the Nephilim.

In considering the possibility of extant giants, I think we should apply the same criteria as with large cryptids. If they exist and if they are flesh-and-bone beings, there would need to be a breeding population. It would be necessary to have a year-round supporting habitat, and the location would need to have remained secluded for quite a while. Probable? Possible?

The Watchers

Daniel uses an interesting word in a dream description...

I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven (Daniel 4:13).

In this NIV translation, the term *watcher* is the Aramaic *ir*. Daniel is the only Biblical writer to use the term, although its derivatives occur frequently in apocryphal books of Enoch and Jubilees. When we discussed heavenly beings earlier [p. 41], we introduced the idea that there

³⁸⁶ Christian writer and researcher L.A. Marzulli offers a variety of resources on the paranormal at lamarzulli.net

are likely more entities in the heavenly realm than just God and angels. Although not inspired works, the Book of Enoch casts watchers as the beings placed in charge of supervising the humans after the fall. Interestingly, Daniel uses this Mesopotamian word for the divine beings “watching over” the events he is referencing. The Enoch version also connects these with the Genesis 6 “sons of God” who rebelled and took human wives.

Several Mesopotamian stories have survived, outlining what seems to be these same events. Bible critics have unsuccessfully attempted to show that the Genesis 6:1-4 account was derived from these earlier writings [see *sequence fallacy*, p. 262]. Many Bible scholars recognize this passage as a literary tool used to counter similar, but false, beliefs. Heiser explains that the account is in the common Old Testament style of...

...a literary and theological effort to undermine the credibility of Mesopotamian gods... Bible writers do this frequently. The strategy often involves borrowing lines and motifs from the literature of the target civilization to articulate correct theology about Yahweh and to show contempt for other gods.³⁸⁷

One of the Mesopotamian counterparts to the Genesis passage is a good example of this. In their story, the watchers were the *apkallus*, divine beings sent to help remedy the sinful pre-flood mess that humans had made. Marduk (the Mesopotamian high-god) gave the apkallus physical bodies to accomplish the work. These divine beings were of superior intellect and taught humans many useful skills such as metallurgy, mathematics, and astronomy.

The apkallus were generally the “good guys” in non-Hebrew cultures. Only a few of them succumbed to the temptations of a fleshy body and took wives of the humans. Marduk took care of the rebels by sending them to the abyss.

³⁸⁷ Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 102.

We know that divine beings do, in fact, observe the activities of humans. Several passages speak of the angels watching, rejoicing, and marveling over earthly events...

... through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10).

We must remember that although God is playing out an important redemptive drama here in the physical realm, there is an unseen spiritual stage with actors and actions intimately tied to this earthly dimension. Daniel gives us yet another peek at this heavenly cast in Chapter 12. The prophet had fasted three weeks awaiting an answer to prayer. Weak and discouraged, he felt someone touched him...

Then [an angel] said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, (Daniel 10:12-13).

I believe the “princes” here could be the Watchers mentioned in Daniel 4. It appears that the prince in charge of Persia was not one of the “good guys” and had prevented this angel from getting God’s message to Daniel.³⁸⁸ After 21 days, the angel had to call Michael (another prince) for assistance. Imagine... God’s plan for an earthly situation included an invisible three-week confrontation in the heavenly realm! Later, the angel says he must go back to the battle with the prince of Persia. He also mentions the prince of Greece. This supports what we discussed earlier with each country or region possibly having an assigned Watcher (son of God).

³⁸⁸ How could one of these divine (but evil) beings hinder God’s work? I admit it’s a mystery. I know that I’ve failed many times to do what God has instructed, yet he continues to give me the privilege of being part of his work. Is it possible that in his overarching purposes, he allows divine beings to participate in history as he does with us? Is there a “drama” acting out in the heavenly realm along with our human story? This does seem to be consistent with what Paul says in Ephesians 6: “...our struggle is not against flesh and blood...”

Human Hybrids

Nephilim stories based on human-demon mating have become quite popular in the media. The prospect of human-nonhuman hybrids is nothing new. Alleged ancient beasts such as centaurs, fauns, and satyrs were mosaic creatures, usually humanoid with an animal's head or appendages. Some Christian writers see a connection between these mythical hybrids and the biblical Nephilim. An Internet search provides hundreds of books, blogs, and videos linking Nephilim to UFOs, Atlantis, vampires, Stonehenge, and Bigfoot to name just a few.

Although a controversial and yet-to-be-proven idea, there is nothing overtly nonbiblical in the notion, especially if we assume the rebellious sons of God in Genesis 6 were divine beings. I'll summarize some of the discourse among Christian writers and bloggers regarding this extreme subject since it's currently getting a double share of media time...

1. Post-flood Nephilim. Why are there Nephilim after the flood (Joshua 11) which would have supposedly destroyed them? Three hypotheses are put forth: 1) One or more of Noah's family carried Nephilim genes, 2) Nephilim survived the flood, 3) The Genesis 6 scenario was repeated after the flood.

2. Mythological creatures may have been Nephilim. Since Scripture doesn't describe Nephilim (except as *giants* or *men of renown*) perhaps they had many body forms. These genetic "freaks" could have provided the basis for the creatures of mythology.

3. Cryptids are Nephilim. Nephilim genetics have survived the millennia in reclusive creatures—possibly Yeti, Bigfoot, Mothmen, werewolves, etc.

4. Fallen spirits (Watchers) are still hybridizing humans. There are several takes on this. One is that governments and the rebel Watchers are collaborating to produce humans with modified genomes for some sinister purpose. The Watchers may be upgrading their techniques with modern scientific advances in transgenics. (Or the Watchers have led

humans in developing genetic engineering for their purposes). Some assume the motivation behind this is either to mess up God’s formula for human DNA or to produce suitable physical bodies for disembodied fallen spirits. Another popular belief is that there is a UFO/ET link. What appear to be extraterrestrials are actually disembodied Nephilim spirits. They and the fallen Watchers are abducting humans to engineer and produce physical humanoid bodies.

Admittedly, some of these ideas do test the limits of biblical exegesis. The “fringiness” of certain interpretations should always cause us to sort the data cautiously but not dismiss unusual ideas for the sole criterion of being unusual. Sadly, the secular world sees much of Scripture as fringe, anyway. I believe these ideas are worthy of some measure of consideration, simply because they are part of the collective conversation.

From a scientific perspective, chimeras are old news. We’ve known for some time that humans can be two-in-one, where a proportion of body cells are completely different genetically—literally another “person.” A common way this occurs is when a developing fraternal twin (two different eggs fertilized by two different sperm) absorbs the other twin. More accurately, the two early embryos fuse into one individual. The single blastula now begins differentiating into the prescribed tissues and it grows into a normal person—except that random parts of the body are essentially parts of the other twin’s body. The phenomenon may seem frankensteinish, but with the spread of genetic testing, we are finding it isn’t uncommon. A chimeric individual would probably never know unless a different skin type was noticeable or if for some reason genetic screening was done.³⁸⁹

In an even more bizarre case, scientists at the University of Nevada were successful in combining an early sheep embryo with human bone marrow stem cells. The composite embryo was allowed to grow to term in a surrogate ewe producing a sheep with 15% of its cells being human. The purpose was not “mad science” but research in developing animal tissue and organs that could be transplanted into humans with decreased

³⁸⁹ No, the person wouldn’t have two personalities or souls. In fact, the opposite of this happens in the formation of identical twins. An early embryo formed from one sperm and one egg splits and becomes two blastulae. Two individuals (with identical DNA) now exist. How God handles the spiritual components of the individuals in these cases, only he knows.

chances of rejection. Thousands of lives could be saved with a dependable supply of replacement human(ish) organs grown in chimeric livestock.

Admittedly, if we step back and look at this from a different perspective it can be really disturbing! With relatively simple protocols, biologists can easily do what traditional breeding could never do—literally rearrange genes like Lego blocks. Although the potential medical value of chimeric procedures is tremendous, other outcomes are chilling. Currently, there is no way to direct or predict where the introduced cells (in the above case human) will end up in the created organism. What if most of the human cells happened to differentiate into neural tissue and eventually the brain? Would a human brain in a sheep think humanly? Would God in his mercy have to instill a soul/spirit into the animal (if that's how he does it) giving it sentience? What if the human cells formed the sheep's ovaries? Would the animal produce human babies? Or if an entire flock of sheep was sheep-human chimeras, what happens when they breed with each other? Could an offspring randomly receive a higher proportion of human cells?

We should also note that these are animal embryos with human-derived cells. Does the situation change when a human embryo is augmented with cells from a sheep or other animal? Would a human-sheep chimera be qualitatively different from a sheep-human? How would society deal with other humans who were not completely human? Would this create the same violation for which God had to destroy most of humankind? Some are asking whether there may already be human-nonhuman chimeras walking among us.

There are obviously significant ethical and worldview issues associated with this research. Most governments now have hastily adopted standards for genetic manipulation. There are limitations on public funding and on how long an altered human embryo may be allowed to develop.³⁹⁰ In some cases, individuals who receive stem cell treatments from nonhuman sources must sign “non-reproduction”

³⁹⁰ Michael Greshko, “Sheep-Human Hybrids Made in Lab—Get the Facts,” www.nationalgeographic.com, 18 Feb 2018.

agreements for fear the new DNA may be passed to offspring.³⁹¹ But the point is—it’s all possible, here and now. Cross-species hybridization is not speculation, it’s standard procedure. Any discussion of what *might* have happened to the human population in the past must at least be tempered with what we now know to be scientifically possible.

Ahead of Their Time

In the original *Star Trek* series and subsequent movies, the character Khan Noonien Singh is a genetically improved human, engineered to be a “super” human. A common belief (at least in sci-fi) is that Darwinian evolution, the principle that has brought us this far, will continue to improve us into Human 2.0 someday. The philosophy of evolution carries with it the notion that *Homo sapiens* necessarily began as primitive, animal-like creatures who have clawed/survived/naturally-selected our way up to where we are now. New Age mysticism would similarly say that we are on an upward spiritual journey, ever evolving to higher planes of existence.

I am disheartened when Christians buy into these ideas. Part of the problem might be confusion between technological advancement and “human” advancement. Yes, we’ve come a long way from foot-travel to space shuttle, and bean-counting to computing, but are humans actually rocketing forward toward super-being status?

Scripture has a different take on human development. Following the creation of the first man, God declares “...very good.” The man was immediately tasked with mental and physical tasks commensurate with a *very good* creation by the omnipotent Creator. There is every indication that the first couple was the ideal expression of God’s desire for sentient, finite beings created to bear his image.

And then the fall. Instead of idyllic consistency, the rule was now degeneration and decay. Man, and the rest of creation, began the downward spiral becoming less and less what God originally

³⁹¹ And lost in the shuffle of terminology is the fact that when we say “human embryo” the biblical worldview says “a *being* created in God’s image.” It’s much too easy to overlook the word “abortion.”

envisioned. Could our image of cavemen be inaccurate?³⁹² Does increased technology enable decreased individual ability? Do our toys and gadgets allow us to be lazy and “unlearned?” What if the appearance of collective evolution is really monomeric *devolution*?

We are puzzled by some of the artifacts produced by early, “ignorant” humans. The Great Pyramids, Stonehenge, the Serpent Mound, Machu Picchu... How did primitive man design, measure, and engineer such? Is it possible that the lack of modern technology could be far offset by early peoples’ superior creativity and mental abilities?³⁹³

It would be more consistent with a biblical worldview to consider early humankind as intellectually adept rather than brutish beasts. This obviously contradicts our contemporary anthropology, but so do many other biblical truths. Unfortunately, evolutionary thought would never allow for the possibility of early complexity.

Interestingly, it’s in vogue to suggest paranormal extremes to account for evidence of advanced knowledge found in antiquity. Did alien astronauts aid in erecting the statues on Easter Island? Could time travelers better explain the knowledge needed to produce the Nazca Lines? Was Stonehenge a flying saucer landing pad? An even timelier question might be “If we are on a downward trend mentally as individuals, can we delay the decay?”

Other Gods

In yet another *Star Trek* original series episode, “Who Mourns Adonis,” the landing party encounters a being with great power who claims to be one of the gods of ancient Greece. An over-worked science fiction plot perhaps, but the point is, any entity with more “power” than a human might resemble the mythical gods of polytheism.

³⁹² Could it be that cave people were just that—people who lived in caves for some reason? Caves last a long time. Wood doesn’t. Maybe they had some pretty decent wicker furniture? Maybe they had rowdy kids who drew on the walls? A future archaeologist viewing my garage in the distant future might conclude that I was quite primitive.

³⁹³ L.A. Marzulli believes That antediluvian humans may have been taught advanced technologies by the Watchers or Nephilim. See Genesis 4 and www.lamarzulli.net.

Human history abounds with mythological gods and goddesses. The Greeks alone had over fifty deities, and even then, Paul speaks of a statue to the “unknown god,” just in case they missed one. The monotheistic Israelites battled continually (physically and theologically) against the images of hundreds of deities from surrounding cultures. An on-going discussion in some Bible student circles is whether the “false gods” and idols mentioned in Scripture were *imaginary* or *demonic*. In other words, did the images made of wood, stone, or metal represent a real spirit, or were spiritual beings embodied in some way within the idols? Three possibilities seem to have Scriptural support.

1. False gods and idols are purely imaginary. Isaiah records the words of Yahweh God himself as he mocks the idol worshipper...

He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread... And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it (Isaiah 44: 15ff.).

This certainly implies that a wooden idol is as devoid of spirit as a chunk of firewood. God emphasizes the irony of believing a manmade object could be divine. Imaginary entities are also consistent with the many claims of Yahweh “I am the LORD, and there is no other. Besides Me, there is no God.”³⁹⁴ However, a common Hebrew idiom used in other instances simply means “there is no other like me.” Zephaniah says of the city of Nineveh: “This is the city of revelry that lived in safety. She said to herself, ‘I am the one! And there is none besides me.’”³⁹⁵ Other passages seem to offer alternative possibilities...

2. Demons can pretend to be gods. Even though objects themselves aren’t spirits, could fallen spirits act through them? Idol worshippers have held varying ideas about how an icon is related to a deity. Even within the same religion, there were often different opinions. Some believed the idol merely represented an entity. Others considered the

³⁹⁴ Isaiah 45:5

³⁹⁵ Zephaniah 2:15

image to be a “dwelling” for a spirit much like an earthly body. An object could also take on its own “holiness” if endowed by another spirit.

Some biblical passages do hint at more than simply physical icons. Deuteronomy 32 declares false gods to be “not gods” but then immediately refers to them as demons. The Apostle Paul does the same thing while explaining whether sacrificed meat was unclean...

What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).

Paul doesn't write off the idols as nonentities. Some aspect of the image was equated with real demons, hence the warning not to participate with them. It seems that biblical writers didn't necessarily equate “nothing” with nonexistence. Nothing in these instances could be taken as “not genuine” or “not comparable to Yahweh God.” It's also possible that both conditions could be true. Could some idols have been purely manmade artifacts while others were effigies of a real demonic entity? Could a demon take advantage of a person's belief in an imaginary idol?

3. God placed certain Elohim over the various nations. As discussed in a previous chapter, is it possible that God himself delegated the heavenly rule of individual nations to members of the divine council? Heiser believes that the pagan “gods” could have been the divine entities mentioned in Deuteronomy 32 after the Babel incident. From what we see, these were not necessarily “good” beings. The joining of a divine entity with a human group was meant to be a judgment on both.

The most relevant question for believers today is whether we make the Most High a lesser god. Rejecting the true nature of God comes in many flavors. I believe this happens primarily through our re-imagining the perfect Creator as something more “containable.” We prefer gods who fit in the box. We like gods who accept our sins. We tend to shun a God who died for our sins but requires repentance. A worldview that

isn't informed by the truth of Scripture will always create a god that is less transcendent and more like us...

Those who hold themselves free to think of God as they like are breaking the second commandment. At best, they can only think of God in the image of man—as an ideal man, perhaps, or a superman.³⁹⁶

Delayed Enthusiasm

If you find yourself somewhat hesitant over the information presented in previous sections, that's good! Your commonsense filter is probably functioning properly! Gullibility is not a fruit of the Spirit, but neither is uninvestigated denial. Christians must be open-minded yet guarded when considering ideas of this sort. It's a good opportunity to practice "delayed enthusiasm." Once again, a major premise of this book is that God's ways may indeed be supernatural and beyond the status quo. Nevertheless, he will certainly work by his will and not our whims. Believers should model "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

True science always supports Scripture in the final analysis. Recent centuries have witnessed a parade of archaeological discoveries that have verified biblical history and silenced skeptics. But wouldn't we expect this since we believe Scripture is, in fact, true? Although not intended to be a science or history book, the Bible is accurate in every scientific and historical fact it has recorded. Unlike other "holy" books, the Bible accounts took place in real space and time and are as testable as any other historical events.

One the other hand, we should *not* expect every man-made hypothesis about biblical history to be true. The veracity of God's Word doesn't depend on our efforts to find supporting evidence. Apologetic research and exploration are good. God, in his own time, often leads explorers to find physical evidence of Bible events. I applaud those who work in biblical archaeology. Every historical detail points to the Grand Truth of God's Word. I think it would be exciting if someone discovers

³⁹⁶ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 47.

the Ark of the Covenant. I would sell my truck and buy a plane ticket the very day someone locates Noah's Ark. But I'm not willing to die on the hill of "this has to be it!" Too many Christians have been embarrassed (and have led others astray) by premature claims and hopeful hypothesizing.³⁹⁷ Strange, supernatural things *are* out there—prudence is *always* appropriate in finding them.

³⁹⁷ I'm certainly not against speculation—not even "wild" speculation if it's productive. Much of the material in this book involves questioning and hypothesizing. Sometimes outlandish hypotheses lead to great discoveries, but more often to twisted theology or gullibility. My point is, keep speculating, but slow down, listen to peers, and make sure our inquiries are based in common sense and good science, balanced with an informed faith. When in doubt, ask... "What does Scripture really say or not say about this? Does this fit with a biblical worldview? What is the consensus of wise, obedient believers? If I'm wrong, how will this affect my witness and Christianity in general?"

