

Whom Shall We Fear?

By

Toby A. Travis, Th.B., M.R.E.

Faith Studies International
PO Box 786
7801 Park Drive Suite F
Chanhassen, MN 55317
952-401-4501
ttravis@faithstudies.org
www.faithstudies.org

LIVING IN THE *ILLUDERE*

Close investigation and study of the claims of the paranormal, such as those found in the New Age movement, Eastern Mysticism, and the Occult, is a fearful procedure for many. To be sure, exploring such practices out of mere curiosity and without biblical discernment can be dangerous. However, to approach these claims fearfully is to play into the hands of those who are making such claims. It may be that the strength or power of paranormal proponents and claimants is primarily in their ability to generate fear and an unholy awe.

As Christians, the Scriptures instruct us "to fear God and God only"¹ (Deut. 6:13, 24; 10:12, 20; 31:12, 13; Joshua 4:24; 24:14; 1 Samuel 12:24, etc.). Apart from the fear of God, we are to live without fear for "greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). To accept the claims of paranormal practitioners without challenging them is to offer them a level of credibility that according to Jesus they simply do not possess (John 8:44). Satan's rebellion at its core is the desire to be God. Thus, his desire is for us to fear him as a god - and to fear his destructive activity.

The word "illusion" originates from the Latin, *illudere*, which means "an erroneous perception of reality," - to see reality incorrectly. As professional illusionists and students of orthodox biblical Christianity, we have been sought out by many individuals over the years to help them discern if they are living in the *illudere*. As we have interviewed, counseled, and simply conversed with these individuals we have encountered many that we believe *are* living in the *illudere* concerning the supernatural. In particular, they are seeing reality incorrectly (especially those who are within the Christian community) when it comes to claims of the paranormal. Foundational to what may be an erroneous (non-biblical) view of the spiritual world – particularly as it relates to the paranormal - is fear: Fear of the occult; Fear of Satanic images; Fear of demonic objects; Fear of personal attacks and influence of the paranormal. However, by gaining a clear understanding of what God's Word has to say about Satan's true powers and limitations, they can be freed from the fears that are often a part of living in the *illudere*.

Whom Shall We Fear?

There is little doubt first century Christians believed in a very real spiritual world² and that they also attributed supernatural magical powers to evil spirits. In the opening chapter of his fine work on this subject, *Powers of Darkness*, Clinton Arnold makes the following statement:

In Western culture we have come to think of magic as harmless trickery in the context of entertainment. When we speak of magic during the period of the New Testament, however, we must realize it was not the art of illusion. Magic represented a method of manipulating good and evil spirits to lend help or bring harm. Magical formulas could be used for such things as attracting a lover or winning a chariot race. Black magic, or sorcery, involved summoning spirits to accomplish all kinds of evil deeds. Curses could be placed, competitors subdued, and enemies restrained.³

We should be quick to agree with Arnold that the activity of evil spirits should never be considered “harmless trickery.” However, I would wish to add the caution that the appearance of “magical formulas manipulating good and evil spirits to lend help... bring harm... attract lovers... win chariot races... etc.” may in fact *be* an illusion. Again, it is certain that citizens of the first century *believed* these powers to be genuine. But were the powers genuine? Was too much credit given to the extraordinary “powers” and claims of evil spirits and of Satan himself? Were they living with an erroneous perception of spiritual realities? John Warwick Montgomery provides a keen example of how easy it is for the spiritually minded person to attribute to Satan more than he should.

The pietist is tricked by Satan’s lie to Jesus when he tempted our Lord in the wilderness (Luke 4:5-6). In point of fact, the kingdoms of the world were not Satan’s to give. They remained entirely in God’s hands, and were thus Christ’s already... The pietist takes Satan too seriously when he claims to control the world; he should recognize, as the Book of Job so clearly teaches, that the Evil One operates on a stringently controlled scale, within the strict framework of God’s sovereign will.⁴

The pietist was living in the *illudere*. And like today’s popular culture, within and outside of the Christian Church, many are quick to glorify the activity of Satan and attribute to him powers and authorities that he may not possess.

