

3 ISSUE 2: THE SPIRIT WORLD IS REAL

ANGELA'S STORY

I was raised as a Christian in a mainstream Protestant denomination, but I never really found a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ in that church. When I was fifteen, I made a commitment to Christ one night, alone in my bedroom, but without nurturing it was like the seed cast upon rocky soil, and I almost immediately fell away. I began to experiment with drugs and became an alcoholic. At the age of thirty, I went into a drug rehabilitation program, and by the grace of God, I am sober today, twelve years later. But the program introduced me to the New Age worldview in a big way. I tried everything: psychobabble, Science of Mind, Emmett Fox, Christian Science, energized crystals, spirit writing, channeling spirits (i.e. demons), opening chakras, Buddhist services, Bahai faith—there was not much I did not try in my search for the “Truth.”

TOPICS

The Spirit World; the New Age Worldview

New Age View and Ultimate Reality

Biblical Teaching about the Spirit World

DESCRIBING YOUR WORLDVIEW . . .

WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS CONCERNING ULTIMATE REALITY?

In conjunction with Lesson 3, consider the following questions. They will help you to identify and describe your beliefs concerning ultimate reality, another of the five components of a well-rounded worldview. Use your notebook to write your impressions in answer to each of these questions, and explain your answers.

1. Is the universe eternal, or did it have a beginning?
2. Was the universe created by an almighty, transcendent God who continues to sustain it?
3. Is the natural world all there is?
4. Is there design and purpose in the universe, or is it a product of chaos and chance?
5. Are supernatural events possible?
6. Do spirit beings exist?

THE SPIRIT WORLD; THE NEW AGE WORLDVIEW

One issue common to both the New Age worldview and Christianity is a belief in a spirit world. But the New Age understanding of the spirit world is far different from that of Christians.

The New Ager's quest for spirituality is motivated by the desire for personal transformation. This transformation comes by looking deep into oneself to discover one's essence, which, according to New Age belief, is oneness with the Divine (called *at-one-ment*, a distortion of the Christian *atonement*). This total comprehension of one's being is facilitated by a number of spiritualistic and occultic practices, such as:

1. *Visualization*: Using your mental energy to *imagine* what you desire to realize, such as being healed of a sickness, being successful in your work, or, at a higher level, being in the presence of the "Divine Source."

2. *Astral projection*: Training your soul to leave your body and travel around. When the body dies, the soul is said to reside in its *astral form* until it is reincarnated.
3. *Contacting spirits*: Allowing “spirits” to guide you or speak through you. An example of this is the book entitled *A Course in Miracles*, which purports to be *the Voice* of the “Holy Spirit” speaking through a then self-proclaimed atheist. The book consists of a text (the words said to be dictated by *the Voice for God*), 365 lessons to be done one day at a time for a year (these are mind-altering exercises to be repeated over and over again with the purpose of *transforming* the mind), and a 92-page manual for “God’s Teachers.” The book repeatedly speaks of “God,” “God’s holy Son,” and the “Holy Spirit.” However, it is neither a Christian book nor a book based on the Holy Bible which Christians recognize as God’s Word. We shall say more about this book, *A Course in Miracles*, later in our study.
4. *Channeling*: The New Age term for *medium* is *channeler*. Channeling involves the transmission of messages from the spirit world to the physical world. It is “more than simply communication with the dead (necromancy), but [allows] the spirit of a deceased individual to speak through a living individual—the channeler. In most instances, this spirit is claimed to be from an individual who is not known to have actually existed.”¹¹

These and other “occult happenings”¹² are common experiences of many New Age advocates looking for “some secret and mysterious shortcut or alternative path to happiness and health.”¹³ New Agers also may seek mystical, spiritual, and even out-of-body experiences through the use of crystals, yoga, meditation, star-gazing, astrology, and other such spiritualistic methods.

Since the rise of the New Age worldview, the occult has gained new popularity and a greater degree of “respectability” as popular entertainers and other well-known figures have publicly embraced these and other occultic practices. But as we shall see, opening oneself to these “spiritual” forces, which are—for the most part—doubtless very real, leads one down a most dangerous and destructive path.

BETTY'S STORY

I don't know exactly how Julie got interested in the occult. I do know that when she was about ten, she was intrigued with a daytime television drama called "Dark Shadows." At the time, I didn't know what I now know about how the powers of darkness can bring people into bondage, or I wouldn't have allowed her to watch it.