26

Apocalypse Now?

“Don't wake me for the end of the world unless it has very good special effects.” Roger Zelazny³⁹⁸

“And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.” Revelation 16:18-19

From Mad Max to the Mayan 2012 prediction, we love a good apocalypse. We're still waiting on the big asteroid crash, nuclear winter, and the zombie virus, but according to the Internet, it shouldn't be long. Fortunately, I don't have to worry since I still have enough dried beans, batteries, and duct tape stockpiled from the Y2K panic. Perhaps the end of the world as we know it seems intriguing because we see ourselves as one of the survivors, and surely we could do a better job of recreating civilization.

Most people didn't give the Mayans a great deal of thought before the approach of 2012. They were certainly interesting people with impressive art and architecture, but their writings were relatively obscure to the average American. Then someone noticed that the Mayan long calendar seemed to end in 2012. Suddenly, world news, talk shows, and social media were ablaze with the looming “end of the

³⁹⁸ Roger Zelazny, *Prince of Chaos*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991).

world.” I don’t believe most Americans took this seriously, although some padded their retirement account peddling the news.

The Greek word “apocalypse” literally means “unveiling”—revealing information that until now has been unknown. Since the Apostle John used it in his book, *Revelation* (or *Apocalypse*) which presents the end-times destruction of the physical world, the term is now used to describe any worldwide disaster of immense proportions. I’ll continue to use it in that negative colloquial sense.

The Bad News

From a purely naturalist, secular perspective, there are lots of things that *could* destroy the earth or at least all life on it. (Don’t go to your shelter yet. It gets better in the next pages.) The most likely total-annihilation event could be an asteroid strike. There are millions of chunks of rock hurtling through the solar system right now. A smaller one hit Russia in 2013 causing 1600 injuries. From pebble to island sizes, about 25,000 larger ones are known to be near enough to be dangerous in the future.

As recently as July 2019, Asteroid 2019OK (affectionately nicknamed “City Killer”) zoomed within 45,000 miles of us at a speed of 54,000 miles per hour, undetected until just minutes before.³⁹⁹ Had it struck the earth, scientists estimate it would have released thirty times the power of the Hiroshima blast. Fortunately, most of these smaller rocks burn up as they enter our atmosphere and all we see is a streaking meteor. Looking at the cratered surface of the moon, which has no atmosphere, we should be very thankful.

There is evidence of at least two major asteroid crashes on the earth’s surface. The huge impact craters in Siberia and New Mexico bear witness to the events. Interestingly, the Bible does prophesy what seems to be a major asteroid strike. Revelation chapter 8 tells of “something like a huge mountain, all ablaze” that falls into the ocean,

³⁹⁹ CBS News, “‘City Killer’ Asteroid Misses Earth—and Scientists Had No Idea,” July 29, 2019.

destroying a third of life. Anyway, this massive chunk of rock called *Wormwood* sounds like an asteroid.

Speaking of Wormwood (that's a phrase I don't use often), some suggest this is actually Planet X, an alleged mystery body in our solar system. Nancy Lieder predicted that Planet X's orbit would bring it so close on May 27th of 2003 that Earth would be thrown out of orbit and destroyed. Lieder allegedly received this information from the Zetans (gray ETs) who had implanted a communication device in her head during childhood. When the event didn't occur, Lieder received the message that it was only a test-run and that we should remain prepared for an unknown future date.

Zecharia Sitchin was more specific. He claims to have found information about Planet X in ancient Mesopotamian texts. Supposedly, the name of the planet is *Nibiru*. Its very eccentric orbit brings it close to Earth every 3600 years, allowing its inhabitants, the Anunnaki, to communicate with earthlings. Sitchin calculated the next approach would be in 2900 AD, but he believed the Anunnaki would probably fly over to meet us long before that.

In 2017, Christian writer David Meade claimed a cataclysmic close-approach of Nibiru would begin the end-times Tribulation period on September 23. His prediction was based on biblical numerology and specific zodiac alignments. Scripture encourages us to be watchful for Christ's return and note the signs. We'll know the general *season* of the approaching time by intensifying signs similar to labor pains before childbirth, [p. 383] but it's amazing how many attempt to bypass the words of Jesus concerning date-setting...

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come (Mark 13:32-33).

Nibiru remains a popular topic for conspiracy theorists and apocalyptic prophets. Several planets are suspected beyond Neptune, but their orbits likely don't cross into the Big 9 (I still hold onto Pluto). NASA assures us we are safe from any renegade planets, and many astronomers agree.

And what about those walking dead? I must say, a zombie apocalypse might be fun for a while (as long as I'm not a zombie), but I have my doubts that it would work like Hollywood's contagion version. Pathogens have brought some devastating mini-apocalypses. The biggest disease catastrophe of all time gets little attention today. In 1918-1920, an influenza pandemic infected 500 million people and killed up to 70 million—5% of the human population. In an age of modern medicine, is it still possible to experience such a disaster?

We thought modern medicine and the World Health Organization had us all vaccinated and safe when Coronavirus sucker-punched us with relatively little warning. It showed that even with our advanced technology, our world can be turned upside-down in no time. Coronavirus, flu, and other pathogens mutate rapidly and can outmaneuver vaccines. Epidemiologists are concerned that an especially virulent strain of a novel virus could surpass historical death tolls due to increased travel and social contact.

Ecologists point to the possibility of global environmental disasters. Doomsayers are already guilt-bludgeoning us with fears of long-range climate changes, but acute changes might be more imminent. There is evidence that a major factor in bringing about the “Dark Ages” during the first millennium could have been such an event...

And it came about during this year that a most dread portent took place. For the sun gave forth its light without brightness, like the moon, during this whole year, and it seemed exceedingly like the sun in eclipse, for the beams it shed were not clear nor such as it is accustomed to shed. And from the time when this thing happened men were free neither from war nor pestilence nor any other thing leading to death.⁴⁰⁰

The widespread “fogginess” of the atmosphere at that time is believed to be not manmade, but of volcanic origin.⁴⁰¹ Geologists believe the eruption could have been in New Guinea, El Salvador, or

⁴⁰⁰ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 536 AD.

⁴⁰¹ David Bressan, “The Elusive Volcanic Eruptions that Plunged Europe into the Dark Ages,” www.forbes.com. November 16, 2018.

Indonesia. The decrease in solar irradiance probably caused famine, human migration, and general chaos on a large scale. Some attribute the accelerated fall of the Roman Empire to this disaster.

If not the atmosphere, will the ocean be the first to go? Far from just an excellent source for seafood and recreation, the ocean's biggest contribution to land-dwellers' well-being is our precious oxygen. Ocean phytoplankton (algae) supplies about 80% of the precious gas we need to survive. A major oil spill or a runaway offshore well could produce a massive oil slick. It would take only a thin layer to eventually kill off the surface algae, and subsequently, everything else.

Of course, nuclear contamination would be the ultimate environmental catastrophe. Instead of destroying the earth's surface by explosive force, relatively few bombs could produce a lot of radioactive fallout. The apocalyptic aspect would be that this material could remain radioactive for years or centuries. Even a well-placed series of "dirty bombs" (low-grade radioactive waste spread by a conventional explosion) could achieve the same result.

It's also possible that "mini-apocalypses" might occur. We've read about and witnessed many enormous disasters such as famines, typhoons, earthquakes, tidal waves, and volcanic eruptions. In our hyperconnected world, a minor disruption in the supply of oil, electricity, wi-fi, food, or toilet paper could have devastating worldwide effects.

The Good News

But enough of the doom and gloom talk. I'll go out on a limb and make a prediction. I don't think there will be a worldwide apocalypse before the big one described in Revelation. Should I happen to be wrong, look me up afterward and I'll give you half-a-bag of dry beans. Seriously, if we take the Bible at face value, we know that there will, in fact, be a true worldwide catastrophe in the future.⁴⁰² The middle chapters in the Book of Revelation outline the course of events. Thus, it would seem unlikely that another major apocalypse would have

⁴⁰² Preterists and others maintain that this is referring to events that happened in the 1st century. Most evangelicals hold to a premillennial view, with this future destruction happening after the Church is removed in the rapture.

happened before this one.⁴⁰³ The truly good news is that since God is in control of the absolute worst, he can handle anything else.

The Real Apocalypse

Clearly, God interacted supernaturally during the apostolic and early Church era. We may speculate about the extent of these miracles in the present and even debate whether they are active at all. However, Scripture prophesies a time in which supernatural signs and wonders once again play a significant role in earthly events.⁴⁰⁴

The prophetic books of the Bible (especially Revelation) describe supernatural and earthly happenings associated with the future time of Christ's bodily return to the physical realm. A significant portion of the Bible is dedicated to these end-time events. Many terms are used to refer to all or part of this concluding chapter in earth's history, such as the Day of the Lord, the final days, the Tribulation, the second coming, Armageddon, judgment day, or the rapture.

The theological study of this period (eschatology) is controversial to some, usually proportional to the extent to which one is willing to accept its literal interpretation and supernatural intervention.⁴⁰⁵ The writers do employ *apocalyptic language* (symbolism, allegory) at times, but interpretation clues are almost always provided in other parts of Scripture. And there is no reason to assume that every phrase is to be taken allegorically. This myopic reading of Scripture often leads to problems. (Another good reason to have a regular time of disciplined Bible study.) Without a functional biblical worldview, it's easy to veer off into personal perspectives...

⁴⁰³ Unless there was time for civilization to be reestablished with the same cities and countries mentioned in the prophecies of the Bible. Not likely.

⁴⁰⁴ Our discussion will be from a premillennial/pretribulation view, which I believe best fits the "plain sense" of Scripture. (See notes on p. 249).

⁴⁰⁵ The term "literal" often raises eyebrows in academia. Obviously, there are metaphors, idioms, and figures of speech in Scripture. My working definition of *literal* takes into account and attempts to understand the contextual meaning assuming a straightforward, face-value reading. That being said, some biblical concepts do require real study, rather than superficial skimming.

...the great temptation for those who attempt to interpret prophecy is to move from biblical *facts* to their own *assumptions* and *speculations*. As they view the future through eyes of the present, their speculations can end up seeming like real possibilities.⁴⁰⁶

I've always had the bias that the Bible was *meant to be understood* with a measure of "rightly dividing the Word of truth," and the leading of the Spirit. Speaking of this *perspicuity* of Scripture, Pettegrew says...

This doctrine is also one of the important teachings of Scripture for which Jude instructed Christians to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3). Clarity of Scripture is denied by every false theology, usually putting a priesthood, a cult's founder, an inner light, a critical methodology, or a postmodern hermeneutic between the Scriptures and the Christian.⁴⁰⁷

Cooper puts it this way ...

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.⁴⁰⁸

Fortunately, though, much of even the enigmatic passages reveal many concepts that are quite straightforward, so there is no excuse for avoiding the study of end-times events. We'll take a brief trip into the future to look at some aspects of this period, especially as they relate to certain paranormal phenomena in other chapters.

⁴⁰⁶ Ed Hindson and Mark Hitchcock, *Can We Still Believe in the Rapture?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2017), 33.

⁴⁰⁷ Larry D. Pettegrew, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *TMSJ* 15/2, Fall 2004.

⁴⁰⁸ David L. Cooper, *The God of Israel*, (The Biblical Research Society, 1945).

Which View?

As mentioned earlier, I believe the premillennial-pretribulation view of the end times is the most consistent with a literal, perspicuous take on Scripture. I won't take time to detail other views here but be aware there are good Christian scholars who have differing views of eschatology.⁴⁰⁹ These aren't the "main and plain" things of Scripture, though, and most disagreements are based on the timing of events, not the certainty of their occurrence. Here is a summary of the typical premillennial/pretribulation end-time agenda.

1. *The taking away of the Church (rapture)*. This event isn't the second coming of Jesus. Believers will be taken suddenly, secretly, and bodily "into the air" to meet Jesus.
2. *The rebirth of the Roman Empire*. Sometime after the rapture, a ten-nation confederation will be formed from European nations. After in-fighting, one leader assumes control (the Antichrist)
3. *Israel's peace treaty*. The Antichrist will broker a peace deal between Israel and its neighbors. Many believe this event starts a 7-year prophetic clock.
4. *The Tribulation*. A 7-year period of tribulation begins. The first half of this period is called the "time of sorrows." At the

⁴⁰⁹ End-times terminology may seem daunting, but the underlying beliefs are straightforward...

In simplified terms, **amillennialism** maintains that we are now in the millennium and the figurative "1000 years" may refer to the reign of Christ in heaven or in the hearts of believers.

Postmillennialism claims that the Church will progressively convert the world allowing Christ to return to his perfected Kingdom. Many postmills are preterists, believing that most end-times prophecies have already been fulfilled. **Premillennialism** expects Jesus to return bodily before the Millennial Kingdom is set up. Within this view, there are varying beliefs about when the rapture of the Church takes place. For example, **pretribulationists** believe Jesus will come for his Church before the Tribulation, not allowing believers to experience the wrath of God.

This view has the Church being removed (raptured) from the earth prior to the beginning of the Tribulation and the emergence of Antichrist. For detailed studies of end times events, I recommend: Mark Hitchcock, *The End: Everything You'll Want to Know about the Apocalypse*, (Carol Springs, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), and...J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958).

beginning, Antichrist makes great improvements with his world government.

5. *The middle of the Tribulation.* Russia and Iran move to attack Israel. God destroys them and the Antichrist fills the political vacuum with even harsher strategies. He desecrates the Jewish temple and declares himself God.
6. *The last half of the Tribulation (Great Tribulation).* During this 3 ½-year period, God’s wrath will be poured onto the earth. In the turmoil, Antichrist strengthens his grip and establishes a worldwide, controlled economy.
7. *Armageddon.* The climactic final battle of the Tribulation. The nations of the earth attack Israel only to be miraculously destroyed by Christ.
8. *Christ’s second coming.* Jesus descends bodily to Earth to set up his kingdom.
9. *The Millennium.* The prophesied 1000-year reign of Christ on this physical earth.
10. *The New Heavens and New Earth.* Eternity with Christ in a perfected realm free from sin and suffering.

Even if we “pretribbers” are mistaken about the timing and the Church does find itself in the tribulation, we know that God will care for his children then, as he always has. Nothing will slip through God’s hands without his knowledge and will. Believers can rest in the assurance that whatever may happen between now and then (and in whatever sequence), our eventual destiny is to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Coming Attractions

Obviously, the entire end-time scenario revolves around God’s *supernatural* acts of redemption and judgment. As a pretribber, I believe God will again use signs and miracles in dealing with the remaining humans after the Church leaves in the rapture. In this section, we’ll focus on the visible supernatural signs and events that will emerge as we approach the end-times.

1. *The Rapture*. In what will ostensibly be the greatest paranormal event of human history, a significant part of the human population (the Church) will vanish in “the blink of an eye.” The most straightforward description of this event, known as the *rapture*, is given in 1 Thessalonians...

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The pretribulation view places the rapture before the beginning of the Tribulation. This isn't the *second coming* of Christ, and there are no specific signs for the rapture. Paul tells us this “catching away” of the Church will come as “a thief in the night,” thus, the admonitions for believers to be watchful and prepared. The rapture can literally occur at any time.

In the preceding passage, Paul is reassuring the Thessalonian believers that those believers among them who had already died wouldn't be left out of God's future kingdom. Moreover, they would instantly be resurrected with new, glorified physical bodies. In 1 Corinthians we get more details of the event...

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

Believers who are alive at the rapture will be given new physical bodies, ones not corrupted by sin and the fall. Together with the previously resurrected dead believers, we'll meet Jesus in the air. This

is the beginning of eternity for Church-age believers. As the Bride of Christ, we'll experience the "marriage feast of the Lamb."⁴¹⁰

There has been much speculation about how unbelievers who are left behind perceive and interpret the sudden disappearance of multitudes. Even though the number of true, born-again believers might be but a small fraction of the human population, it will undoubtedly be a world-changing event.

It's hard to imagine the world not seeing this as a *major paranormal incident*. Will it be explained as supernatural? Some have suggested that ETs might be blamed for the "mass kidnapping." Interestingly, some New Age leaders already expect a future purging of Earth's "unenlightened" (Bible-believing Christians) in which millions will simply vanish.⁴¹¹ Perhaps the "strong delusion" mentioned by Paul includes an explanation for the disappearances.⁴¹²

I've lived long enough to observe society's changing perceptions of the rapture and end-times events. In the 1970s, Bible-believing Christians began paying more attention to eschatology. With the revived interest, many new books were published, and the unbelieving world began to take notice. I recall the media blitz as they rushed to understand and define this "new" Evangelical ideology.⁴¹³ Even the secular media became involved, running stories that attempted to explain the concepts.

Having come full circle, most of the secular world today is still somewhat familiar with the concepts of the rapture and eschatology. These supernatural events are generally laughed off along with the biblical truths of angels, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and many others. It is, however, disheartening that many Christians today dismiss eschatology, especially the rapture, although, we shouldn't be too surprised by unbelief, among believers or secular society. We should

⁴¹⁰ Revelation 19:9. The Church will also accompany Christ at his second coming. At that time we (in glorified, immortal bodies) dwell on the earth for 1000 years with mortal believers who did not bow to Antichrist during the Tribulation.

⁴¹¹ Barbara Marciniak, *Bringers of the Dawn: Teachings from the Pleiadeans*, (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1992).

⁴¹² 2 Thessalonians 2:11

⁴¹³ Some claim that the pretrib rapture was authored by John Nelson Darby in the 1800s. Hitchcock discusses written evidence for the doctrine as early as the 4th century (Hitchcock, *The End*). Beyond that, the doctrine can arguably be derived from a straightforward reading of the New Testament.

expect skepticism about Christ's return to increase as the end-times draw nearer. Peter predicts this pattern of denial...

Remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished (2 Peter 3:2-6).

Notice that Peter ties this eschatological denial to the denial of the supernatural flood. Some claim the dismissal of the rapture is only a symptom of the larger dismissal of the biblical supernatural.

2. *The Tribulation and the Antichrist.* With believers out of the picture, the earth now enters its darkest days. God's final dealings with a sinful, rebellious world center around a supernatural person. The Apostle Paul gives an overview of this individual...