WHOM SHALL WE FEAR?

Why are we instructed in Scripture to “fear God alone?” Fear is an element of worship. When fear is present, there is also present a sense or state of awe. If we fear Satan and the activities of darkness, are we not participating, in a sense, in Satan worship?

Consider the success and popularity of the many books that have been written which, in essence, glorify and exhibit the claimed powers of “the dark side.” Throughout the past three decades especially, books about Satan’s miraculous intervention in human affairs have sold millions of copies in the Christian marketplace. Consider the Christian community’s fascination with speakers and celebrities who have come out of the “Satanist church” or those conducting “power encounters” with demonic forces. Such individuals have drawn capacity crowds anxious to be titillated by fascinating and gruesome tales. For years Mike Warnke, a talented comedian, toured the United States as a popular Christian speaker. His initial success and the attention given to him from the Christian community was due in part to the popularity of his book *The Satan Seller* and his very vivid testimony of witnessing the miraculous powers of Satan. Although this may not have been his purpose, his presentations fostered and fueled a fear of Satan and his activities in the world. The limelight is no longer upon Mr. Warnke since several years ago his book and satanic involvement were exposed as fabrications.⁵ The Satanists’ tales that he presented were just that - tales; fictitious stories created to tickle the ears of those who were enamored by the fear of claimed satanic powers.

The irony of it all is that Christians, who should be the most discerning when examining truth claims, have fallen for the lies perpetuated by both the occult world and, tragically, other Christians. This lack of discernment on the part of Christians only plays into Satan’s hands. If the paranormal proponents can keep an air of mystery and darkness about them, they will continue to maintain their images of transcendent knowledge and dark miraculous powers. These proponents might make such claims as: “A ten thousand year old guru speaks through me;” or “I predict that there will be a major earthquake in

Whom Shall We Fear?

California this month;” or “I can psychically alter your energies and restore your health.” It is alarming that many within the Christian church do not question the honesty of these claims. Christians, in fact, may be largely responsible for the spread of mis-information and un-founded truth claims due to their predisposition to belief in the supernatural and desire for spiritual experiences. In his classic work, *Principalities and Powers*, Montgomery notes at the time of authorship how there was an unhealthy preoccupation with the occult amongst Christian youth.

Christian young people are as fascinated with occult possibilities as their unchurched friends, and their prior belief in the supernatural seems to give added incentive to these interests. It is common knowledge that at Christian camps, conferences, and retreats occult experimentation by participants is by no means an isolated phenomenon.⁶

Here we are thirty years later and the interest and even the embracing of occult teachings are more a part of our culture than what many realize. A 2001 Gallup Poll revealed that belief in psychic and paranormal phenomena is at an all time high – especially among those “who say religion is a very important part of their daily lives.”⁷

[Another] reason why evangelicals are fascinated by the occult is their preoccupation with “spiritual experience.” Why do evangelicals prefer revivalistic conversions to conversions of any other type? ... Evangelicalism with its roots in the open-air 18th century English preaching and the 19th century American frontier, centers not on Scripture, church, doctrine, or sacraments, but on personal experience.⁸

For a large portion of contemporary evangelical Christians, the truth claims of the paranormalists go unquestioned. According to one study by Erich Goode, there appears to be a strong link between holding to a Christian worldview and to the claims of the paranormal. “As a general rule, persons who accept articles of traditional, fundamentalist Christian faith... tend also to accept a range of paranormal beliefs as well.”⁹ This unquestioning acceptance of what the supporters of the paranormal teach as truth may also be based in part on the media’s portrayal of the occult, as will be addressed later. Add to that what may be a faulty understanding of Satan’s role in our world, and we have a wicked brew of palatable lies.