I recently learned that when Julie went to "Lock-ins," an all-night youth event, the girls would look into the mirror in the bathroom and try to call up a spirit called "Bloody Mary." Once I was vacuuming her room and praying. Under the bed I found a book on how to put spells on people. We burned the book. Julie told me that once she became frightened after she and some school friends played with tarot cards. She said she saw demonic figures in the corner of the room.

I believe when people get involved in occult activity they open a door for Satan to oppress them. We experienced that oppression throughout the home. The Bible says, "Neither give place to the devil." What people may think is just an innocent parlor game can be the doorway for satanic strongholds in their lives. They need to renounce such activities and ask God for forgiveness to be set free.

You asked if I thought Julie was now free from demonic oppression she had been experiencing. The answer is, "Partially, but not completely." She has received some deliverance, but there's more to be done. I am fasting and praying for Julie.

NEW AGE VIEW AND ULTIMATE REALITY

At the beginning of this lesson, you were asked to consider some basic questions related to metaphysics. Is the physical universe all there is? Does it operate according to inviolate natural laws? Are supernatural events possible? Do spirit beings exist? People with a New Age worldview are convinced the spirit world is real. Here are some of their main beliefs in this regard:

1. Many spiritual entities exist around us.
2. We are all spiritual beings with eternal souls.
3. Channelers are spiritual mediums who speak to people.
4. Spiritual experiences reveal the mysteries of the universe.
5. We need to access the spiritual world by any possible means.

As we can see, New Agers have a profound belief in “spiritual” experiences and in spirit beings. Their view is that spirit beings or “entities” are, for the most part, disembodied spirits of people who have died but have not been reincarnated. Either they have reached a state of perfection and oneness with “God” or their souls have not yet connected with a new body in the cycle of reincarnation. Some are said to be ancients from the past who speak with great “wisdom,” revealing things about the past lives of those to whom they are speaking or foretelling the future. Some New Age channelers, through whom certain “entities” speak, have become wealthy by conducting paid seminars and calling on the “entity” to speak to those present or answer their questions.

In a conversation with “Ben,” whose story began in Lesson 2, I asked what having an “astral experience” was like. He indicated that for New Agers, there are “supposedly different planes of existence” and by putting oneself into a trance-like state, one can travel into one of these planes of existence and encounter invisible entities. Or one can “travel” to India and consult with a “guru.” Ben’s “astral” experiences seemed real to him at the time of occurrence. In retrospect, he sees them as being comparable to one’s ability to get so absorbed in a movie one vicariously experiences what is happening so it seems to be a real, personal experience. “Then,” Ben says, “how good it is is judged by how well it fools us.”

Likewise, according to Ben, psychedelic drugs deceive people into thinking they are having a real, spiritual experience. In contrast to what

happens when you stub your toe (simply stated, the message of pain comes into the closest nerve in the area of your toe that has been hurt, then jumps to the second nerve, and so on until, after a slight delay, it reaches your brain), taking a psychedelic drug “opens the floodgates” at the end of each nerve in your body, sending signals everywhere at once. Sometimes these are pleasurable experiences and thus are termed *spiritual*; sometimes they are horrible experiences, completely divorced from reality, and are called *bad trips*.

According to Ben, when some early users of psychedelic drugs, such as Timothy Leary, compared the psychedelic experience to what gurus had been demonstrating for years, the experience was given a spiritual emphasis. By taking a pill, one could supposedly travel to some other domain in the astral plane. The psychedelic experience would give one an “awareness” of the pantheistic nature of the universe. Ben explains, “If I drop [take] this pill, my sensory functions come alive and I can hug a tree and feel that I am one with the tree and that it is talking to me.” He indicates that the New Age concern with environmentalism is based on this pantheistic viewpoint.

The New Age experience with the spirit world, including occultic practices, is very dangerous because it opens people to satanic attacks. Because New Agers deny the existence of evil, claiming it is merely “ignorance,” they see all contacts with the spirit world as useful in taking them to a higher plane of consciousness where they come closer and closer to “Reality” or personal perfection.