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

Scholars identify the "lawless one" as *the* Antichrist. The Bible describes him as the embodiment of evil, perhaps literally since he is directly empowered by Satan. Scripture also uses the title "antichrist" (*against* or *in place of* Christ) in referring to the antichrist spirit embedded in the culture and all false teachers who work against Christ.

The pop media often sterilizes or glorifies this individual beyond recognition, but if ever a Prince of the Paranormal could be imagined, it will be the Antichrist of the Tribulation period. Summarizing several

passages, this man will rise suddenly from obscurity at a time of world crisis. The Apostle John's vision has him rising as a beast from the sea. Much of Revelation refers to him as the "Beast." In the beginning, Antichrist will do good works such as creating a union of European countries and establishing a Middle East peace treaty. "Peace and safety" will be the mantra of the day—at least for a little while.

Antichrist will be assisted by another individual known as the False Prophet (also called the *second beast*). Many have aptly designated Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet as the *unholy trinity*. Eventually, the entire world will fall under the spell of their charisma. Indeed, for the first time since the Ark landed on Ararat, the world will have one central government, led by the dictator of dictators. The drama builds...

[Antichrist] opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Long story short—humankind will experience oppression and catastrophes on an unprecedented scale. Part of this will be the activity of Satan via the Antichrist, but another part will be God's judgment and wrath finally poured out on a rebellious, sin-loving world. Not to leave you hanging, but my objective here is to examine the supernatural signs of the time. Please read the rest of the story in Revelation (spoiler... the bad guys lose).

As we might expect from a "counterfeit Christ," Antichrist will mimic the miracles of Jesus. The Beast will receive "a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast." Although this passage is unclear as to whether the wound is to the Beast himself, later verses seem to indicate that fact...

Then I saw another Beast [the False Prophet] rising out of the earth. It exercises all the authority of the first Beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first Beast, whose mortal wound was healed (Revelation 13:11-12).

There is discussion as to whether this reanimation of Antichrist is a genuine miracle or simply a well-staged illusion. I tend to think the ability to give life is God's alone. Whichever is the case, with the encouragement of the False Prophet, the event convinces the world of the Beast's apparent deity.

Satan also empowers the False Prophet with supernatural abilities...

[The second Beast] performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the Beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived (Revelation 13:13-14).

Thus, the False Prophet follows suit by copying one of the prophet Elijah's miracles, calling fire from heaven. Next, a truly strange, event is described involving Antichrist's image...

And [the False Prophet] was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. (Revelation 13:15).

A talking, breathing image is probably less bizarre than in past ages. Some have speculated this animated image could be a robot or some virtual, computer-generated avatar. We already have the technology to project realistic 3-D holograms of people. Or will Antichrist produce a hyper-growth clone of himself? It has been pointed out that the language seems to present something more paranormal. The image is considered a separate entity from Antichrist and in some aspect a miraculous creation.

Despite the greatest achievements of any world leader, Antichrist's fate is sure...

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness

he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God... And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet... These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:11-13, 20).

3. *God's Miracles.* Remember, whatever signs and wonders Antichrist can conjure, they are mere counterfeits of God's omnipotence. Although the Most High isn't obliged to show mercy to the Earth rebels, his grace is always amazing. From the Jews living in the Tribulation, God appoints 144,000 to be his last evangelists. In the midst of his wrath, perhaps the greatest miracle of all is that he calls a multitude from the rebellious horde to hear the gospel and come to him in faith. God also sends two special "witnesses" at this time...

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days... And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes... They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire (Revelation 11:3-6).

Scholars debate the identity of these two figures. Some suggest they may be Elijah and Moses since the signs they perform are similar to those of the Old Testament pair. Others think it could be Elijah and Enoch, as these two never experienced physical death. Whoever they are, the world will take notice and hate them. When their work is completed, God lifts his hand and allows Antichrist to kill the men.

While their bodies rot on a Jerusalem street, the wicked people of earth actually celebrate their deaths by exchanging gifts. However, while the wrappings and ribbons are still on the floor, God supernaturally intervenes once again...

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them (Revelation 11:11-12).

As world events crescendo, God continues his “bowl and trumpet” judgments. Angels fly throughout the earth proclaiming the gospel. Supernatural signs abound proclaiming judgment and salvation. Natural and supernatural events begin to merge into a single reality as the time for the final act approaches. The armies of the Antichrist (essentially the whole world) have surrounded Israel in Satan’s final last attempt to erase God’s chosen nation and nullify his promises to them. With no earthly hope for Israel, the sky miraculously opens and Christ descends for a second time to Planet Earth—this time as King. In supernatural splendor, the One who spoke the universe into existence utters another word and the armies of the world are destroyed. King Jesus ushers in his 1000-year reign of long-awaited “peace on earth.” We, the raptured Church will dwell on the earth during this Millennial reign with Christ and the believers from the Tribulation. A supernatural eternity is just beginning...

For the Here and Now...

How much of the preceding drama will believers witness in our mortal bodies? Most who study eschatology agree that the Church will experience trials but never God’s wrath. The question is when during the Tribulation is his wrath applied or is it possible to be on earth and avoid God’s wrath. Without wrestling with those points, let’s consider the prospect of believers observing supernatural events associated with the end-times. Assuming a pretrib/premill view, will the Church witness any signs?

As stated, there are no unique signs given for the rapture. It will come without immediate warning. A common analogy, however, is that when you begin seeing Christmas decorations, Thanksgiving can’t be

far away. Regarding signs of Christ's return, Scripture uses the example of labor pains before the birth of a baby. Humans have always experienced evil, lawlessness, war, and natural disasters, but it's the intensification and quickening of events that signal the nearness of end-time events.

We might also expect to see the stage being set for what is predicted. Some things may change quickly, but others take more time. Pre-rapture believers may observe the "buds" of some scenarios that will come into full bloom after their departure. Nations will begin to align as prophesied. Cultural attitudes will begin to change. Many believe we may be seeing such today.

Do paranormal events play into this? Some Christian leaders believe the deceptions within the present-day paranormal set society up for greater deceptions to come. For example, significant change would be needed for the entire world to accept Antichrist and his system. Do paranormal beliefs affect our collective thinking? Are we witnessing trends that make us more vulnerable to stronger delusions?

Prophecy Cancellers

In their times, Bible prophets were a miserable lot. Literally... I'm thankful Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Amos, and others were braver and more spiritual than myself. Had I been given a prophetic word by the Most High, there's a good chance I would now be used as an example of a major biblical fail: "Wait... I can't tell the people this! That's suicide! Can we tone down the rhetoric a bit and kind of ease the bad stuff in gradually? Can I just send a letter? Do you have any good news to tell anyone? How 'bout I do that one instead?"

With the Bible a completed work now, no new prophecies are coming down the pike, yet the long-reaching predictions of Old Testament prophets loom close on the horizon. Many Christian leaders today would like to resurrect and tar-and-feather some of them, or more specifically, those of us living who still believe and teach their words regarding the end-times. According to Todd Hampson...

Unfortunately the topic of Christ's return has been hijacked by caricatured notions of what the Bible actually teaches...

His return is a foundational truth of the Christian faith, but in our day, we tend to treat the topic like a crazy uncle the family never talks about.⁴¹⁴

One pastor aptly designates this as *prophecy derangement syndrome*.⁴¹⁵ More than simply failing to study Bible prophecies, there now seems to be active hostility toward a literal view of eschatology or even considering Bible prophecy a thing to be studied.⁴¹⁶

At a time when we see a proliferation of details playing out in the nightly news, just as the prophets predicted, it's disconcerting to see Christians reinterpreting passages to deny the prophecies given about the end-times. This is certainly out-of-step with those in the past who anxiously anticipated "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."⁴¹⁷ The prophetic book of Revelation even acknowledges blessing to those who study it.

My objective here isn't to sift through the various views of end-times events, but to ask why the subject has "fallen from grace" in so many churches. Once again, I believe that among other factors, the abandonment of a supernatural view of God and reality has resulted in a cold-shoulder being turned toward end-times teachings. Prophecy by nature is supernatural. It isn't a projection of what is *likely* to occur, but an inspired declaration of what *will* be. True biblical prophecy will always involve intervention by God.

We also see apathy and hostility brought to bear on the study of prophecy in reaction to prophetic charlatans who have ignored the Bible's clear teaching against date-setting. As we've seen, humans crave secret knowledge, especially concerning the future. It's easy for profiteers and pretenders to distort and sensationalize. The unbelieving world, for the most part, is unable to discern the biblical errors put forth by charismatic, pop-culture spokespersons. When their outlandish

⁴¹⁴ Todd Hampson, blog Sept 14, 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com>.

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Brandon Holthaus on "Understanding the Times," Olive Tree Ministries, 4 Jul 2020.

⁴¹⁶ Most of the pushback seems to originate in academia. Interestingly, the target is usually premill/pretrib ideology which is the more literal interpretation of the supernatural end-times events.

⁴¹⁷ Titus 2:13

claims fall though, the true message is defamed, and true teachers are disowned.

But this in no way affects the veracity of the prophetic word, nor should it deter its teaching. There is certainly a balance to be found between wild speculation and disciplined exegesis. As with my view of creation beliefs, I have much more respect for those who disagree with me from fact-based reasoning than those who dismiss my beliefs because of tradition, condescension, or current academic distaste for the supernatural. Believers (and pastors in particular) are responsible for presenting the whole Word of God even when it's ignored or jeered. I've come to realize that this passage in 2 Peter may refer to scoffers within the church as well as without...

Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days... They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

"Why should we study end-times prophecy? Isn't eschatology just a side-issue for academics and fanatics?" If modern-day scoffers had their way that might be true, but there is still a remnant who holds to God's appraisal of its importance. Perhaps most significant is the role of future events in the biblical worldview. Scripture describes a linear history, in that our earthly Story is being providentially guided toward an ultimate, supernatural conclusion. The human timeline isn't a random series of events nor is it an endless wheel of karmic cycles. A functional worldview sees all events in God's sovereign, deliberate context.

Furthermore, since our earthly Story has a climax, so must the gospel message. Those who study and understand eschatology sense the urgency of the Great Commission. End-times prophecy encourages both evangelism and the pursuit of godly living.

Finally, Jesus certainly considered knowledge of prophecy important...

Jesus not only spoke many times about the future, He also rebuked people who didn't seem to recognize the significance of the events taking place around them. He scolded those who

could read the sky for weather, but were unable to read the signs of the times. It was no small thing to Jesus that the people of His generation remained ignorant of God's prophetic Word.⁴¹⁸

Jesus's message was unquestionably one of warning and preparation. The fact that he commanded so should be reason enough to diligently study and understand prophecies of the end-times, and to view our present reality within that context.

⁴¹⁸ David Jeremiah, "Is Bible Prophecy Important?" www.davidjeremiah.blog, Accessed 11 Jul 2020.

Enchanted Elixirs and Paranormal Potions

*“Ladies and gentlemen, attention, please!
Come in close where everyone can see!
I got a tale to tell, it isn’t gonna cost a dime!
And if you believe that, we’re gonna get along just fine!”*
Stephen King ⁴¹⁹

Medicine has a long history of teetering on the fine line between science and supernatural—and that’s not necessarily bad. God can and does heal at his pleasure. The norm is for him to use physical means, which isn’t at all unexpected. After all, he providentially designed and formed our physical bodies with amazing built-in mechanisms for self-healing. The New Testament advises to (physically) drink a little wine and rub on oil in addition to (supernaturally) praying for the sick. The Samaritan didn’t perform a miracle to help the traveler. He bandaged his wounds. God frequently uses both physical and supernatural means in accomplishing his objectives. And essentially, our bodies are already miraculous from the inside out, even though they appear to be functioning naturalistically.

Supernatural means aren’t always the preferred method for healing. We can even classify some attempts at supernatural healing as unscriptural. Medieval alchemists used a few good medical techniques, however, many of their cures were saturated in sorcery and magic. Modern-day shamans and sorcerers who perform rituals to elicit the aid

⁴¹⁹ Stephen King, *Needful Things*, (New York: Viking Books, 1991).

of spirit beings are clearly operating outside of God's will, as are those who withhold treatment in the belief that miracles alone are acceptable. In this chapter, we'll look at some current healing practices that may have paranormal implications.

Alternative Medicine

As stated earlier, God created us as souls within a physical body (Paul would say a *tent*). All of our body systems are physical, even those that maintain homeostasis to keep us healthy and alive. The biblical worldview would see nothing problematic in using physical means (chemicals, vaccines, radiation, surgery) to correct deviations in the systems. Science (the understanding of the orderly creation around us) has allowed us to discover many ways to correct physical malfunctions. Luke, the gospel writer, would agree since being a physician, he used the science of the day to heal. Conventional medicine has worked well for centuries and continues to learn new ways to maintain health.

Over the past decades, however, there has been growing interest in non-conventional medical practices. This is a multi-factor trend with 38% of Americans utilizing some aspect of alternative medicine.⁴²⁰ Some have become disillusioned with conventional medicine because of specific failures they have witnessed. Others have turned to non-conventional forms because they're novel, and pop culture gives its hearty endorsement. Another reason is that many New Age ideas have filtered into our societal thinking, shifting the emphasis from physical to spiritual.

To be clear, Christian belief isn't antithetical to this idea in principle. We know our attitudes somehow affect our well-being. We acknowledge there is a connection between emotions and physical health. We pray *and* use conventional treatments. The term *holistic* refers to this "total person" approach to health taking into account the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. What then is the issue?

⁴²⁰ Johns Hopkins Medicine, "Types of Complementary and Alternative Medicine," www.hopkinsmedicine.org, Accessed 19 Mar 2020.

The collective term for all types of non-conventional medicine is *complementary and alternative medicine* (CAM). CAM encompasses an extremely diverse collection of practices. However, its central dogma is typically based on New Age philosophy. New Age, if you recall, lends and borrows from other religions, even Christianity. Thus, CAM has become an aggregate of ideas and methods, some good, some not. My goal here is to look at the big picture of CAM then dissect out some particular aspects which may be contrasted with the Christian worldview.

The designations *complementary* and *alternative* differentiate degrees of integration. Complementary methods are used in conjunction with conventional medicine. Alternative methods replace the conventional. Most patients are advised to use a complementary (*integrative*) approach...

Integrative health care often brings conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way. It emphasizes a holistic, patient-focused approach to health care and wellness—often including mental, emotional, functional, spiritual, social, and community aspects—and treating the whole person rather than, for example, one organ system.⁴²¹

So far, most of us would likely agree with the essentials of this view. But this is where the branch occurs. Alternative medicine consists of two primary ideologies...

The Natural Aspect

The natural branch of alternative medicine focuses on natural substances and techniques that conventional medicine doesn't utilize. As the name implies, the supernatural isn't necessarily involved. The underlying motivations for choosing natural alternative medicine could be one or more of the following:

⁴²¹ National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, "Complementary, Alternative, or Integrative Health: What's in a Name?" www.nccih.nih.gov, Accessed 19 Mar 2020.

- Man-made chemicals are suspect.⁴²²
- Conventional medicine hasn't worked.
- Belief that there's a conspiracy in conventional medicine to keep us unhealthy or to simply make more profit.
- Belief that conventional medicine is invasive and foreign to the human body.

Natural alternatives include, among many other things, herbal supplements, natural and organic foods, ayurvedics, massage therapy, stress reduction, chelation, and homeopathy. There are good ideas to be found among some of these strategies. The main drawback with natural alternatives isn't anything paranormal, but that many of their health claims haven't been tested scientifically. This certainly doesn't mean they are ineffective; it simply indicates that we don't *know* whether they work other than by anecdote. There is no structured, empirical evidence to determine their efficacy.

For example, I may try the herbal remedy echinacea because a friend told me it prevents the common cold. After taking it every day all through winter, I find that I had a cold only once. Did the echinacea work? How do I know? Do I compare this winter to last winter? Suppose last year I had two rounds of the cold. Did I truly decrease my cold cases by 50%? What if I would have had only one cold anyway, without echinacea?

These are questions that can't be answered with small, anecdotal data sets. In order to obtain reliable evidence that echinacea prevents colds, we would need at least two large test groups. And, we would need to make sure the members of both groups were treated similarly: same diet, same sleep pattern, same environment, same exposure to the

⁴²² This is another hill I don't want to die on, but as a scientist I have problems with these motivations. Yes, as a scientist I'm probably in cahoots with conventional medicine. The fact is, conventional medicine has a pretty good track record. I teach some basic medical principles and they are certainly consistent with the rest of biology. As for natural and synthetic substances (medicines)—there are none. It doesn't really matter where a chemical comes from. The universe is made of 92 different elements, and they're the same everywhere. A chemical is a chemical whether it comes from plant juice or a test tube. Having said all of this, though, modern medicine is still learning. There may be foods and techniques that actually do work better than some conventional ones. Science is constantly working to discover these, but what it finds will always be consistent with the orderly nature of the creation.

virus, same physical traits. Then, in a double-blind experiment, one group would be given doses of echinacea. After a time, we could compare the cold rates of the echinacea group with the non-echinacea group and perhaps get significant data. Long story short—this procedure has not been done for most substances in alternative medicine.⁴²³

Again, this doesn't mean they don't work. It simply means *we don't know*. Even if an alternative treatment seems to work for an individual (a test group of 1 with no comparison), it doesn't provide empirical evidence of effectiveness.

The Energy Aspect

This side of alternative medicine brings with it all the empirical problems of natural alternatives along with some paranormal issues. Basically, these treatments involve mysterious energies or forces not acknowledged by conventional medicine. Some see these energies as simply a type of “life force” that is presently unknown to science (paranormal). Examples might include healing with copper bracelets, magnets, or energy fields.

Others believe the forces originate with a spiritual being, or more specifically, some type of New Age “force/god/universal consciousness” (supernatural). Depending on the philosophy, this universal vital force is called *prana*, *chakra*, *chi*, *qi*, or *ki*...

Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ As “food” products, for the most part, the government doesn't require the same strict testing as in medicines. Distributors certainly aren't going to invest in testing. They're already selling the product. As stated, some of these may work—we just don't know. Personal anecdotal evidence is not trustworthy.