LYING WONDERS

Much of the misunderstanding of the truth behind Satan's powers stems from a misinterpretation of the nature of occult practices. There are clear biblical directives that forbid participation in occult activities. Let us look closely at a few of those forbidden practices. The practices that are condemned are not necessarily examples of phenomenal and powerful demonic activities as we see portrayed by Hollywood or described by the latest Christian best-seller. Consider the following that are mentioned as occult practices in Deuteronomy 18:10 & 11: "Sorcery," "Divination," "Enchantment," "Wizards" and "Witches."

Two Hebrew words are commonly translated "sorcerer" (*kashap* and *anan*). The first is commonly translated "one who whispers spells." It is "compared to adulterers, perjurers and those who defraud laborers in Malachi 3:5 – in other words, those who are cheats and frauds; called liars in Jeremiah 27:10 and Isaiah 57:3-4; in Isaiah 47:9, 12 and 14 it is stated that their attempts will fail."¹⁰ *Kashap* has also been translated as "witch" or "witchcraft." To be a witch then – is to be one who whispers? Maybe so. It has been said that if you want a test to know whether you are participating in the sin of gossip all you need to do is note the times you find yourself whispering. Perhaps the core or the root of sorcery and witchcraft is evil language (i.e. lying, muttering, gossiping, etc.) – as Jesus stated in John 8:44 regarding the nature of Satan as the "father of lies."

The second word found in the Old Testament that is translated "sorcerer" is *anan* - which in the Literal Bible is simply translated "a cloud-reader." This translation is due to the primitive root of the word that means, "to cloud over" (figuratively) or "to act covertly."

Note that the biblical definition of these terms does not include a descriptive such as, "one who can wield miraculous powers" – but rather the "power" of the sorcery is based on cheating, fraud, whispering, acting covertly. We should not assume that the occultists possess some super-human or supra-human

Whom Shall We Fear?

power. It may be that their “power” is just the ability to deceive. Even in a contemporary definition of the word “sorcery,” we should note the qualifiers to the use of the word. Here is Webster’s definition of sorcery. He seems to be on to something.

sor-cer-y **1.** the *supposed* use of an evil supernatural power over people and their affairs; witchcraft; black magic **2.** *seemingly* magical power, influence, or charm.

The power of the sorcerer or the witch may be found in causing an individual to attribute incredible powers to him or her; powers that they may not actually possess. As Webster states, the sorcerer, or the witch may only have “*supposed*” powers and “*seemingly*” magical influence.

This does not mean, however, that the “power” of the sorcerer or witch would be innocuous. No, their power or influence would still be quite significant, and there may surely be an attachment to an evil supernatural realm. Nevertheless, let us be clear on the biblical understanding of these individuals. They may be under the influence of Satan or his demons, but the power they exert may only be through their *words and natural behavior* – not through miraculous or supra-human phenomena.

The Hebrew word *nahash* that is typically translated as "divination" makes for another interesting study. This term refers to someone who *pretends* to have some secret knowledge. The term is ascribed to Joseph several times. “Both in Genesis 44:5 and 15 we learn that Joseph claimed for his brothers’ benefit that he could ‘divine’ with a special cup and so knew secret things such as that his brothers, still unaware of who he was, had his cup in their possession.”¹¹

Note that Joseph did not actually possess “supernatural” knowledge. The “special” insights provided him via his “divination” was illusionary. It appeared to his brothers that Joseph possessed supernatural insights, however, in reality he was pretending. He knew where the cup was because he had it put there.

Another occult practice named in Deuteronomy 18 is that of the “charmer” (*habar*) meaning, “to be joined, coupled, league, heap up, have fellowship with, be compact: be a charmer.”

Gerard Van Groningen makes the observation that, “The main idea of *habar* in the Old Testament is ‘to join or unite’ two or more things. However, the root idea of the term ‘to bind’ also appears, especially in the concept ‘charm.’”¹² Could it be that an individual is “bound” by the charmer due to being “joined” with him or her? A variant of *habar* is *haber*. Dr. Van Groningen states that in regards to *haber*, “The usual translation is ‘enchantments’ referring to the *means* the charmers employed to influence people or the result of their charming efforts (Deut. 18:11)”¹³ What is this *means*? Perhaps a further consideration of similar words would provide a clue. The word *haberet* is a feminine noun that is used as a synonym of wife in Mal. 2:14, and it identifies the very close relationship that the root word *habar* seems to suggest. Another similar word, *hoberet*, also a feminine noun, refers to the physical coupling of a joint in the tabernacle (Ex. 26:10) as well as in the temple (II Chr. 34:11).