One problem with these approaches to the spirit world is that what the goal—the state of perfection—consists of is unclear. This state of perfection does not seem in any way related to moral values, such as good or evil, right or wrong. Many of those who have broken away from New Age “spiritual” experiences see them, in retrospect, as illusions—sometimes of a terrible, demonic nature. We shall look at that possibility in our next section.

BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT THE SPIRIT WORLD

The Bible reveals that an active spirit world does exist and that it is inhabited by both good and evil spirits. In fact, the Bible tells us: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth”

(John 4:24). Although He is in essence *spiritual* and has no body, God is a personal being with intelligence, feelings, and will.

Humans, who are created in God's image, are also personal beings whose personalities are patterned after God's. One might describe God as "the one and only eternal spirit who created the universe and all it contains." He is the triune God, God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three Persons being of the same substance and equal in glory, power, majesty, and eternity.¹⁴

Angels, including those who are God's messengers or ministers, are also spirit beings. Those who are His messengers voluntarily do God's will and serve Him in holiness. Psalm 148:2–5 says angels and all of the "heavenly hosts" were created by God.

All angels were created holy, but some fell from their holy state. Satan, or the devil, is such an angel. The Bible says, "God did not spare angels when they sinned" (2 Peter 2:4). John 8:44 indicates that one of the sins which caused the devil to fall from a holy state was "not holding to the truth." Those who sinned became part of the devil's angels (Matthew 25:41). This was the beginning of evil in the world. The angels who did not sin remained as God's holy angels (Mark 8:38) or messengers.

When we look at what the Scriptures teach about the unholy angels—Satan and those angels who followed him—we learn more about their demonic activity. One indication is that Satan is a deceiver or a counterfeiter, that is, he mimics the activities of God. For example:

1. Satan has a throne and is referred to in Scripture as "the prince of this world" and the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" (John 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; see also Revelation 2:13).
2. He is the head of an evil organization. He has his angels (Matthew 25:41) and they oppose God (Revelation 12:7–9; see also Ephesians 6:12 and Colossians 2:13–15).
3. He is called *Satan* (meaning "adversary" or "opponent"); he is the adversary of both God and humans. He is called the *devil* (meaning "slanderer," or "one who makes false charges against someone"). In Genesis 3:1–5 Satan accuses God to man; in Job 1:9–2:10 and Revelation 12:10, he accuses man to God. He is also called the *tempter* because he entices people to sin.

Jude, verses 8 and 9, warn that we should not speak lightly of the devil, nor should we underestimate his determination to destroy our spiritual life. Evil spirits cannot exercise their power over us without our consent. Through faith in God and prayer we can resist the devil (1 John 4:4; Hebrews 2:14,15). While we need to understand that evil spirits operate in the world and that we need to be able to recognize them in order to overcome them, we should not become obsessed by thoughts of them. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes:

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 unhealthy interest in them! They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and they hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.¹⁵

The Bible clearly warns against such practices as those engaged in by many New Agers, which we have described earlier in this lesson. Deuteronomy 18:10–12 speaks about the person “who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord.”

The danger of seeking spiritual experience, hidden knowledge, or supernatural help or healing through occultic practices is that it opens the door to Satan and the powers of darkness. Scripture forbids these practices because they are equivalent to calling upon other gods (see Exodus 20:3–5). Remember that Satan is called “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4) While Satan may provide hidden knowledge or help through such sources, those who seek this kind of spiritual help open a door of access to Satan and become victims of the forces of darkness, which oppress in many ways.

The Bible is our safeguard and guide with respect to the spirit world. We need to take seriously these words from Ephesians 6:10–17:

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able

to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

You may be saying, “Christians claim to be ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ and they seek spiritual help from God.” This is true. Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He told His disciples:

I will ask the Father [God], and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16,17)

Christians believe God’s Holy Spirit resides within them to reveal the truth about God to them and guide them (John 14:26). Whatever He counsels will always be in agreement with the Bible, God’s written Word. The Bible also tells us angels are “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). But angels are the messengers of God and they act at His command. They are not ours to command. However, believers can take comfort in this promise:

If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. (Psalm 91:9-11)

We do not need to go through life aimlessly seeking many different paths of enlightenment, because God has revealed himself and His will for our lives in the Bible. We only need to know what it says and apply its teaching to our daily lives. We can find satisfying answers to life’s most perplexing questions in its inspired pages.