⁴²⁴ Donald O'Mathuna and Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 193.

Derived from Eastern philosophies, these ancient health and healing practices have set up shop in American shopping centers and online. Even a sampling of the options is extensive: therapeutic touch, mindfulness, crystal healing, reflexology, acupuncture, reiki, t'ai chi, aromatherapy, yoga, havening, iridology, hypnotherapy, cupping, tao yin, qigong, and hydrotherapy.

Since the basic principles of these are so similar, let's examine only one as a model. A popular energy-medicine fad at the moment is a Japanese technique called *reiki*. Based on Buddhist philosophy, reiki claims to use the *Rei* (god-force) to remove obstructions to the flow of the life force in the body. These blockages are the result of bad emotions or negative thoughts and if ignored lead to bad physical health.

In order to perform reiki, an individual must be trained by an experienced master who will eventually "activate" the powers of this student. The Reiki practitioner places his or her hands at various positions on the patient's body. Energy then presumably flows into the patient "rebalancing" the system and hopefully curing all that ails.

As we observed with New Age thought in general, this body of philosophical concepts can be very convincingly wrapped in Christian clothing. For example, the Reiki for Christians web site points out the "natural" connection between Christianity and their philosophy: "Didn't the Apostles lay on hands to instill the Holy Spirit? Isn't Rei just another name for God? Didn't Jesus exercise a healing touch?"...

More and more Christians view Reiki as a practice that provides an opportunity to follow more closely the teachings and examples of Jesus healing the sick.⁴²⁵

Mistaking an impersonal, universal force for God's Spirit is a serious offense, as is trying to fit God's sovereignty into a ritual of hand positions. While our culture applauds inclusivity and the harmony of religions, Scripture warns...

⁴²⁵ Marcia Backos, "Should Christians Practice Reiki?" www.christianreiki.org, Accessed 3 Mar 2020.

...test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

Sadly, Christians are a prime target for alternative medicine charlatans peddling their wares with spiritual slogans and pseudo-biblical rationales. Part of our vulnerability is because we really do want our bodies to be “temples.” We preach against the evils of drugs and alcohol, so naturally, we tout what we are told is good and wholesome...

...many people—including committed Christians who would “go to the mat” over the interpretation of a grammatical detail in a passage of Scripture—appeared quite willing to lay critical thinking aside while dealing with unorthodox healing methods. “Does it work?” or, more specifically, “Does it make *me* feel better?” were often far more important questions than “Does it make any sense?” or “Is there any empirical proof?” or “On what worldview is this healing system based?”⁴²⁶

And a worst-case scenario... Many New Age health practitioners unapologetically rely on spirit beings in their healing techniques. If genuine entities are being contacted, the Ephesians Hypothesis describes their true nature, regardless of the presumptions of the practitioner. Energy medicine encourages patients to open their minds to the leadings of healing powers. This is indeed a dangerous situation and one that Scripture sternly warns us to avoid.

An Alternative to the Alternative

As a way of gaining information beyond the physical world, science is for the most part lousy. Empirical science deals with our sensory measurements of the physical realm. Coincidentally, that’s what physical ailments are—physical! To those with an aversion to standard medicine and such, I realize I probably sound like one of their paid endorsers. Not only have I taught science for decades, I’ve *used*

⁴²⁶ Paul C. Reisser, “Alternative Medicine,” Article ID: DN395, www.equip.org, 10 Jun 2009.

science to *study* science. *Science works really well in studying physical effects in the here-and-now physical world.*

With scattered exceptions, I believe we can trust the findings of science in the areas of health and medicine. Be wary of any treatments, conventional or not, that...

- are “proven” to treat several different ailments.
- promise results.
- are the exclusive treatment by that particular practitioner.
- are “information they don’t want you to know.”
- are “too good to be true.” (It’s probably not.)
- are “unknown to modern science.”
- use the healing energy of _____.”

Christians are sometimes urged to distance themselves from traditional medicine because of its connections with the physical. Use common sense. If you believe a non-conventional medical treatment might be appropriate, you could be right, but listen to all sides. Prayerfully get opinions from your pastor, trusted web sites (ones that don’t offer a product), and several friends with healthcare training.

PART IV

Our Supernatural Future

28

An Undiscovered Country

“The fairy tale stirs and troubles him (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach and, far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth. He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: The reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.” C.S. Lewis⁴²⁷

“We see life differently when we realize that death isn’t a wall but a turnstile, a small obstacle that marks a great beginning.” Randy Alcorn⁴²⁸

Every “once upon a time” begs for the accompanying “in the land of...”

Psychologists and sociologists muse at our attempts to discover Oz and Wonderland. Their theories have us groping wildly for any place offering protection from a world that has become too sad or dangerous. But this quest for magical lands wasn’t strapped onto our psyches as an afterthought. Our Creator not only placed us in a Story, he made us perfectly suited for its setting.

Christians are so often accused of creating a fairytale afterlife as a crutch for hobbling through a life filled with trials. To the contrary, my

⁴²⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*.

⁴²⁸ Thanks to Randy Alcorn for informing my view of Heaven. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 463.

entire being is tailor-made to fit into another realm—my true home. A loving and good God would do nothing less! Like any lost creature, our search for that perfect place is merely an outgrowth of the longing we feel for our natural habitat. The writer of Hebrews speaks of this yearning...

[Those who have already died in the faith] acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:13-16).

But thoughts of a perfect place sometimes conjure serpents... I've dealt primarily with teenagers and young adults over the past forty years. Heaven isn't a common word in their posts and tweets.⁴²⁹ I'm not too old to remember those feelings. Clearly, God blesses young people with optimism and anticipation for their future. Heaven and end-times events are often equated with death. Popular views of heaven imply the termination of these hopes and dreams in people of all ages. The consensus is that when this life ends, the party's over.

Moreover, thoughts of a sublime afterlife are a bit too close to the paranormal for "enlightened" people. In our distancing from the supernatural, we've also pushed aside one of the most uplifting teachings in Scripture. Our official doctrines of Heaven are mostly intact, but the inward reality of a future residence with our Creator has been stifled.

This is a recent trend, though. I believe we still feel the desire for the biblical heaven, but our postmodern culture paints Heaven to be as ridiculous as a red-suited, pitchforking devil or as boring as an eternal harpfest. The idea of heaven has withered into the Christian's blind hope that there must be something better, coupled with the fear that it may not meet our 21st-century expectations. We've learned so well to

⁴²⁹ I capitalize "Heaven" in this chapter just to emphasize that it's a real place (my future address), as real as Shawnee, Ok.

misquote Paul's hope: "To live is okay, but to die is to lose everything fun."

Heaven may be the most difficult supernatural concept for my earth-realm brain to understand. Heaven itself is another realm—one that encompasses super-nature. Unquestionably my future glorified body will come equipped with a glorified cerebrum that can begin to comprehend eternity, interdimensionality, and deity. For now, though, I'm limited to only shadows of reality. Even if I could see the unseen realm now, my little three-pound bundle of neurons would go bluescreen. If God told me *white* I "would translate it into terms of dingy gray"⁴³⁰

Some have suggested that the Scriptures have little to say about Heaven. That may be true proportionally, but God's Word provides plenty of light to discern *wrong* notions. Let's examine some of the supernatural splendor of our future home by addressing some Heavenly misconceptions...

1. In Heaven, we'll give up our earthly relationships. The *Toy Story* movies tell of the relationship between the boy Andy and his cowboy doll Woody. In *Toy Story 3*, Andy is grown up and headed for college. The tear-jerking message is that Andy still loves Woody as much as ever, but other things are now more important.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father..."⁴³¹ To imagine God would wrench away good gifts in order to make us fit for Heaven is one of Satan's most subtle lies. It isn't only contrary to the *nature* of our Heavenly Father, it's the antithesis of God's revealed *intent* to love us throughout eternity.

You will still be *you* for all eternity. The idea of nameless, amorphous spirits floating around the clouds is nowhere in Scripture. *You* will remember *your* life and relationships...

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for

⁴³⁰ A.W. Tozer, "The Holiness of God," Sermon.

⁴³¹ James 1:17

myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27).

And with perfected insight, even the sorrowful events will be seen from God's just perspective. Relationships and memories will be painless when viewed in their rightful context...

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

In Heaven, our frail, earthly shadows of love will be engulfed in perfect love. *We will not love anyone less*, but we will love everyone much, much more. I don't believe God will take away any of the special relationships with individuals. That love for your spouse, your children, and your parents will never be diminished. Rather, it will be augmented with a purer and deeper love than we could have imagined here on earth.

2. *I'll lose all my toys in Heaven.* Perhaps that sounds too childish... I'll rephrase it more maturely, although it retains the bite: *When I go to Heaven, I'll give up all the physical things I enjoy in this world.*

"You can't take it with you..." How often do we hear this? As they say, we never see a U-Haul behind a hearse. This type of thinking, while true to some degree, doesn't correspond with biblical teachings about our eternal home. No, our bank accounts and credit lines won't go with us, but we must keep in mind God's view of his creation. His first appraisal of each aspect was "It is good." He later reminds, "Every good thing" comes from him. The evil Screwtape acknowledges this when speaking to Wormwood, his demon "trainee..."

Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's [God's] ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours.⁴³²

⁴³² C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (New York: HarperOne, reprint edition, 2015).

The creation is presently fallen and corrupt, yet God hasn't given up on it. Our fallen minds perceive things in a fallen way, but that doesn't erase the original intent. Food is meant to be savored; our gluttony taints it. Peace and restfulness are gifts to the laborer; we extrapolate them into laziness. Possessions are intended for pleasure in giving, receiving, and sharing; we hoard and covet. Creative pursuits are designed to reflect the image of our Creator; we use them to invent new ways to sin. *There are no pleasures that are intrinsically sinful.* Every lustful thought, every evil act, every sinful passion is only a corruption of something good that God has ordained.

Thus, why would we expect God to remove his created goodness in Heaven? The short answer—he won't. Scripture is replete with God's plan to redeem the universe, not destroy it. A "new Heaven and new Earth" is the divine idea...

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17).

We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... (Revelation 21:1).

In case you missed it, God's future plans involve not just heaven, but *earth*. A new earth, in that it's redeemed, restored, and revitalized into what God had originally willed. Randy Alcorn summarizes...

We won't go to Heaven and leave Earth behind. Rather, God will bring Heaven and Earth together into the same dimension, with no wall of separation... Christ died not merely to make the best of a bad situation. He died so that mankind, Earth, and the universe itself would be renewed to forever proclaim his glory.⁴³³

What exactly will Heaven be like? Well, the "exactly" part is exactly what we won't know until we get there. That certainly doesn't mean we

⁴³³ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, 88.

don't know anything about our future home. By the testimony of God's Word we know that...

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

My heart imagines some pretty awesome things, and heaven is even better! We can also consider God's revealed character. Can you imagine the things an unbounded, perfectly creative, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent being can come up with? Can you imagine what he will provide for us motivated by unlimited grace and love? It doesn't simply stagger imagination—it defies it!

Furthermore, Scripture tells us that we'll have real physical bodies (though immortal and unmarred by sin) residing on a real physical Earth. I enjoy harp music. I may even devote a few centuries in Heaven to learn how to play. Maybe I'll even sit on a cloud and pluck out a little Bach for a while. But only as I wish to...

What I really enjoy here on Earth now is hiking and exploring nature. I love finding a new something over each hill. So far, I've only covered a pittance of what's out there. Will God fulfill my desire to pursue this joy in my eternal home? Perhaps that's the wrong question. I'm still approaching Heaven from a limited, earthbound perspective. I have to remind myself that God has placed me in a Story—no wait—*he created me to be in a Story*.

As mentioned previously, Heaven isn't an afterthought with features and experiences geared to match my desires like an eternal *Fantasy Island* episode. Everything about my being was planned and custom-created for my eternal existence with God *in his Heaven*. My ultimate purpose (and yours) is to “glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”⁴³⁴ The reason Heaven will fulfill my desires is that I have been made expressly to be there. Every longing I have deep in my soul is the absence of something that my future habitat will include in abundance. C.S. Lewis says it better from an apologetic perspective...

⁴³⁴ Westminster Shorter Catechism.

The fact that our heart yearns for something Earth can't supply is proof that Heaven must be our home.⁴³⁵

Yes, I'll spend endless days (literally!) hiking through God's universe. Like Lewis, I believe this because I have that desire hardwired into me. After exploring every niche in this galaxy, I'll go to the next. Then perhaps I'll have to find a galaxy cluster with innumerable planets suitable for hiking. Also, I won't be limited to those that are earth-like. My recreated body won't need an atmosphere or a particular temperature range! If anyone wishes to join me, look me up sometime after the initial millennium or two.

But will we *do* anything? Is Heaven simply a big vacation?

If I'm not careful, I can become very workaholic. My family says I should learn to rest, but I just don't function that way. I thrive on *doing*. Fortunately, God has blessed me with a job I enjoy. My alarm goes off after I get up most mornings.

Heaven is often portrayed as a place of rest. Scripture even states that fact. But there is also plenty of suggestions that eternity will be an active pursuit of accomplishment. I have Jonathan Edwards to thank for relieving my Heavenly work-worries...

We are not to suppose, when the saints have finished their course and done the works appointed to them here in this world, and are got to their journey's end, to their Father's house, that they will have nothing to do... There remaineth a rest for the people of God... The most perfect rest is consistent with being continually employed.⁴³⁶

“Work” isn't a 4-letter word! Adam was assigned to work well before sin entered the picture. His joyous occupation was ruling over a planet. Whatever that entailed, we can be sure he was perfectly equipped and perfectly pleased. After the fall, the dignity of work didn't change, only the mode of work here in a spoiled realm.

⁴³⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952).

⁴³⁶ Jonathon Edwards, “Praise, One of the Chief Employments of Heaven,” Thanksgiving Sermon, Nov. 7, 1734.

Is This Too Materialistic?

If you're thinking critically of me right now for being so self-centered in my excitement over mere creaturely pursuits, don't judge me yet. You're probably asking "Won't we spend eternity just worshipping God and adoring his awesomeness? Certainly! But I think we miss the mark when we try to stuff this into the box of our earthly understanding of worship.

I can only speculate about how we'll manage time and activities in Heaven. I certainly don't think there will be competition or even indecision about what we do or with whom. This is where the goodness of a loving Savior (who has deliberately been working on a specific place just for me) is all we need to know for the time being. Yes, just being in Jesus's presence for all of eternity will never grow old. But he is the one who provides a universe filled with created wonders for our enjoyment.

When I vacation with my family at a special place, there is no competition between the sights and my loved ones. In fact, the sights and activities are enhanced by sharing them with others. And our being together is simultaneously enhanced by enjoying the experiences. I share my granddaughter's thrill of finding a new flower. My wife and I share the joy of our children sharing experiences with their children. All the grandkids share the excitement of making it to the top of a mountain together... You get the point. The symbiosis of relationships, activities, locations, and discoveries are amplified a hundred-fold over a single relationship or event.

I believe that Heaven will be that way. I literally could gaze at Christ's unbounded majesty for eternity. But when someone joins me, a new way of enjoying Christ is formed and I add an aspect of excitement that wasn't there before. When Jesus and I transport to a galaxy far, far away to see a species of plant that he created, the shared joy grows exponentially. But if Jesus is with me, is he not with you? I don't have a clue how he works it out, but an omnipresent being shouldn't have a problem. We'll adore Christ and explore God's nature forever in Heaven, *and* we'll enjoy each other, *and* we'll marvel over the endless creation *and* do countless other things.

Several passages make it quite clear that believers will reign with Christ.⁴³⁷ What will that be like? I can only imagine, but I can guess it won't be sitting on a golden throne all day twiddling my thumbs. The imagery of Heavenly work carries with it animation and adventure. God is a delegator, not out of laziness, but because he loves working with his created beings (especially his adopted children).

Once again, we must trust the goodness and love of God in anticipating our future careers. Interestingly, what we do here on earth has input as to the responsibilities we are given in Heaven. The parable of the talents and several other passages inform us that our deeds in this earthly realm factor into our responsibilities in the heavenly realm...

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master (Matthew 25:21).

3. Heaven should be somber. It's a serious place with a serious Boss. Some think of Jonathan Edwards as austere and constantly nose-to-the-grindstone, yet even he admits that one of his life goals was "...to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world as I possibly can."⁴³⁸

C.S. Lewis so aptly notes: "Joy is the serious business of heaven."⁴³⁹ Scripture encourages us to actively seek joy...

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).

He agreed heartily with Edwards' life objective. Despite popular opinion, God is okay with joy and happiness! In fact, he created us with the capacity and desire to be happy; it was meant to be our normal state. Our pursuit of true happiness isn't selfish or materialistic. Edwards could have his joy-seeking mindset because he realized that joy, delight,

⁴³⁷ 2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 5:10, Daniel 7:27.

⁴³⁸ Henry Rogers, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M.*, (London: John Childs and Son, 1839).

⁴³⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1963), 93.

and happiness are ultimately bound to the glory of God himself. He explains...

God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it.⁴⁴⁰

Much of John Piper's work deals with the joy of God. He sees this as a non-negotiable in understanding the Creator and his work...

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). Therefore, he is not frustrated. He is an unshakably happy God... His happiness is foundationally the delight he has in himself. Before creation, he rejoiced in the image of his glory in the person of his Son. Then the joy of God “went public” in the works of creation and redemption... All the works of God culminate in the praises of his redeemed people... The climax of his happiness is the delight he takes in the echoes of his excellence in the praises of the saints.⁴⁴¹

Heaven will be a place of joy because God is joyful. Grumpy, apathetic, or grumbling people need not apply!

4. If we are too heavenly minded, we will be no earthly good. This sounds good as a song lyric, but I don't believe I've ever seen it play out in real life. Certainly, Scripture never warns against heavenly thinking...

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:2).

Those who keep in mind their ultimate destiny have a much more accurate view of the day-to-day narrative.

⁴⁴⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Schafer, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 495.