Previous to this study you may have associated with the term “enchantment” or “charmer” someone who causes supernatural forces to manipulate the human and natural world as a result of repeating the words of a spell, such as seen acted out, granted humorously, in the TV sit-com *Bewitched*. The *Bewitched* worldview, however, is not built from a biblical definition of what it means to be a “charmer.” The above referenced Scriptures seem to communicate more the idea that the charmer (*habar*) exercises perhaps some type of feminine sexual influence in order to bind or affect their subject. The *means* then by which they exercise their enchantment may be the seductive allure of physical enticement – a very powerful force that has bound and destroyed many lives.

One more illustration from Deuteronomy 18:10-11 would include identifying who or what are associated with the word translated “wizard” in the KJV. “Wizard” may be the masculine form of “witch” as it is derived from the Hebrew word, *yidd’oni* that always appears parallel to “witch” (Hebrew ‘*ob*). Both *yidd’oni* and ‘*ob* are associated with someone who “calls upon or worships the dead.” In Isaiah 8:19 we are told that they “whisper and mutter” - a very close connection to the sorcerer’s description as we saw earlier. The root of *yidd’oni* is the verb *yada* that has been popularized in the American vernacular by

Whom Shall We Fear?

comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Seinfeld uses the expression, “*yada, yada, yada,*” as frequently and in the same manner as Rogers & Hamerstein’s king of Siam used “etcetera, etcetera.”

What is *yada*? It is simply the word “know.” Paul Gilchrist provides the following insights:

This root, occurring a total of 944 times, is used in every stem and expresses a multitude of shades of knowledge gained by the senses.

- *Yada* is used of God’s knowledge of man (Gen. 18:19; Deut 34:10).
- *Yada* is also used for man’s knowledge and for that of animals (Isa. 1:3).
- *Yada* is used to express acquaintance with a person in such statements as “do you know Laban?” (Gen 29:5; Ex 1:8; II Sam 3:25).
- *Yada* is also used for sexual intercourse on the part of both men and women in the well-known euphemism “Adam knew Eve his wife” and its parallels (Gen 4:1; 19:8; Num 31:17, 35; Jud 11:39; 21:11; I Kings 1:4; I Sam 1:19). It is used to describe sexual perversions such as sodomy (Gen 19:5; Jud 19:22) and rape (Jud 19:25).¹⁴

So again, as we saw with the charmer, the possibility of evil sexual influence appears. More likely, however, the practice of the wizard is the claim to knowledge via claimed contact with the dead. In Deut. 18:11 the reference to “wizard” is sandwiched by the descriptives “consulting spirits” and “inquiring of the dead.” What is this “consulting” and “inquiring?” Is it genuine communication with the dead? Many biblical scholars believe not. Rather, what the “wizard” or “spiritist” may be performing is a deception. They may be pretending communication with the dead much the same as contemporary channeler John Edwards, in the American Television hit *Crossing Over*, fakes communication for television viewers. Edwards, perhaps the most popular spirit medium in the United States today, quietly states in the disclaimer of his show that his work is to be considered “for entertainment purposes only... and not factual in any way whatsoever.”¹⁵ Another consideration is that the wizard or spiritist may replicate the voice of the deceased through the art of ventriloquism. Robert Alden points out that the prophet Isaiah understood the work of the *’ob* (witch or medium) to be nothing more than the manipulation of their vocal cords in order to deceive.

Isaiah discredits these “necromancers” and implies by his choice of words that the sounds of spirits so raised are nothing more than ventriloquism: “The mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter” (8:19). Isaiah makes two more analogies to the sounds made by an

'*ob*: "From low in the dust your words shall come... your speech shall whisper out of the dust" (29:4).¹⁶

Merrill Unger and William White also emphasize the inability of the witch ('*ob*) to actually communicate with the dead:

Necromancers' unusual experiences do not prove that they truly had power to summon the dead. For example, the medium of Endor could not snatch Samuel out of God's hands against His wishes. But in this particular incident, it seems that God rebuked Saul's apostasy, either through a revived Samuel or through a vision of Samuel. [Or through a deception perpetrated by the witch]. Mediums do not have power to summon the spirits of the dead, since this is reprehensible to God and contrary to His will.¹⁷

Here again, as was true of all the above references to occult practices, they are all certainly evil deceptions and most assuredly in sympathy with the "prince of the power of the air." All of these practices center on lies and leading people away from the truth of God's counsel and power. Nevertheless, they do not constitute genuine paranormal wonders or miraculous manipulations. Their power is found in their ability to deceive and cause the viewer to operate in the realm of the *illudere* and fear.

So the arrogant glory of the adversary can be nothing but illusory, and his theomachy nothing but a fight with illusory weapons (John 8:44; Luke 22:48). His antithesis stands in such servile dependence upon the thesis that it achieves nothing but a demonic aping and perversion of the divine... Yet with all this play acting at piety and miracle the adversary deceives the unwary as to his true nature and intentions (II Cor. 4:4).¹⁸

Deuteronomy 18 is not the only passage in Scripture that limits the power of the occult practitioners to the deception of words and natural means (though certainly in conjunction with a very real evil supernatural realm). In Exodus 7:11 the magicians of Pharaoh accomplished through their *secret arts* their imitations of the genuine miraculous, (that were being accomplished through Moses and Aaron by the power of God). "Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts (*lahat*)." The Hebrew word for their activity, *lahat*, refers to ensnaring people with secret practices. Strong's definition suggests, "a blaze; also (from the idea of enwrapping) magic (as covert)." The word *lahat* is most typically translated "to kindle" or "to burn."

Whom Shall We Fear?

This may suggest the *modis operendi* of the magicians. It may be that the magicians had snakes enwrapped (*lahat*) in a hollow tube that had the appearance of a stick or a staff. Perhaps the tube was then set aflame (*lahat*), quickly burning away the thin walls of the tube, leaving the snake in its place.

Regardless of the actual methodology, according to the Old Testament record those who practiced occult rituals and apparent paranormal wonders never succeeded in performing genuine miracles. The Scriptures do not indicate that genuine miraculous powers were utilized. Throughout the Old Testament, we can observe that one of the distinctions of the followers of Jehovah is their rejection and demythologizing of the claimed occult powers found amongst other people.

In striking contrast to her neighbors who were geniuses at creating a mythology, we find a perpetual tendency or power in Israel to demythologize life. Take for instance the word *lilith*, well known as the Assyrian female night demon... In her one appearance in the Old Testament she is in a list of real animals and birds, with the jackals and wildcats, the pelicans, and the owls. The LXX renders the *hapax legomenon* by a word which means something like a tail-less monkey!

The same could be said for many other words which Israel used... The Old Testament acknowledges the spirit world but seems bent upon minimizing, demythologizing, or marginalizing it. Wherever it does occur, it always has its origin in Yahweh and its role and domain determined by His sovereignty. No autonomous domain, independent of Yahweh, or outside His immediate control, exists to threaten man.¹⁹

The idea here is similar to those who practice Transcendental Meditation in our day and claim to be able to levitate; however, they never actually perform any genuine miraculous effect or literally defy God's laws of gravity. Robert T. Carroll makes the following observation:

Levitation is the act of ascending into the air and floating in apparent defiance of gravity. Spiritual masters are often depicted as levitating and the ability to levitate is taken as a sign of blessedness by some. There are people in transcendental meditation who will sit cross-legged and hop up and down on their butts [sic], claiming that they are flying. Perhaps they are...for one-millionth of a second one millimeter above the ground. They say they feel lighter than air and are quite proud of their butt-hopping achievements.²⁰

It is a fraud, a deception. In fact, the Scriptures are clear in pointing out that all occult practices are performed by deceitful fabricators of lies and that their claimed miraculous "powers" are far from genuine

or effective.