⁴⁴¹ John Piper, “An Unshakably Happy God,” John Piper devotional, www.desiringgod.org, Accessed 30 Jul 2020.

This book has a shelf life. At some point in time, the supernatural will no longer exist...

In a sense, it has been wrong from page one. I hope by now the reader has realized that what we've been calling the supernatural realm is, in fact, the *real* realm. Yes, it's only semantics, but I think our terminology adds to some peoples' wrong-thinking about the nature of reality. Perhaps a better way to visualize this is that God resides in the truly Natural realm, while we now inhabit a temporary, *subnatural* world. On some future date, this "bubble" of physicality in which we now live will be "burst," and what we now perceive with only five senses will forever be swallowed up into the *real* reality...

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (John 14:1-3).

28

Deception's Dead End

“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.” 2 Thessalonians

2:9

In previous chapters, we've examined some specific phenomena that many classify as paranormal. Ephesians 6 informs us that regardless of our feelings, sensory input, or philosophical reasoning, a supernatural realm exists in which there are malevolent entities engaged in a serious battle against God and his created beings. The fact that we are lulled into complacency by the “realness” of the physical world only gives the Enemy one more weakness to usurp. One of Satan's advantages is a clear view of both realms...

We are surrounded by another dimension of reality that is not subject to the senses, but is nevertheless as real as anything material. It is capable of penetrating our dimension in given instances and of doing things contrary to the laws which govern our dimension.⁴⁴²

I feel the pain of anyone who finds the battle metaphor unfit for the Christian experience. We (the Church) have allowed this complacency to settle into our traditions and define a “gospel” that is foreign to the one for which martyrs gave their lives. Scripture speaks often of peace,

⁴⁴² Walter Martin, *Tools of the Occult*, Audio on www.calvarytruths.com, Accessed 23 May 2020.

beauty, and contentment, but the overall picture (for now) is one of warfare.

God may mercifully shield dutiful Christians from the fiery frontline assault much of the time, but it wouldn't be too extreme for our first prayer each morning to be praise and thankfulness that he has provided spiritual armor for that day. Like Nehemiah's wall-builders, we should go about our daily lives with optimistic joy and encouragement yet keeping a wary eye and a ready sword.

The Ultimate Paranormal Deception

I realize the danger of speculating about the future. My simple, pea-sized brain can't even comprehend why *Star Trek TOS* was canceled after three seasons and *The Bachelor* continues, much less the course of human events. We must continually guard against letting supernatural hypothesizing take precedence over the revealed Word. Owen warns of ignoring this imbalance between feelings and beliefs, and God's truth...

Where light leaves the affections behind, it ends in formality and atheism; where affections outrun light they sink into the bog of superstition...⁴⁴³

Scripture does provide light on future events, but even here we must take care not to read into it our own bents and biases. Mature believers should prayerfully and diligently "search the scriptures daily" and "rightly handle the word of truth," never repackaging the Word to support a particular phenomenon.

Having set these lofty criteria, are we allowed to ask the question: "Will paranormal phenomena play a role in up-coming or end-times events?" My speculations are just that—*my speculations*. I'm not a prophet, but I do believe we can explore some possibilities based on logical and thoughtful observations aligned with Scriptural truths. I

⁴⁴³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, volume 1, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 401.

fully trust that the reader will wisely follow the Berean example of verifying the claims of others.⁴⁴⁴

The plans of the Evil One are known only to him and the Most High. He will always do whatever he deems most efficacious in achieving his ends. Tethered to God's permissive leash, Satan may change, augment, or scrap weapons as his schemes require. However, I believe it would be naïve to think the strategies that work so well in leading people astray wouldn't continue to be used in even greater ways. Among many other tactics, paranormal deceptions seem to be major weapons in Satan's warfare. Without being overly dogmatic, there are predictions in Scripture that might allude to supernatural deceit in the end-times. Paul warns that spirits and/or demons will play a role...

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

He also speaks of "signs and wonders" performed by Antichrist...

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders... (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

The original text could also be read "signs and lying wonders." It's unclear as to whether these are "fake" signs and wonders, or signs and wonders that lead to a false belief. Whichever is the case, people will be utterly deceived by these events, resulting in their refusal to follow the truth...

...and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who

⁴⁴⁴ Acts 17:11

did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Some accuse God of injustice here in sending this “strong delusion.” Good biblical hermeneutics, however, advises us to interpret unclear verses by the clear ones. We know from many other passages that God’s holy nature precludes any deceit on his part. The first and last phrases of this passage frame God’s act in the middle. These people are far from innocent bystanders. The recipients of the delusion have already “refused to love the truth” and “had pleasure in unrighteousness.” After snubbing God’s bountiful mercies, their destination has already been chosen. In a sense, God is releasing them to their own intents, allowing Antichrist’s deceptions to culminate in their ultimate end—the condemnation of the human rebels.

The important thing to note in the context of this chapter is the clear prediction that a *huge*, worldwide, fast-track, cross-cultural deception will transpire. In my opinion, this would have to be of paranormal or supernatural proportions to convince an entire unbelieving population to give allegiance to the Lawless One. Jesus gave a similar prophecy...

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24).

Most biblical scholars interpret this as hyperbole meaning these signs and wonders are *so* compelling that they could *almost* fool a believer.

Some have speculated that this global “Mother of All Deceptions” isn’t feasible in our global information age.⁴⁴⁵ As we move closer to the

⁴⁴⁵ When science is used to test a hypothesis, we typically try to falsify the *null* hypothesis. For example, the hypothesis is put forth that Additive X will increase apple production. We would then do experiments to *falsify* the null hypothesis: “Additive X will *not* increase apple production.”

A similar logic can be used to examine possible end-times events. When skeptics claim that there is no scheme that will deceive the world, that is a null hypothesis that can be tested. One way to test it rationally is to offer scenarios in which it could be possible. If the proposal is reasonable, the null hypothesis (“World deception is not possible.”) has been falsified. Note, we didn’t prove the hypothesis, but we did show the null hypothesis to be unsubstantiated.

end-times, we've already witnessed several "impossible" prophecies become old news. Prior to the 1940s, no one could imagine the nation Israel back in her homeland. Prophecies of "the whole world" viewing an event simultaneously were ridiculed mere decades ago. A cashless economic system with the power to control every transaction worldwide? This was a ludicrous prediction for most of the 20th century. We also know that because of our social and electronic connections, change can occur at light-speed. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that paradigms can literally shift overnight.

We already have hints about some of Antichrist's and the false prophet's supernatural acts—fire from the sky, a resurrection, and a talking image. Let's assume, then, that the prophesied activities of these end-time spirits are of a more blatantly paranormal nature.⁴⁴⁶ (Just a speculative mental exercise at this point.) Are there candidates in Satan's contemporary pool of paranormal phenomena that could potentially initiate a global deception?

Some have speculated that the UFO/ET phenomenon could be a catalyst for rapidly altering worldviews. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan mused over that possibility: "I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world."⁴⁴⁷

Imagine a scenario... One morning all TV networks switch to an unexpected press conference. The president approaches the podium accompanied by a small, gray-skinned being just like we've seen on sci-fi shows for decades. Similar announcements are simultaneously broadcast from other nations. World leaders explain that earth has been negotiating with a race of extraterrestrials for several years with the goal of "breaking the news to us gently" about our new space brothers. The world experiences what is ostensibly the greatest paradigm shift of all time.

In subsequent coverage (all regular TV programming is preempted for days), the ET spokesbeing (who has learned several earth languages) astonishes audiences via global satellite feed with the of the mysteries of the universe. He (it?) praises earthlings for showing the potential for inclusion in the galactic family. The ET encourages

⁴⁴⁶ As opposed to Satan's supernatural manipulation of non-supernatural constructs such as politics, academia, or culture.

⁴⁴⁷ UN address, 1987.

humans to come together as one, dropping ancient mythologies and embracing the Universal Truth—the brotherhood of all beings.

He tells of how his ancestors millennia ago engineered human life on the empty planet Earth and explains how they've been watching and nurturing us covertly for so long. But now is the "New Renaissance" of human civilization. Working through the appointed liaison (Antichrist?), humankind can now reach new heights of knowledge and creativity. Needless to say, biblical truths and the old morality in any form are suddenly obsolete. As prophecies indicate, human civilization will wholeheartedly drink in the "Lie" and follow Antichrist.

Or could Satan trigger the strong delusion by some mystic, New Age ploy? If the rapture does occur just prior to this great deception, could a supernatural explanation be given for the mysterious disappearance of millions? Recall that one New Age leader has already predicted a miraculous "removal" of old-school Bible-thumpers so that the remaining humans can finally move to a higher spiritual plane. [p. 347] There are also predictions among some UFO religions that ETs will someday remove large numbers of humans (either to populate a new and better planet somewhere, or to purge the earth of "troublemakers").

Again, these are only interesting speculations, not disciplined exegesis. I believe, though, that a small helping of postulating about the future is appropriate. Whether end-times deception involves the paranormal is yet to be seen, but the fact remains that these same phenomena are also significant factors in shaping contemporary worldviews. Their influence is *now* as well as *then*.

Are we truly seeing signs of the end-times now? I believe it's prudent to realize that every tree starts as a seedling. Despite not knowing the exact dates of end-time events, Scripture encourages us to be watchful and to heed the developing signs. (This admonition in itself implies that signs are discernable.)

Here in Oklahoma, storms occasionally catch us off guard, but most of the time they are preceded by developing "clues." A nimbo cumulus cloud begins billowing on the horizon. Minutes later, the western sky is completely dark. A few flashes of sheet lightning can be seen. Then a distant rumble of thunder shakes the plains. A gust front passes and the trees begin to bend. Time to head to the fraidy hole! Paul

noted that the inklings of the last days were already developing in his day...

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:7).⁴⁴⁸

The scriptural metaphor for the approaching storm is the pain of childbirth. Having been only a bystander to the process, the typical birth pangs begin small and infrequent, then crescendo to intense and rapid. This is an important fact in considering end-time events. The *types* of events we see are secondary to the *intensification* of the events. Thus, if Christ's coming is near, it's possible that an "embryo" of the paranormal signs and wonders of the Tribulation may be observable today. Possibly, the "setting of the stage" will spill back into the days prior to the rapture.⁴⁴⁹

Will believers be tempted by the strong delusion? A pretribulation/premillennial assumption has the Church taken up to be with Christ before this deception. Some speculate individuals may become believers during the Tribulation. If this is the case, then these believers could be the referenced "elect" who were not led astray by the delusion. And of course, God would not judge his children by allowing them to be fooled by the lie.

I believe it's quite likely, however, that if the strong delusion is of a paranormal nature, we could be witnessing the embryonic stages of this today. It would be hard to doubt we are being primed for some type of major UFO deception, whether sooner or later. Even if Satan played out the ET scenario tomorrow, I could see millions, even many Christians, dumping their biblical worldview for his paranormal upgrade.

⁴⁴⁸ Whatever the "restrainer" is, it's preventing the full-scale plan of Antichrist even now. When the restrainer is absent, the plan goes hyperspeed. There are a number of guess about the identity of the restrainer. I believe it's the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. When the Church is raptured, Antichrist is now "unrestrained."

⁴⁴⁹ Note that the rapture has no specific signs. It occurs as "a thief in the night" with no prior warning. All of the end-times signs point to the Tribulation and Christ's second coming at the end of the seven years. Logically though, if the signs indicate an imminent second coming, the rapture is even nearer.

Furthermore, some have suggested that since Satan isn't omniscient, he may not know yet the exact form of his end-times strategy. The Restrainer may have him "keeping his options open," working on a number of possible deceptions. Paranormal phenomena may be among many schemes ready for full-blown development.

The Believer's Supernatural Hope

The war has come to us. Satan and the world rage against us without, and our flesh opposes us within. Some seem to believe that coming to Christ removes them from the battle, but the opposite is true.⁴⁵⁰

If that sounds too foreboding an end to our discussion, take heart! My hope and prayer is that as we've examined paranormal phenomena, the believer isn't only better equipped to discern and confront these deceptions, but has developed a strong feeling of praise and triumph—praise to the Author of our Story of adventure and redemption, and triumph in that he is sovereign over every realm, seen or unseen. He has given the specific promise...

We would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Our "prime directive" remains clear and unwavering...

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:11).

The strategy is simple, but by no means simplistic. Taking on this armor requires a lifestyle that cultivates the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, repentance, and purity.

⁴⁵⁰ Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to Questions About Satan, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014), 167.

Personally, I fully expect paranormal phenomena to increase in frequency, popularity, and deceptiveness. We are warned that “Evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”⁴⁵¹ It may well be that the plot of our Story darkens before the final pages. Yet as believers, we have a sure hope...

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 37-39).

⁴⁵¹ 2 Timothy 3:13

Chapter One?

“Biblical Christianity is not only a faith that involves essential truths; it is the story of God’s purpose to redeem humanity and to bring glory to himself. This narrative is revealed to us as a comprehensive master story that is as vast as the cosmos and so detailed as to include every atom and molecule of creation.” Albert Mohler⁴⁵²

“We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:18

We find ourselves at this moment in the Story, trekking a valley path connecting two mountains. If we look over our shoulder, a supernatural past is a distant peak on the horizon. We hear only faraway echoes of creation, incarnation, resurrection, and countless other miracles. Before us lies another peak shrouded in mist. At times, when our souls are very still, we seem to hear the same supernatural reverberations coming from that cloudy mountaintop.

For the moment, though, we are in between on the flatland where the rocks around us can be examined up close. The flowers can be measured, and the air can be smelled.

As discussed throughout this book, we valley-path believers face a double-edged danger in engaging the supernatural. Many succumb to the secularist pull to jettison the supernatural, as much as our traditions

⁴⁵² Albert Mohler, (2010). “The Christian Worldview as Master Narrative: Creation, “www.albertmohler.com, 2010, Accessed 8 May 2020.

allow, in favor of a naturalistic universe. We are bombarded by this philosophy from the media, education, and too often religious leaders. Lewis saw this budding decades ago...

They thus make it part of their method to eliminate the supernatural wherever it is even remotely possible to do so, to strain natural explanation even to the breaking point before they admit the least suggestion of a miracle.⁴⁵³

Believers are trapped in cognitive dissonance. This naturalistic philosophy works for the non-believers since it does away with any accountability beyond human preferences. But the true follower of Christ is left with an empty deism that defies both Scripture and the soul's strong sense of "something beyond."

At the other extreme, New Agers, mystics, and other pantheists urge us to abandon the physical realm completely and plunge heart-long into supernatural "realities." Ron Rhodes speaks of this end of the supernatural belief spectrum...

Today we are living in experiential times... Rather than embracing an objective, factually-based faith, resting on divine authority, many today are seeking mystical and emotional experience... the paranormal is the experiential flavor of the day.⁴⁵⁴

And therein lies the problem. Very few of the paranormal beliefs in our culture endorse the "objective, factually-based faith" detailed in Scripture. Many Christians are lured into these "empty philosophies" by Christianized vocabulary and the delusion that anything spiritual has to be of God. I don't suggest that there is a happy medium between these two extremes. Reality (God's reality as revealed in Scripture) isn't to be found on this human-centered continuum. Our gaze must be fixed higher and differently.

I like old westerns; the guy in the white hat always wins in the end. We are hard-wired for happy endings because *that is the final scene*

⁴⁵³ C.S. Lewis, "Miracles," *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

⁴⁵⁴ Ron Rhodes, *The Truth*.

God designed for us. Believers have the sure promise that whatever transpires in this physical realm, our Story moves to an incomparable climax in the next...

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17).

And even better news—that ending is only the final words of Chapter One! Eternal adventures begin in the next chapter and continue unbounded through our eternal Story with our Redeemer...

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (John 14:3).

Carry On

I believe a solid, biblical worldview will be even more critical in the days to come. Effectively using the spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6 presupposes the warrior possesses a biblical worldview that clearly defines the enemy's methods, acknowledges the importance of the battle, and understands the resources provided.

If at this point you feel somewhat preoccupied with the supernatural or are experiencing twinges of fear, you may have missed some important points in this book. Please note these truths...

- The reality of the biblical supernatural is significant, but it's only one part of spiritual discipline and Christian maturity. Our worldview should include an accurate knowledge of the supernatural but keep a balanced view. Don't become negatively obsessed with angels, demons, or other paranormal concepts.
- Within the area of the paranormal, remember that God remains sovereign over all. For the believer, Christ's loving sacrifice has

defeated sin, fear, and death. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”⁴⁵⁵

I assume that if you have read this book, you are likely a believer, concerned about scriptural truths and the biblical worldview. It’s also very likely that you have a significant influence on those around you. We not only have the responsibility of sharing the gospel within our social circle but also of discipling.

Although our final destination will be glorious, Scripture tells us to expect increased deception and “birth pangs” as Christ’s return draws nearer.⁴⁵⁶ God’s Word gives us these warnings and encouragements *because we can and should be proactive in confronting trials and deception*. Here are some ways to engage your world with the truths of a biblical worldview...

1. Continue developing your own biblical worldview. In addition to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer, build an apologetic base that can provide “an answer to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Place yourself (and your family) under the mentorship of those who teach Scripture as the inspired, inerrant, Word of God. Be sure they have a balanced view of doctrine and are not afraid to engage the elements of a biblical worldview. Make your beliefs accountable to your mentors and fellow learners.

2. Use the Ephesians Hypothesis when discerning new paranormal phenomena or teachings. Seek advice from other believers who may have experience in a particular phenomenon. Study God’s Word and pray for discernment.

*3. Engage others in biblical worldview training.*⁴⁵⁷ Provide resources to your family and others that can facilitate this. Many of the citations

⁴⁵⁵ 1 John 4:18

⁴⁵⁶ “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1).

⁴⁵⁷ There are many good resources for this. Check out the (Christian) sources cited positively in this book. Here are some books to start with...

An Introduction to Christian Worldview (Anderson, Clark, and Naugle)

Cold Case Christianity (J. Warner Wallace)

Is God Just a Human Invention? (McDowell & Morrow)

within this text provide good starting points for worldview enhancement.

4. *Stand against deceptive ideas.* Pray for wisdom, truth, and discernment in your family and church. One person can make a difference. “Put on the full armor!”

5. *Enjoy the reality of God’s supernatural and glorify him for it!* The Most High cannot be understood to the fullest of his revelation without considering his supernatural attributes and creations. We are a part of his supernatural realm although presently in a limited sense. God is supernatural, yet “he is actually not far from each one of us.”⁴⁵⁸

Mere Christianity (C.S. Lewis)

The Case for Christ, The Case for Faith, The Case for a Creator, The Case for the Real Jesus

(L. Strobel)

⁴⁵⁸ Acts 17:27

Appendix A

Things That Are Just Weird

Ball Lightning

This is one of the many proposed sources for UFO lore. Ball lightning has been discussed for centuries, yet it remains an elusive phenomenon with no undisputed explanation. The earliest documentation of what may have been ball lightning was in Dartmoor, England in 1638. About 300 people were in a church when a very dark thunderstorm passed over. Witnesses say an eight-foot ball of fire burst through a window and bounced around the inside of the church building. When the fireball dissipated, four were dead and dozens injured. The phenomenon generated a thick black smoke with choking sulfurous stench.

Reports of other incidents also mention sulfur dioxide fumes, which would seem uncharacteristic of a purely electrical event. The phenomenon does seem to be associated with severe electrical storms. The white, yellow, to reddish spheres are usually smaller than the Dartmoor fireball, from marble-size to three feet. The duration is usually from one to about 20 seconds, hence the lack of good photographic evidence. Most of the balls end with an explosion. As with swamp gas, laboratory attempts to reproduce the phenomena fail to match reports.

Cattle Mutilation

Another almost universal phenomenon is the unusual death and mutilation of livestock. The majority of the incidents involve cattle and are elevated to paranormal status by the unexplained parameters associated with the bodies and surroundings.

Since the events are usually unobserved, there is always the question of whether a death really is abnormal. Evidence outside of normal death

and scavenging could include 1) lack of blood in the body or at the scene, 2) missing eyeballs and tongues, 3) precise cutting of body parts, 4) surgical removal of genitals and certain organs, 5) no apparent cause of death, 6) transport of bodies long distances or over fences, etc., and 7) absence of disturbance in the surroundings (noise, footprints, tire tracks).

The Pickle Principle would suggest that most cases have a normal explanation. Animals die all the time with CODs that are often puzzling. Some claim that small scavengers (mice, insects, birds) may then eat out eyes and specific organs. It's possible for blood to be absent in a body that did not bleed out and then was allowed to be undisturbed for a few hours. A few incidents have been shown to be human criminal acts. (Animal mutilators face a variety of charges—animal cruelty, trespassing, rustling, destroying property.) Most of these were connected with occult practices or perverse attention-grabbing.

A significant number, however, seem to defy simple explanation, thus the paranormal connection. There does seem to be a correlation with other alleged paranormal activity.⁴⁵⁹ UFO sightings, vortexes, and poltergeists are often accompanied by cattle mutilations. I can't imagine the usefulness of a cow tongue to an ET, except maybe a good deli sandwich.

Another common theory is that the animals are part of government research. This raises the question as to why the Feds or military would need to work their mischief secretly and dangerously (ranchers are well-armed) when they could so easily waste our taxes on their own ranches.

Death Crown (feather crown, angel crown)

These oddities have haunted southern and Appalachian folklore for centuries. After a person's death, it was common to destroy or re-tick their feather mattresses and pillows. Among the loose feathers loved ones would often find tightly rolled spirals of feathers that could be as large as an apple. The legend is that these are formed as the spirit of the

⁴⁵⁹ Again, we could question cause and effect. Is there a common paranormal source or is the commonality a person(s) attentive to the paranormal?

person spiraled out of the body. I've seen these myself, and they are quite perplexing. I have two hypotheses. Feathers have a hook-and-barbule structure that allows the strands to stick together much like Velcro. This arrangement causes the feather to have more friction when rubbed one direction. Perhaps the motion of the sleeper over the years causes feathers to grab onto each other and grow like a snowball. The other source might be a small insect that becomes trapped in the mattress. Perhaps the little creature in its desperate attempts to escape rolls the feathers into a sphere.

Gurdon Light (Sandy Crossing Spotlight)

A few miles east of my hometown is the smaller town of Gurdon. For almost a century, residents have talked about the unusual orb that floats above a nearby section of the railroad. I spoke with several teens back in the day who said the light was consistent enough that if you spent several nights there, you were almost certain to see it. I tried but never saw anything. Nevertheless, many reliable Gurdonites have witnessed it.

The lore behind the light is that the ghostly lantern is that of railroad foreman William McClain who was murdered in 1931. McClain was killed by one of his workers, Loius McBride, over accusations of railway sabotage. The time of the incident coincides with the first appearances of the light.

Geologists have a different take. There are massive quartz strata under the entire area, along with a section of the New Madrid fault. One hypothesis is that stress from the fault generates piezoelectric energy within the quartz crystals. Some think the phenomenon might be expressed as an orb of energy that rides the steel tracks similar to ball lightning. Other theories are the usual swamp gas, UFOs, and giant panther eyes. An acquaintance of mine who used to attend Gurdon High School, and who had seen the light, summarized it well: "It's not as much fun when you try to explain everything."

Old Mike

Many of us have odd past experiences that at the time may not have seemed so unusual. Mine is Old Mike. Mike was an embalmed corpse I used to visit back in the late 60s. When I knew him, he lived in a closet behind a cloth curtain in the town mortuary. My friends and I would get change out of Mike's coat pocket periodically for pinball money. I'm fairly certain the morticians kept his pockets stocked just to see kids search them.

They say Old Mike wasn't really that old, probably in his forties when he died in 1911. He was an itinerant pencil salesman who would periodically ride the train into Prescott, Arkansas, make some sales, then leave the next day. Mike's body was found in the city park one morning. Someone had seen him near there at a tent revival the night before. His death was assumed to be a stroke or heart attack.

The mortuary prepared Mike's body for burial while attempting to locate his family. Many townspeople were acquainted with the traveler on a casual level, but no one could verify anything more than his first name and that he might have had an Italian accent. With leads running out, the morticians placed Mike's body on display in the mortuary window on Elm Street, in hopes that someone might recognize him.

By the time I met Mike in the 60s, he stayed mostly in the closet. His preservation had deteriorated somewhat by then, leaving his skin very dark and shriveled. For some reason, his eyelids had been painted with eyeballs, as if they were open, but they were far from realistic. I remember feeling sorry for Mike and wishing I could paint him some better eyes.

In 1975, shortly after I left Prescott (and after Mike's mention on *The Tonight Show*), the Arkansas attorney general ordered him to be buried. He had a modest, yet dignified funeral. Old Mike's body rests in peace at DeAnn Cemetery in Prescott.

While on the topic of unusual interments, my maternal grandfather, John Wesley Daniel, attended a funeral at which the deceased woman raised up during the service and requested a drink of water. After recovering from the diabetic coma she raised several more children, before her actual death. My paternal grandfather, Leon McWilliams,

told me of a “sittin’ up with the dead” incident.⁴⁶⁰ The deceased had died in a contorted position and the morticians had to use cords to hold the body in a straight position. One of the cords apparent broke in the wee hours of the morning allowing the corpse to sit up. According to my grandfather, the body was unaccompanied for the rest of the night.

Paranormal Odors

I’ll refrain from any jokes, but it is interesting how many paranormal reports include smells. Ghostly odors range from sweet to sinister. Some report smelling flowers, cologne, Old Spice, or donuts. Others describe horrible aromas such as rotting flesh or burning sulfur. A group in Los Angeles offers guided tours of “13 Smelly Ghosts” in southern California.⁴⁶¹

Many Bigfoot encounters begin with the fowl scent of the animal wafting by before the actual observation. This seems to be a universal component in Sasquatch stories. Perhaps odor sensors would be more effective than infrared? Also, demonic manifestations, in general, have long been associated with the smell of sulfur (brimstone) or smoke. There is no biblical reference to a demonic odor, except for the association of hell or judgment with fire and brimstone.

UFOs/ETs aren’t without some characteristic aromas. Experiencers in proximity to the phenomena tell of a few milder smells such as oil, ozone, or chemical. The majority of olfactory observers report more repulsive scents. Common adjectives are sulfurous, foul, atrocious, nauseating, rotten-eggish, noxious, pungent, skunk-like, etc.

Some paranormal experiencers have recurring odor episodes. There is documented medical condition known as *phantosmia* in which the subject senses non-existent aromas. Medical experts suggest the long-term smellers may be phantosmiacs. I’m not sure what to make of paranormal putridness. I assume if a deceiving entity could produce a visual sensation, an olfactory one would also be possible. It seems too

⁴⁶⁰ Back in the day, friends of the deceased would sign up for times to sit with the body during the night. Supposedly this was to keep cats and mice off the body, which was kept at a home until relatives could arrive.

⁴⁶¹ Alysia Gray Painter, “Ghost Hunting (With Your Nose),” www.nbclosangeles.com, 28 Sep 2015.

cliché to think that evil spirits possess an inherent nauseating scent, but who knows?

Spontaneous Human Combustion

Since Dickens killed off one of his characters in Bleak House, the phenomenon of a human body bursting into flame has been a popular paranormal storyline. It's difficult to get a count of SHC victims since the results look the same as other burnings. Over the past two centuries, there have been hundreds of unusual cases in which the remains of a burned corpse is found with no known ignition source and with little damage to the surroundings.

The obvious problem with SHC is that humans are mostly water and not very flammable. It takes temperatures over 2000° F and lots of fuel to cremate a corpse. How does a person turn into a pile of ashes without external fuel sources and without causing massive damage to the surroundings?

Several explanations have been proposed. Are these scenes cleverly disguised murders? As suggested, burning a corpse takes a lot of energy. It seems there are easier ways to dispose of a body. Could renegade body enzymes release all cellular energy at once? So far, no mechanism has been found for this.

Some physiologists propose a non-paranormal explanation. The "wicking" theory supposes that a series of circumstances may lead to SHC. It starts with an overweight, alcohol-consuming, smoker falling asleep. A lit cigarette touches the abdomen of the victim. The smoldering tip slowly burns through the skin, melting an area of fat. The liquified fat wicks into the clothing and begins burning like a candle. Toxic gases immobilize the victim and the "candle" continues to burn. Eventually, all the fatty parts of the body are consumed. Little damage is done to the surroundings.

Strange Things That Fall from the Sky

We've noted the wonder humankind has always experienced pondering the heavens above. Deep space still intrigues us, and we sense that untold discoveries await. But closer to home, our atmosphere sometimes provides peeks at its own mysteries. The usual stuff—rain, hail, snow—is rather commonplace except in excess. Some falling things, though, are more enigmatic. The friendly skies have dumped quite a diversity of unusual objects on us. Some are more explainable than others. For centuries, people have witnessed showers of blood, frogs, fish, meat, Cracker Jacks, jelly, cooked bats, spiders, squids, sticky stuff, golf balls, coffee creamer, and frozen iguanas.⁴⁶²

Falling metallic objects and device components are rare but increasingly likely. In addition to shoddily serviced aircraft and renegade missiles, humans have placed thousands of satellites in orbit. Near-space is a junkyard (possibly a deterrent to the more snobbish ETs) and what goes up must come down. The plan is for most of this to burn up on reentry, but it doesn't always work that way.

I was puzzled as a child when I ran across what appeared to be wads of aluminum foil Easter basket stuffing. Most were found during the 60s in open fields around my house. Our forty acres were very isolated, so these anomalies weren't blown trash or litter from passers-by. I convinced myself that the excelsior foil had to be from airplane engines, perhaps the air filters. After about fifty years, someone offered the first plausible explanation. A Vietnam vet said it was *chaff* sprinkled by jets to confuse radar. Looking back, we did have a lot of low-flying fighter jets maneuvering over our middle-of-nowhere-sparsely-populated southern Arkansas bottomlands. Why they were there, I suppose, is another mystery.

Most of the reports of strange things falling from the sky have involved fish. In Marksville, Louisiana, 1947, fish of all types and sizes rained down on the city for several minutes. It was a fair day, although there had been storms and tornadoes the day before. A state biologist collected samples and noted the specimens were all local species. He estimated the concentration to be about one fish per square yard. The

⁴⁶² Meghan Jones, "10 of the Strangest Things That Have Fallen from the Sky," *Readers Digest*, www.rd.com, accessed 29 May 2020.

first explanation was that a flock of pelicans had bombed the town. That theory was quickly dismissed. The next guess was the recent tornadoes.

Most sky dumps are water animals and plants. There is good evidence that waterspouts and tornadoes can draw up huge amounts of water and rain it down miles away. A few miles from here, a recent tornado lowered a lake level by three feet as it passed over. Ill-fated creatures would likely be in the mix.

Let's move backward a few decades. On a fair day in Rankin, Kentucky, 3 March 1876, pieces of raw meat showered onto a community for several minutes. In a NY Times article a few days later, witnesses tell about the thin slices of fresh, red meat fluttering to the ground like snowflakes. According to the article, townsfolk said the meat looked like beef but tasted more like deer (...what?). Samples were sent away for analysis and confirmed to be lung tissue. Later samples were found to be mixtures of lung, muscle, and cartilage. (For what it's worth, a similar incident occurred in London the next week.)

Incidents like this are magnets for paranormal propositions. I think we can rule out distressed cargo planes, ejecting their load of sliced deli meats. I know you're thinking a UFO cattle abduction gone horribly wrong, but let's shelve that for a while, too. Scientists at the time offered two solutions. First, the material was not meat, but rather a type of soil algae (or cyanobacteria) called *Nostoc*. Dehydrated *Nostoc* can be blown into the atmosphere then rehydrated to form gelatinous, fishy-smelling, thickened colonies. As a biologist, I've seen lots of this algae. I don't think so. Besides, pathologists were certain it was animal tissue. The other alternative was buzzard regurgitant. Vultures are known to vomit their last meal (for various reasons). So, a huge flock of unnoticed buzzards regurgitated the herd of dead deer they had just eaten over the town? (Kudos to those who did the initial taste test.)

Ruling out anything paranormal, my best guess is, as with fish showers, a tornado swept up an unfortunate herd of something, pulverizes the remains with the projectiles in the vortex, then pumps the material high into the stratosphere where it could have been transported great distances in the jet stream. So, if it ever rains cats and dogs...

Swamp Gas

Kindled through agitation to a flame—Which oft, they say,
some evil spirit attends—Hovering and blazing with delusive
light, Misleads the amazed night-wanderer from his way, To
bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool.⁴⁶³

John Melton's description of this phenomenon remains as mysterious today. Hovering, glowing lights aren't an invention of the ufologist. Swamp sojourners have called them will-o'-the-wisps, spooklights, orbs, fairy fire, and jack-o'-lanterns.

My grandfather told of his experience with a jack-o'-lantern. Walking home late one night, he noticed a light on the road ahead. Assuming it was the lantern of a fellow traveler, he continued. As he passed the light, he saw that it was hovering above the road with no human present. His story ends by stating he didn't stay long to investigate.

Volta was the first to link *ignis fatuus* (fool's fire) to "swamp gas" in 1776. In theory, these gaseous products of decomposition either combust or possess a type of luminescence. Scientists speculate that the gases are phosphate-based. Laboratory attempts to recreate the phenomena have been unproductive.

Over the past 80 years, swamp gas has been one of the preferred explanations for many UFO sightings, even though no one has verified this *in situ* or experimentally. It's somewhat ironic that glowing gas masses in the scenarios skeptics use seem rarer than the phenomena they are intended to replace. UFO investigators note that if swamp gas did act as hypothesized, it would not resemble most of the reported UFO behavior. There is also speculation as to whether some swamp gas lights are instead glowing fungi. Several species of Basidiomycetes are capable of bioluminescence. Their glow is dull green, and it definitely wouldn't be navigating through the air.

Project Blue Book investigator Allen Hynek at first debunked the Hillsdale College UFOs by citing swamp gas (there was a nearby pond). Supposedly, this was his worldview turning point. Hynek claims that

⁴⁶³ John Melton, *Paradise Lost*, book IX, line 637.

this ridiculous explanation (forced upon him from superiors) caused him to rethink the whole UFO situation and become a “believer.”

Zombies

Originating in Haitian folklore, zombies are believed to be a reanimated dead body. According to the myth, a *bokor* (evil sorcerer) uses magic in reviving the body. The “undead” corpse has no mind or soul of its own and obeys the will of the bokor. Modern sci-fi zombies are typically caused by viruses, radiation, or aliens.

Zombies throw up some serious red flags for the physiologist. It’s difficult enough to keep a nominally healthy human body alive, much less a decomposing mass of putrefying flesh. Where does the body’s metabolic energy come from? What coordinates the muscle movement if the brain isn’t working? This pretty much rules out a physically caused zombie, so no danger of being contagious. But if you should see a zombie—run!

Appendix B

What is a Worldview?

“Ideas have consequences, bad ideas have victims.”

Chuck Colson⁴⁶⁴

“The Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can’t both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn’t fit the real universe.”

C.S. Lewis⁴⁶⁵

Some of my earliest memories are of the backyard on East 3rd Street. It seemed like a huge place. When I followed my dog Timmy to the back fence, the little tile house looked miles away. That was my world, along with occasional trips to town, church, and grandparents.

There were many mysterious things in my world. I recall watching through the fence as large, noisy trucks chugged by carrying long sticks on the back. Toward the end of most days, I remember hearing a low, mournful sound in the distance. Mama would comfort me, “It’s just the mill whistle.”

I didn’t know what that meant, but it was enough to know that she knew and wasn’t afraid. I began to look forward to the sound because it meant that in a little while Daddy would come home. He would always hug my sister and me as we met him at the door. Daddy smelled like something I never smelled in the backyard. I figured it was just daddy smell. When I sat on his lap, I remember seeing little brown flakes all over his clothes. His pants had tiny holes with dark edges that mine didn’t. My little brain pondered a lot of these mysteries.

I’m not sure about the details leading up to this particular event. One day my dad put me in the car, and we went to an unfamiliar place. It was noisy. Stick trucks were everywhere. Little brown flakes were

⁴⁶⁴ A byline often used by the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview.