We make the same observations when considering New Testament references to the work and activity of the satanic. In 2 Thessalonians 2, the apostle Paul warns us to be on the lookout for self-proclaimed miracle workers in the end times. Note the italicized words that Paul connects to the work and activity of Satan.

Let no one in any way *deceive* you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, *displaying* himself as being God... that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and *false* wonders, and with all the *deception* of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 9-10)

John Anderson, author of *Psychic Phenomena Unveiled*, and a former Satanic Priest, makes this observation about the instruction by Paul in 2 Thessalonians; he says, “We should be alert to the identification of their feats as lying wonders and pay attention to the use of the adjective *lying*, or *false*, as opposed to the noun *wonders*.”²¹

Please do not jump to the conclusion that we deny demonic activity and the literal activity of Satan in our world. We do not. The Scriptures are very clear in teaching the existence and practice of demonic activity. Nevertheless, let us not confuse the two issues. The Bible clarifies both fraudulent miraculous powers that are associated with the occultists and the demonic - as well as those miraculous powers that are genuine and are associated with the work and revelation of God. Our purpose here is to separate the two and shed some light on this often very misunderstood subject. For if we are not seeing reality correctly – then we will be in the *illudere* that leads to an unholy fear.

THE KEY QUESTION

Let us not give the Devil more credit than that which is due him and his fallen angelic troops. After all, can Satan and his demons perform genuine miracles? That is the key question to understanding the

Whom Shall We Fear?

activity of paranormal and occult phenomena.

First, we need to recognize that neither Satan nor his army of demons possesses the qualities or attributes of God. Never have! Never will! Granted, angels are different in their makeup from humans - but nonetheless they are created beings. Angels, fallen or not, for example do not possess the attributes of omnipresence, omniscience, and so forth. Angels can no more genuinely prophecy the future than you and I can apart from the involvement of the One who holds the future. All created beings are limited within the boundaries that God has placed them. This is a very different understanding than what the average person believes of demonic activity and what is portrayed by the media.

Hollywood's interpretation of demons, the Devil, and the presumed powers of Satan are erroneously being adopted as consistent with Scripture. Too many movies attribute to Satan the ability to produce truly dramatic, sensational displays of occult phenomena. It is certainly a sad state of affairs when we turn to the tool of Satan to learn what we should be seeking from the Bible.²²

Another “end-times” passage that identifies the deceptive activity of Satan is Revelation 13:3, “And I saw one of his heads *as if it had been slain*, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast.” Note that the translators of the New American Standard Bible have used the phrase “*as if it had been slain*.” They identify that what will take place is not a genuine resurrection – but a resurrection of the *illudere*.

GOD ALONE

Satan and his legions certainly do have powers. However, those powers are grounded in the use of deception. Jesus identifies this truth when he describes Satan as “the father of lies” in John 8:44. There is very strong biblical evidence that Satan and his demonic forces cannot perform *genuine* miracles or wonders. Consider the following passages:

In Exodus 15:11 Moses and the sons of Israel are found singing unto the Lord in rhetorical questions: “Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises,

working wonders? (Or working miracles)?" The obvious answer to that question is . . . No one!

In Psalm 72:18, Solomon declares, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who *alone* works wonders." Then again, in Psalm 136:3-4 the psalmist declares: "Give thanks to the Lord of lords, For His lovingkindness is everlasting. To Him who *alone* does great wonders."

Notice that the attribute of God being praised is that God *alone* works wonders. The Hebrew word for "alone" *badad* can also be expressed in the word "solitary." Dr. Louis Goldberg, has written that the word "alone" as it appears in this passage, "is used of the Lord's incomparability and uniqueness in His exclusive claim to deity as seen in his extra-ordinary works"²³ In other words, the reason why only God can perform the miraculous is that He alone is God.