⁴⁶⁵ C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 116.

blowing into the car window onto my pants. The smell in the air was my dad's smell, but much stronger.

Daddy pulled the car up next to a tall machine and said "Wait here. I'll be right back."

I watched as my daddy climbed a ladder to the top. He put on a strange hat and fiery sparks began raining down the side of the machine. In a minute, he crawled down and shook a man's hand. Suddenly, I heard the sound again. The mill whistle—except it was so loud! Then another loud sound... I watched as sticks like the ones on the trucks started rising one by one into the huge building.

Something incredible had happened. My daddy probably didn't notice. When we got back home, there was no change that my mama could have seen. Yet within my little brain, a coherent worldview was starting to form. All those random, mysterious puzzle pieces of my life were fitting together. For the first time, I was beginning to see my world as a "big picture." Things made sense...

When I saw the trucks the next day, I knew they were taking trees to the mill. The mill whistle? Not so mysterious. It comes from where my daddy works. When he came home, smelling of sawdust, I could touch the holes burned in his pants and ask, "Did you fix machines today?" I could carry on an intelligent conversation with him! Even more important, I had a framework for new information. When Mama said Daddy had to work late, I understood that a lot of machines must be broken. When I saw a tree being cut down on TV, I could predict that it would be put on a truck and be taken to a mill. The world started to make more and more sense.

My worldview has continued to develop for several decades now. Each new factoid of truth I learn is a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. I go merrily through life picking up a piece here and another piece there, placing them securely in my idea bag. Over the years, I've amassed quite a collection of information. It's a hodgepodge of data about philosophy, TV, theology, friends, science, society, ethics, history, and such.

As an adult, I have enough information in my bag to live an engaging independent life. However, there are different ways to deploy the data. When a new question/challenge/need arises, I could simply sort through the random pieces until I find the appropriate truth. In

theory, this would work, and it's very likely a good metaphor for how most people process their world.

But I can think of a better way... Let's take the pieces out of the idea bag and lay them out on a table. It would be great to have a puzzle box top with a picture, but let's say we don't. My grandmother taught me the strategy of connecting the edge pieces first then looking for same-color pieces. So, the puzzle is beginning to take shape. And, I'm learning an important concept—the pieces “fit” in one way better than in others. In fact, with the not-so-good fits I have to mangle and distort a piece if it fits at all.

As I find more fits, I'm becoming quite pleased with my puzzle-assembling skills. But something much more subtle and profound is occurring. If someone were to say, “That piece doesn't go there,” I would quickly retort “No way, it has to! Look at the way it locks in place perfectly with the other pieces and how the pattern matches. How could it not be in the right place?” A context is emerging. I'll fight for my puzzle accomplishments! It isn't just the information of the pieces, it's also their connections to other pieces. *Connected pieces have a contextual “certainty” not associated with individual pieces.*

After adding a few more pieces I have an epiphany... I know what the picture is! “It's the Mona Lisa!”

Suddenly, the bag of random pieces makes sense. There is a full context. My ability to process and understand information has reached a milestone. That piece with a nose—it has to go here. And that piece of a mountain—there. I even have predictive power: “The piece that's missing on the left side of Mona's face has to have an eye on it...”

And perhaps even more important, I know what *doesn't* belong. Suppose some sadistic puzzle-packer had slipped in a few pieces from a lemon bowl still-life puzzle. No problem. I can easily see that those bright yellow pieces would never fit the context of the Mona Lisa. A worldview is kind of like that.

As a child gaining new puzzle pieces each day, my task was usually manageable. Most of my incoming knowledge bits were practical—how hard I can press a crayon before it breaks, not to take food from Timmy while he was eating, ants walk in a line on the driveway. I even started adding my own pieces. Does a red crayon break easier than a blue? If I put a bread crumb in the ant line, do they respond? All of this data was allowing my reality to make sense.

But then I grew up... Now, my media-rich world feeds me bits of information by the trainload—with more trainloads available. And a lot of the data is more subjective. Some of the information bits are ideas, beliefs, and mental pictures. Occasionally, someone might show me one of their puzzle pieces and it's just weird! Even some of the pieces I collect have to be discarded because they so obviously don't belong in my picture.⁴⁶⁶

Everyone has informational puzzle pieces. They may still be in the idea bag or in some stage of “fittedness.” There may be crucial pieces missing. There may be pieces that don't seem to fit. There may be pieces that are awkwardly forced onto other pieces. The bottom line is... *When the context is known, the individual pieces make more sense.*

So, how does all this play out in a real-life worldview? I'll describe a typical student sitting in my biology class...

The Adventures of Mary Metanarrative

Mary is a freshman journalism major. She has attended a Bible-teaching church all her life and has good Christian parents. Mary is a believer but has had little organized training in biblical doctrines other than weekly sermons. Nevertheless, her idea bag is bulging with information, including many good biblical and philosophical truths.

Mary's BFFs are all generally nice people, ranging in belief from ambivalent to confused agnostic to atheist. They've dropped a variety of puzzle pieces into Mary's idea bag. BFF1 used to be in the church youth group with Mary. A few years ago, he became interested in Eastern mysticism through a martial arts friend. Mary was impressed by his newfound diligence and enthusiasm. He says it's because the Universal Power gives him clearer insight than he used to have. He's at one with the cosmos—no more guilt-baggage like sin and penitence.

⁴⁶⁶ Some may say that this is a type of stubbornness or closed-mindedness. I suppose that's the negative take on it. Still, that's what a worldview does; it allows concepts that fit to be held and those that don't to be rejected. But that's why it's important to form ones worldview intentionally and with good evaluation. A functional worldview will allow for thoughtful and informed rethinking of various elements as appropriate.

Just last summer, Mary helped BFF2 through a very difficult time. Her unplanned pregnancy changed everything. Mary spent long hours talking with her. At one point, she was on the brink of suicide. The school counselor was quick to inform her of an alternative. Disaster averted—BFF2’s life is back on track now. She’s Mary’s roommate now, aiming at a promising career in medicine. Although she would never make the same decisions BFF2 did, Mary feels that in her roommate’s case—well, who was she to judge someone else?

The professor in Mary’s gen psych class has an interesting take on the human mind. He believes our thoughts and emotions, everything mental, is simply the accumulated electrochemical reactions that have allowed us to survive as a species climbing the phylogenetic tree. In the last session, the professor scoffed at the archaic ideas of a soul and the afterlife. Mary had heard these ideas before, but now they seemed to be more reasonable.

Tonight, after she finished up her assignments, Mary opened her idea bag. She saw the new puzzle pieces piled onto all the others. Digging around to the bottom, she found some pieces that were similar to these more recent ones...

Mary found an old piece from second-grade Bible school. It had God as a personal, transcendent being who loved her enough to die for her. She held it up next to the Eastern mysticism piece; they were very different. Which one is right? She pondered a few moments then dropped them back into the bag.

Mary noticed another old piece regarding how humans are special, formed in God’s image. “Which God?” she wondered. “The one from church or the Universal Power? And if humans are special, then is it okay to dispose of one? Maybe the professor was right. If our minds are just chemical reactions, humans are not that special after all.”

She spent a lot of time the next few days sorting through her idea bag. Mary would pull out one idea piece, consider it, then put it back. So many questions. So many different ideas. So much confusion.

Later in the semester, Mary was asked by a new friend to attend a seminar at her church presented by a Christian apologist. The speaker explained the nature of the God of the Bible in a way Mary had never experienced. The lady explained absolute truth, and how logically the concept fits with the nature of God. She left the seminar still filled with

questions, but with a new perspective on how the idea of Creator God meshes so logically with the biblical ideas of truth.

During quiet times over the next few weeks, Mary would open her idea bag and remove certain puzzle pieces to contemplate them. One day she took out the human mind piece again. “If my mind is just chemistry, then why do I have such a strong sense of right and wrong? How did these “rules” get into my head anyway? How do mere molecules *feel things*? Wouldn’t it be more logical for a transcendent *Mind* to create another mind rather than believing it to be a result of blind molecular collisions?”

Some of the puzzle pieces fit! Mary is beginning to grow a simple, yet functional worldview.

She continues to ponder... “And if that’s true, wouldn’t the idea of a personal, loving God make more sense than simply a vague force of some kind?”

In psychology class, the professor started in on how wrong it is to defund fetal stem cell research. He claims that so many lives could be saved by it. Mary knows nothing about stem cells, but something doesn’t sound right. She pulled out the image-of-God piece again and analyzed it. For a moment, she wanted to raise her hand and confront the professor but decided against it for now. Still, she wondered, “But if it’s important to save lives, why destroy other innocent lives to do it? And BTW, Prof, why are you even considering *right* or *wrong*? If your brain is just chemistry, how does it know the difference? Why does it know? You believe in ‘truths’ and not a truth-giver?” Mary isn’t merely reasoning randomly, she’s reasoning about the relationships of ideas to other ideas.

As Mary’s worldview develops, her idea bag will get smaller and smaller. Ideally, all the pieces will eventually end up on the table. Some will be fit into her growing worldview jigsaw puzzle. Some will be examined, evaluated, and discarded. Mary will pick up new pieces for the rest of her life. Now, however, she can assess them quickly and intentionally. “Do they fit with what’s already connected? Should I perhaps remove a piece because this one fits better? And what about that empty spot? Does my worldview have missing pieces I should find?”

All of this is obviously a simplified model of a worldview, but I believe it presents a good starting point for understanding its importance in decision-making. In the context of this book, pieces that inform us about the paranormal must be handled like any other piece. They should be considered in light of the entire worldview, then connected or discarded.

The Anatomy of a Worldview

Discussion of a Christian or biblical worldview is typically avoided, as are many other “academic” concepts. This is unfortunate since the idea of a worldview is quite sensible and straightforward. Moreover, one's decision-making capability depends on the type and state of the worldview that informs it. The reason for including the topic in this book is that our thinking regarding paranormal phenomena will be housed in a worldview (whether functional or still developing). My premise throughout has been that a biblical worldview best explains the phenomena. Also, my contention is that a Story (metanarrative) is an effective delivery method for complex ideas, and as such is quite compatible with the concept of a worldview. Sire wrote...

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁴⁶⁷

James Orr was one of the earliest proponents of the Christian worldview,⁴⁶⁸ arguing that Christians possessed a unique *weltan-*

⁴⁶⁷ James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2009), 13.

⁴⁶⁸ The terms *Christian worldview* and *biblical worldview* are sometime used interchangeably (as in this book). I consider *biblical* more accurate and intend it to mean from a literal, fundamentalist perspective. A simply *Christian* worldview *could* encompass diverse, incompatible views. There would be some significant difference among, Evangelical, Charismatic, Mainline, and Catholic worldviews.

schauung (worldview).⁴⁶⁹ He believed that one who commits to Christ is committing to more than simply a heart devotion. The move necessarily includes “a view of God, ... man,... sin,... redemption,... purpose of God in creation and history, [and] human destiny, found only in Christianity.”⁴⁷⁰ Orr organized the five belief components into a set of propositions. He believed a worldview should address a person’s...

1. Theology – Belief in a supreme being(s) or no supreme being.
2. Philosophy – How we interpret reality, knowledge, wisdom, rationality, purpose, and logic.
3. Ethics – Our method of determining good or bad, righteous or evil.
4. Biology – Our view of ourselves—what we are, where we came from, what we’ll become.
5. History – What is the story in which we find ourselves.

There are other good ways to approach the idea of a worldview. Anderson provides four questions that can be used in identifying a worldview...

1. What is our nature?
2. What is our world?
3. What is our problem?
4. What is our end?⁴⁷¹

He goes on to say that each question must be considered in light of the others...

⁴⁶⁹ Orr studied the 19th-century German philosophers who had delved deeply into the idea of a *weltanschauung*. They believed this was an important framework for understand the many related factors that influence decision-making.

⁴⁷⁰ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1897), 4.

⁴⁷¹ Tawa J. Anderson, W. Michael Clark, and David K. Naugle, *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God’s Perspective in a Pluralistic World*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 19-21.

Answers to the first question have grave implications for the remaining questions; answers to the second question often entail necessary responses to the other question, and so forth. Hence, one's worldview contains a holistic, wrapped-up-together set of answers to all the worldview questions.⁴⁷²

There is some disagreement as to which ideologies rise to the level of a worldview. I try not to get too caught up in strict definitions of the concept. In my view, I would consider such ideologies as Judeo-Christian, Islamic, New Age, Marxist, and naturalist to be worldviews.

I believe one of the most influential contemporary worldviews is *postmodernism*.⁴⁷³ (Or possibly as a teacher I see it as predominant in my students.) A postmodern worldview attempts to throw off absolute truth, postulating that truth is nonexistent or unknowable. Even without the terminology, most can recognize postmodernism's signature...

“Openness” (without the restraint of reason) and “tolerance” that rejects all moral absolutes are the mandates of postmodern ideology.⁴⁷⁴

In contrast to the thrust of this book, postmodernism denies that an actual metanarrative is useful or that it even exists; an overarching “story” implies too much truth. The biblical worldview is in opposition to much of postmodern philosophy, but it also threatens other ideologies...

...postmodernism taken to its logical conclusion not only leads to epistemological skepticism and moral relativism but can also undermine the academic study of almost any subject.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Ibid, 18.

⁴⁷³ As opposed to the Modernist worldview, brought about by the Enlightenment. Modernists believed that science and knowledge would eventually solve the world's problems and elevate humans toward perfection. Also, postmodernism is considered by some to be an emerging worldview, not quite fully developed as of yet.

⁴⁷⁴ Jim Leffel and Dennis McCallum, “The Postmodern Challenge,” www.equip.org, 10 Jun 2009, Accessed 31 Jul 2020.

⁴⁷⁵ Anderson et al., *An Introduction*, 262.

The coming decades will likely bring many worldview skirmishes in many different arenas. All the issues debated in politics, religion, science, and society, in general, will necessarily be fueled by the worldviews of the various proponents. *Your understanding and engagement of these issues will depend upon your worldview.*

I believe it is crucial for Christians to study, understand, critique, and teach the biblical worldview in function and content. Parents and churches must be proactive in these efforts. If we fail to do this, decisions will still be made on critical issues, but the reasoning will be based on a confusing aggregate of opposing ideas or worse, worldviews based on falsehoods, deception, or mythology.

Appendix C

Science and the Supernatural

This book travels through many of the intersections of the supernatural and science. By definition, empirical science deals exclusively with our sensory perceptions of the physical universe. But as we've seen, the biblical worldview affirms the connection of two realms. We are able to sense and examine *physical* effects of spiritual causes in our realm. For those who deny this, Christianity is immediately reduced to Deism. Prayer, faith, and spiritual warfare become myth.

I believe there are three primary ways to gain information (to know something). One of these is by *communication* with another person, either directly or by recorded thoughts. In our Information Age, with books, conversation, and electronic media, this may be the chief method by which we learn. Communication, however, gives data that is only as good as the communicator. Accurate sources are trusted to provide accurate information, and fake news—need I say more? My perception of the reliability of a communicator is likely based on some sort of relationship.⁴⁷⁶

A few skeptical philosophers might disagree with me, but I believe I know some things through my mind's *intuition/logic/rationality (ILR)* feature. My brain seems to be hard-wired to “just know” certain things.⁴⁷⁷ For example, I realize that my mother taught me the English words “one” and “two,” and what “plus” and “equals” mean, yet something in my ILR already had the concept that if I added the concept *one* and the concept *two*, they brought up the concept of *three* whether I knew the word “three” or not. I believe God installed this operating system (and much more) as standard equipment, being made as his image bearer. But there are still drawbacks to my ILR. There is often a “way which seems right”⁴⁷⁸ that is distorted by my sin nature.

⁴⁷⁶ “I know the character of person A to be dependable, therefore I can assume that person A will provide accurate information.” Likewise, I know some of God's dependable character through my relationship with Christ, therefore I put great trust in his Word.

⁴⁷⁷ *a priori* knowledge.

⁴⁷⁸ Proverbs 14:12

Empirical science, then, is the third way that we can *know* something. There is nothing at all profound or highly technical about the scientific method. It's simply an organized way to learn about the physical world by using our senses. We do this intuitively as humans. Our science quest usually begins with a question about the physical world...

1. Why won't my car start? (Question)
2. It may be a dead battery or an empty gas tank. (Hypothesis)
3. I'll check the lights and the gas gauge. (Experiment)
4. The lights come on. Oh, the gauge is on "E." (Data analysis)
5. I'm out of gas. (Conclusion)

We've just solved a problem using science!⁴⁷⁹ Notice that we could do this type of investigation because we have the experience of living in an orderly, predictable universe. Also, the only interfaces we have with this universe are our five senses. Science is good at working with sensory inputs. It isn't so good with "extra-sensory" things like the spiritual.

Yet all is not lost when trying to explore the supernatural. Some make a big deal about the "Grand Canyon" between science and supernatural as though there is no way to bridge the gap. I agree we must be careful when claiming scientific "proof" for things of faith, spirit, and the supernatural. Indeed, science will always be at a loss when attempting to directly examine anything beyond the physical realm. This isn't to say, however, that the supernatural is beyond the empirical. When the supernatural "intrudes" into the physical universe, there are physical effects to study.

Scripture is clear that God welcomes our scientific analysis of his creation. Furthermore, his creation provides sensory evidence regarding God's nature...

⁴⁷⁹ We might have also solved the problem by ILR: "I'll bet I'm out of gas, since I haven't filled up in two weeks." Or by communication: "I had my car towed to the mechanic. He said it's the fuel pump." Often we use all 3 ways of learning at the same time.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).

God has intruded into this physical universe. (In the initial case he created it.) We see the effects of his intrusion “in the things that have been made.” This *general revelation* is the evidence we perceive about the physical world (God’s creation) through our senses (science). Paul tells us here that the evidence is so solid that its analyses will lead to the conclusion that God exists and that he has certain attributes. Moreover, the observer is “without excuse” for making a wrong conclusion.

Christianity is a *reasonable* faith.⁴⁸⁰ Evidential data are useful and appropriate in understanding some spiritual things. When John the Baptist, at a low point in his life, seemed to doubt Jesus’s true nature, Jesus sent the message...