There are and have been throughout history individuals who claimed to have miraculous powers and that their powers were from God (e.g. the late "psychic" Jeane Dixon).²⁴ However, when God chooses to do the miraculous, which according to the Scriptures referenced above, only He can, He is very consistent in the pattern in which the miraculous is performed. God's pattern for the miraculous is enumerated as follows by Dr. Norman Geisler: (1) Miracles Are Always Successful, (2) Miracles Are Immediate, (3) Miracles Have No Relapses, and (4) Miracles Give Confirmation of God's Messenger.²⁵ In addition to these four observations add that in the biblical examples of the miraculous God is always glorified - not a man or a woman. Non-believers are impressed and recognize the "finger of God" (e.g. Pharaoh's magicians). Moreover, there is no contradiction to other biblical truths.

These patterns are found in every example of the genuine miraculous as recorded for us in Scripture. These observations or guidelines are not only succinct and to the point, but also very helpful tools as we encounter those outside or even inside the Christian church who claim to be exercising a miraculous gift from God.

One of the evidences of God's superiority to all that He has created, including the angelic hosts, is His

Whom Shall We Fear?

solitary ability to perform the miraculous. When we read in Scripture about the activity of Satan and his demons performing wonders and signs it would be in contradiction of the Scriptures we have just read to assume that those signs and wonders are genuine miracles. They are indeed signs and wonders, but they are apparently deceptive and fraudulent - not genuine. Consider John's statement in Revelation 16:13-14 as he describes what he sees in his vision of the end times:

And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, *performing signs*, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

This prophecy paints some amazing pictures for us – “spirits of demons, performing signs.” In the King James Version, this phrase is translated “spirits of devils, working miracles.” This translation, coupled with Hollywood's widely accepted portrayal of satanic powers, has misled many contemporary readers to believe that demons are producing genuine miracles. But are there many “devils?” And will these devils accomplish the genuine miraculous?

IDENTIFYING A LIE

Let us take a short field trip by way of an example. The Bureau of Engraving in Washington, D.C. prints our U.S. currency. A huge production line of high tech printing presses overflows with sheets and sheets of dollar bills. One of the most obvious and serious responsibilities of the Bureau is to produce bills that cannot easily be counterfeited, and many, many precautions are taken to ensure that. These precautions include such measures as micro-printing on each bill that cannot be seen with the human eye and maintaining a legal monopoly on the fabric on which U.S. currency is printed. It is very difficult for the average person to spot or identify a counterfeit bill. If we do not possess the knowledge, skills or the equipment to recognize “funny money” we are more than likely to accept it as genuine and value it as equal to the real thing. To those with appropriate training, however, a counterfeit is obvious.

That is why individuals, such as illusionists and psychologists, with specialized training in spotting deception are able to offer insights to unmask claimed phenomena when others may be unable to do so. In 1926, at Clark University, a symposium on psychical phenomena was held featuring luminaries from such locations as Harvard, Leipzig, and Oxford. In attendance were Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Dr. William McDougall to name a few; all of whom were “convinced of genuine psychical phenomena.”²⁶ L. R. G. Crandon, M.D., Boston physician, and husband of the well known medium, Margery, made the following point in the concluding statement of his presentation: “The physical manifestations of the séance-room are real and valid sensorial experiences. Once that validity is established, the experiments will become respectable, and more data will pour in.”²⁷ The validity, however, never has been established and the data never has poured in to support Dr. Crandon’s claims. Nor has the séance-room become respectable or legitimate. In fact, the data²⁸ pouring in over the last seven and a half decades has not endorsed the conclusions of Crandon or Margery. Rather the data today primarily supports the only two antagonists of psychical belief who participated in that symposium.

There were two papers submitted at Clark University that identified the deception of the claimed psychical phenomena. These papers were written by famed magician, Harry Houdini, and psychologist, Professor Joseph Jastrow, both experts in exposing the fraudulent activity of the spiritualists of their time. They candidly identified the connection between psychical activity and deception.