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them (Luke 7:22).

In other words, “If you need evidence that I am God incarnate, look at the phenomena I have done in the physical realm. Since I do the works predicted of Messiah, I am Messiah.”

Thus, there is precedent for applying scientific reasoning to some supernatural phenomena since the effects they produce may be compared with a prediction (hypothesis). Obviously, scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena has limitations. It’s difficult to employ repeatability. Investigations are quasi-experimental, meaning the variables are difficult to control, and we deal in correlation rather than causation.

⁴⁸⁰ “Seeing” and acting on evidence is okay with God! (Even though believing without seeing is better, John 20:29.)

Indirectly, though, we are able to test some supernatural hypotheses through the predictive aspect of science. Just as John could “judge” Christ’s role by the predicted abilities of Messiah, we can evaluate hypotheses by their alignment with expected physical effects.⁴⁸¹ This is quite common in many theoretical sciences such as physics. As a modern example, the physics of string theory is rooted in dimensions beyond our four. Its only tests lie in the similarity of observed physical events to particle behaviors predicted by the theory.

The Ephesians Hypothesis sets forth certain claims about the interactions of the unseen realm with ours. *If* these interactions occur, we can make predictions about how we would perceive them.⁴⁸² Then, if the observed physical phenomena correlate with those predictions, we have a test for our hypothesis.⁴⁸³ [also see the treatment of ghost analyses, p. 180]

Admittedly, science is much more limited in its ability to study the paranormal, but that shouldn’t prevent legitimate examination of real physical events that may be related. Remember also, that empirical science is *a way* of knowing. For the Christian who has witnessed the truth of God’s revealed Word played out time after time and who accepts the veracity of general revelation from his creation, God’s *communication* is a reliable source of data. More hypotheses may be available than simply the ones presented by science alone.

The rigors of empirical science are crucial in understanding the natural world, but believers should never be intimidated by those who wish to limit their sources of knowledge to only one venue.

⁴⁸¹ This is the way we test any hypothesis. “IF my hypothesis is true, THEN the results of the experiment will align with my predictions.”

⁴⁸² Of course, the Thomas in me would love to see, touch, and measure an actual demon (and also sort of not), but for the time being that isn’t possible.

⁴⁸³ Some may argue that this is reverse-engineering the problem, and that we should gather the data first before making a hypothesis. I’m assuming here that that step has been going on for millennia. And we all know, many researchers begin with a preconceived notion about their hypotheses. This is problematic only when the scientist allows the notion to bias their interpretations of the experiment.

Appendix D

Experiencing the Supernatural God

Our Eternal Creator has had the human Story in his mind forever. The Most High desires to have an eternal relationship with you forever. Nothing in your life has taken God by surprise.

The problem, however, is that we are under the curse of the Fall. We sin (fall short of God's requirements for righteousness) because we are sinners, born with a fallen nature that cannot know holy goodness. Our sin has separated us from God. We aren't able to know him personally or experience his love. Scripture tells us, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It also says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). This spiritual death forces a separation from God and leaves us to continue on our way to an eternity in hell.

But because of his perfect and undeserved love, God created a way to save us by sending his son to pay the price for our sin. "God showed his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This is our only hope! Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

It isn't enough that we know these truths, we must individually place our trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. By turning from our sins and trusting Christ's sacrifice, we can know God personally and experience His love. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

You can receive Jesus by faith "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Glossary

These are terms that often come up in paranormal discussions. There is no implication that these concepts, objects, and beings are necessarily logical or even real.

Angel Hair – Masses of fine, sticky strands have been associated with some paranormal events. The threads have been found following UFO and ghost encounters. The appearance of the Fatima apparition was also accompanied by this “angel hair.” Witnesses claim the masses dissolve away shortly after the incidents. Some have suggested spider webs, but observers say otherwise.

Anunnaki – In ancient Sumerian texts, these divine beings interacted with the pre-flood humans. Some claim they are the Sumerian counterparts to the sons of God (*beney Elohim*) or Watchers in Genesis 6. Zecharia Sitchin taught that the Anunnaki now live on Planet X (Nibiru) beyond the orbit of Neptune.

Apparition – The *appearance* of an entity presumed to be of another realm, such as a ghost. (As opposed to saying it’s a ghost.)

Bray Road Beast – Sighted around Elkhorn, WI since the 1930s, the beast of Bray Road is reportedly a large canine humanoid. Many describe it as the werewolf of movie fame. The Michigan dogman seems similar.

Catastrophism - This is the theory, especially in geology, that some features we observe today may have been caused by out-of-the-ordinary events. It’s the counterpart to *uniformity*, which asserts that the typical processes we see at work today can account for all of the features we see. For example, suppose we find a large crater in a field. Was it caused by the typical erosion we observe today, acting over a long time span? Or was it caused quickly by an uncommon, extraordinary event (catastrophe) such as a meteor crash?

Proponents of a *young earth* (Short Day) creationism generally believe that the worldwide flood described in Genesis accounts for surface features such as sedimentary rock strata and the erosion of the Grand Canyon. Those who hold to strict uniformity would attribute these to small everyday actions acting over millions of years. For major earth features, uniformity demands extremely long periods of time. (Thus, uniformity is advocated by secular evolutionists and *old-earth* creationists.)

The fall brought about by Adam’s sin is another catastrophe with widespread effects. A literal interpretation of Genesis shows that the world we observe today, as much as it still reveals the hand of the Creator, is in many respects tainted and deteriorating.

Chupacabra – The term literally means *goatsucker*. In Central and South American legend, chupacabras are usually dog-like, but have also been

described as reptilian. The creature is said to be larger than a dog or wolf and more vicious, mutilating and devouring livestock. Some claim the animal could be a coyote with mange or a coyote-wolf hybrid.

Clairvoyance – The ability to gain information by extrasensory perception (ESP; beyond the senses).

Cryptozoology – The study of undiscovered, yet hypothesized animals such as Bigfoot or chupacabras.

Cynocephaly – This is the alleged characteristic of a canine head or face on a human. Dating back to ancient Greece and Egypt, “dog heads” are scattered through many cultures. Several early explorers, such as Marco Polo, document their encounters with dog-head populations. Cynophalics are differentiated from lycanthropes (werewolves) in that they are non-aggressive and do not morph back-and-forth from human to beast.

Disclosure – The government’s declassification of all UFO-related information (typically *full disclosure*).

Divination – The attempt to gain information by magic or occult practices.

Divine Council – The proposed group of divine beings who assist God in his reign.

OBE – Out-of-body experience. Associated with psychics and New Age, the alleged phenomena of one’s spirit traveling or observing separately from the body

Ephesians Hypothesis – A set of presuppositions based on Ephesians 6 that help in understanding the biblical reality of the supernatural realm. [p.31]

- There is an unseen realm beyond the one in which we live.
- Spirits from that unseen realm are able to interact with our world.
- Our primary struggle is with fallen spirits from this unseen realm.
- Fallen spirits are evil, scheming, and set on doing us harm.
- We can and should be prepared to recognize and withstand these fallen spirits.

ESP – Extrasensory Perception. The ability to see or know things without using the physical senses.

ET – Extraterrestrial (Used in this book to mean a sentient being from another planet).

ETH – Extraterrestrial Hypothesis. The idea that UFO phenomena are caused by ETs.

ETI – Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Specifically, sentient ETs as opposed to perhaps extraterrestrial plants, bacteria, etc.

Esotericism – The belief in secret knowledge as in Gnosticism.

EVP – Electronic voice phenomena. The alleged ability to hear ghost or spirit messages through an electronic device.

Flap – A large number of UFO sightings over a distinct period.

Fouke Monster – The town of Fouke is in SW Arkansas near my hometown. This Bigfoot variation was the source for the Boggy Creek beast.

Hynek, J. Allen – The head of Project Blue Book and other government UFO investigations. Initially a skeptic, Hynek eventually became convinced that UFOs/ETs were substantial and worthy of attention.

Karma – In Eastern mysticism, the belief that a cosmic force or principle causes “what goes around, comes around.” In other words, wrong deeds must be balanced by having wrong deeds done to the perpetrator. This may mean that the perpetrator will have to be reincarnated to experience the payback.

Land Between the Lakes Beast – LBL is a large wilderness area on the borders of Tennessee and Kentucky. The creature(s) is reported to be a large canine humanoid similar to the Bray Road beast. The bipedal, wolf-headed being has been associated with several deaths and mutilations in the area.

Lazarus species – These are animals which were extinct, or believed to be extinct, but have been discovered alive.

Ley Lines – Alleged paranormal force lines that run over the face of the earth. Sacred or mystic sites are supposedly located at the intersections of ley lines.

Lovelock Cave – An archaeological site in Nevada, some Lovelock Cave artifacts have been alleged to be associated with a tribe of cannibalistic, red-haired giants (the *Si-Te-Ca*). Some connect these to the Nephilim in Scripture.

Magic – (Magick) As opposed to entertainment illusions, the manipulation of supernatural forces or beings in order to effect changes in the physical world.

Majestic 12 – A purported secret group established by Truman in 1947 to study UFO phenomena.

Mantis – A sorcerer. Practitioner of magick.

Metanarrative – A broad interpretation of events, history, situations, and phenomena that give meaning to our experiences. It can be thought of as a “grand story” of things. This book recognizes a biblical metanarrative. For example, “All that we experience can be explained as the complex history of God creating, redeeming, and loving his image-bearers, ultimately for his glory.”

Miracle - An event in which a supernatural agent suspends at least one physical cause in bringing about a particular effect.

MUFON – Mutual UFO Network. The largest private UFO data-gathering organization

Narrative Sequence Fallacy – When applied to the Bible, the presumption that if a text is written later than another, it must have “borrowed” from the older. The reality could be that two authors could be referencing the same event, but from their own unique perspectives. [p. 271]

Necromancy – The attempt to contact the spirit of a dead person by occult means.

New Age – An eclectic collection of religious beliefs, typically based on Eastern mysticism (Hinduism, Buddhism, pantheism). The term usually applies to its practices among westerners.

Nuts-and-bolts – A reference to a UFO with a physical, material form rather than merely a light or vortex.

Old Earth (view) – The belief that Earth (or the entire creation) is billions of years old, and that the “days” referenced in Genesis 1 should be taken as metaphorical “long time spans.” It usually assumes Darwinian evolution to be true.

Pareidolia - The situation in which an incorrect perception of a stimulus is interpreted to be a familiar pattern. For example, seeing an image of Lincoln on a tortilla.

Paranormal – Literally, “alongside the normal.” Phenomena for which the source isn’t readily explained by current scientific laws.

Planet X – An alleged mysterious planet in our solar system, either in an outer orbit or a very eccentric orbit that is often associated with paranormal themes.

Pickle Principle - In a collection of alleged paranormal data, most or all the incidents can be explained by natural means, however, that doesn’t preclude the fact that some incidents in the collection *could* be paranormal. [p.25]

Postcognition – Psychically “seeing” events from the past. Usually, this refers to having information about a past event through some psychic ability.

Precognition – Predicting or psychically “seeing” an event before it occurs.

Psychokinesis – The ability to move physical objects with the power of the mind

Pseudoarchaeology – A derogatory term for the interpretation of archaeological data in a way that is different from conventional interpretations.

Rake – A more recent meme, usually reported in the northeastern U.S., rakes are pale, hairless humanoids with spindly limbs. It can navigate on two or four legs very rapidly. Some observers say their rake had no facial features. Seemingly similar to wendigo in appearance, rakes are claimed to be more frightful than deadly.

Reincarnation – The belief that the soul may go into another body at death. This is typically an Eastern mystic belief related to karma.

Reverse Engineering – In discussing UFOs, the assertion that crashed or captured alien spacecrafts are currently being used as a source for new technology.

Rougarou – This is a Cajun variation of Bigfoot. Also called loup-garou, the swamp beast has more of a wolf or pig character than the primate Bigfoot. Common in Louisiana folklore.

Second-temple Judaism - After Solomon’s Temple (the first temple), the rebuilt second temple stood from about 500 BC to 70 AD. This was the temple at which Jesus and his followers would have met. It’s important to consider this period because it provides the cultural and religious context in which the New Testament was written.

Shamanism - The practice of altering one’s consciousness to interact with the spirit world, usually for the purpose of healing.

Sheepsquatch – This is a West-Virginian take on Bigfoot, described as having horns.

Supernatural – Beyond the physical realm in which we exist.

Star Jelly – Gelatinous masses have been observed on the ground and hanging from trees. Some analyses have found fungal slime molds, algae masses, or amphibian ovaries. Other tests have yielded inconclusive or “unknown”

results. Many occurrences have been associated with UFOs and meteor showers.

Sykesville Monster – Reported around Sykesville, MD in the 1970s, this Sasquatch variant was claimed to be more human than ape. The 7-8 foot beast had a hairy body with a human head said to be like a caveman.

Telepathy – The psychic ability to supernaturally communicate with another mind.

UAP (unidentified aerial phenomenon) – The latest term for a UFO. This is preferred by those who wish to avoid negative connotations or associations with extraterrestrials.

UFO – Any unidentified flying object.

Ufology – The study of UFO phenomena.

Uniformity (see Catastrophism)

USO – An unidentified submerged object. Many of these underwater objects have been observed with the same features and behavior as UFOs.

Vortex – An alleged mystical, location at which supernatural forces exist or are concentrated. Vortexes are also associated with “doorways” connecting realms.

Wendigo – In the folklore of the Algonquins and others around the Great Lakes, these are vicious humanoid beings who are claimed to devour their human prey. Wendigos are said to be tall and exceptionally thin with ribs and sometimes entrails protruding. Some descriptions include horns or antlers. Legends also say that a wendigo can control the mind of its prey and even possess its body, causing the victim to kill and cannibalize (A wendigo seems similar to a *rake*).

Worldview – A perspective of the world (or reality) that encompasses and connects all areas of influence, such as theology, philosophy, politics, economy, psychology, history, and eschatology.

Wraith – In Scottish and other European folklore, wraiths are spirit/demons who tend to be parasites on humans. They are said to appear skeletal when manifesting physically. They invisibly attach to a person in order to feed on their spiritual energy.

Young Earth (view) - The belief that Earth (or the entire creation) may be relatively young (about 10,000 years), based on a literal interpretation of Genesis. Each day in Genesis is equated with a real 24-hour period.

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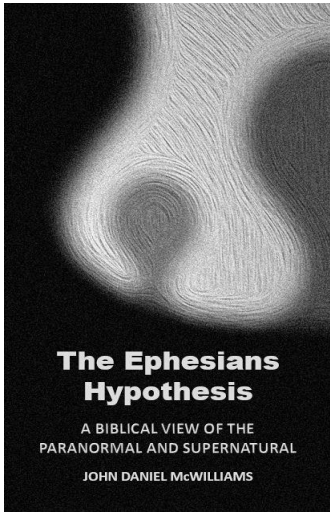
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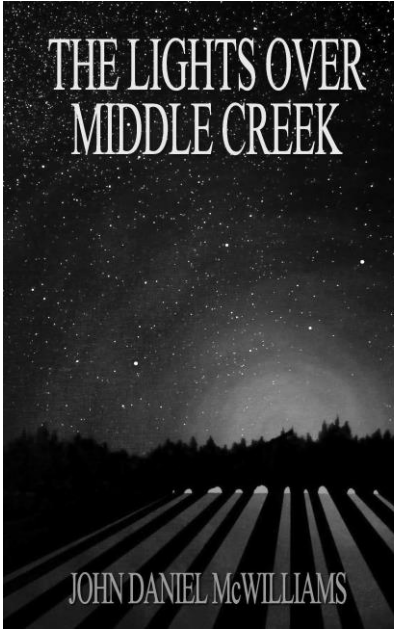
**THE EPHESIANS
HYPOTHESIS:
A Biblical View of the
Paranormal and
Supernatural**

**A condensed version of
*God and the Paranormal...***

Twenty-first-century Christians tend to drift toward two extremes when confronted with the paranormal. Some seem embarrassed by the biblical supernatural and go to great lengths to provide naturalistic explanations. Others are lured by tabloid paranormal claims, far-removed from reality.

In the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul describes the true nature of reality. His propositions lay out the basis for interactions between both a natural and supernatural realm. These form a useful hypothesis for examining phenomena that may be connected to paranormal or supernatural phenomena. Assuming Paul's propositions are true, we would expect this *Ephesians Hypothesis* to be testable in our physical world. In other words, we should be able to make predictions about how the unseen interacts with the seen—how the supernatural interacts with the natural. And, if the Ephesians Hypothesis is correct, we would expect it to have explanatory power with some phenomena, especially those that appear to have causes beyond the physical universe.

This certainly isn't to imply that every unusual or hard-to-explain phenomenon is supernatural. However, *there is only one supernatural reality as described in Scripture*. Therefore, if a supernatural cause is indicated, *it will necessarily be of the type described in Ephesians 6*—not some contrived reality, made to fit a particular phenomenon. The objective of this book is to examine some contemporary paranormal claims in light of the Ephesians Hypothesis.



A novel...

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Paul McLane thinks his life is finally scrutinized, analyzed, and categorized—the least that should be expected by an aspiring psychology student. But the unearthly lights in the forest behind his house make this fall’s college plans a distant concern. Should he involve his grandmother? Are they in danger?

As his preoccupation with the phenomenon grows, Paul discovers his experience isn’t unique. Others have witnessed the mysterious lights, and disturbingly, the death of his mother and grandfather appear to be connected to them. But the sudden appearance of Nathan Monroe sets a different trajectory for the young man’s quest. Monroe’s ideas about science, philosophy, and reality in general are quite intriguing. However, as Paul’s worldview is evolving, God is positioning his own players for a spiritual confrontation.

Paul’s obsession with knowing the truth leads him through crisscrossing roads of science, Celtic folklore, New Age mysticism, and Christian apologetics. He gives in to the consuming urge that demands answers at any cost and becomes a wounded fugitive with no place to run except to Nathan Monroe. Only God’s mercy and providence, set in motion by the prayers of his faithful, can shine spiritual light over the truth about Paul’s past and the hope for his future.