As soon as one type of performance is exposed another appears; but the point emerges that if any such claim is to be met and its examination conducted after the logical pattern of an experiment, then the one supreme condition is that the *experimenter* and not the medium shall control the conditions. That indispensable requirement is always evaded, though seemingly accepted. At the crudest we are told that light is inimical to these occult forces; so the shelter of darkness which nullifies the control is resorted to; or if not that, the screen of the table which conceals the modus operandi; or one is forbidden to stand at the only place from which the operation could be detected; and there are curtains and cabinets and holding of hands, and clever tricks of release from apparent control, and rigid examinations of the body which still leave a loophole of concealment; and ever the neglect of the observation that as such controls are made rigid, the phenomena are curtailed, while the amazing performances reported occur when such control is relaxed... All this may sound dogmatic, when reduced to such curtness of statement; but the documentation is all too

Whom Shall We Fear?

ample, and, to repeat, pathetic.²⁹

Specialized training and tools are often necessary to identify what is true and what is false. In addition, when it comes to the subject at hand, it is especially of value to seek the insight and knowledge of those who are committed to biblical, historical, orthodox Christianity and possess expertise in the art of illusion.

Magicians deceive people all the time. Magic is the art of deception. We even pay to be entertained by their illusions. Unfortunately there is evidence to demonstrate that there are religious frauds as well. Christians are also “paying” for these as well. Only the cost is not currency but credibility. Thank God for the professional Christian magicians who are exposing the fraudulent claims to supernatural powers. There is a big difference between miracle and magic. It is interesting to note that the Bible denotes the practitioners of false signs as “magicians” (see Exodus 7:11). For whether in its human or occult form, magic involves deception.³⁰

In addition to the skills and expertise of those who can identify illusory works, we also need a commitment to discern the original text of the Scriptures for understanding John's revelation of wonder-working demons. In this case, the original Greek text provides some enlightening insight on the phrase “spirits of demons.” The word “spirits” (*pneuma*) here is very common in the New Testament and is a synonym for “breath” or “wind.” The Greek word for “demon” (*daimon*) [note that it is correctly translated “demons” not “devils.” There is only one Devil, but there are many demons] - found in this verse, being used as a noun, also is applied to “slanderers and false accusers.” In 1 Timothy 3:11 the apostle Paul instructs women to not be “malicious gossips” (*diabolos*) - which can also be translated “demons.” “Women, don't be demons!” Slander and false accusations are based upon lies. So, this phrase “spirits of demons” could also be read in the reversed as “lying spirits.”

These “lying spirits” are seen performing “signs,” or in the New International Version, “miraculous signs.” The NIV translators, however, are not being literal to the individual original Greek words, but rather attempt to communicate the sense of what John is seeing via the phrase “miraculous signs.” For the kings of the world will *see* these signs as being miraculous and will accept them as being miraculous. But in this phrase “performing or working signs” the word “performing” (*poieo*) or “working” simply means

“to do” and the word for “signs” (*semeion*) can simply be translated “a token signifying or to signify.”

These lying spirits then may just be presenting a token that signals the kings of the world to gather for the battle of Armageddon. This is the conclusion of Dr. Norman Geisler in his work, *Signs and Wonders*.

In spite of Satan’s super power, he cannot do truly supernatural things as God can do. For example, he cannot create life or raise the dead... Satan does not need to be able to violate natural laws, as long as he can convince people he can do it... He is not able to do true miracles, but he certainly can fool people into thinking that he can. So for all practical purposes his powers seem miraculous. Indeed, John speaks of “the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs” (Revelation 16:14). Inspired by Satan, the Antichrist will display “all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9).³¹

Can the same New Testament Greek terms noted above be translated to communicate the idea of genuine miracles? Yes, and they are in fact utilized in that manner when referring to the works of Jesus and the amazing happenings found in the book of Acts. However, in light of the earlier text where the Psalmist proclaims that God alone works miracles and Paul’s statement that Satan will work “counterfeit miracles” during the end-times, it is best to understand John's vision of the demons’ wondrous signs as being deceptive or fraudulent miracles. One of the basic rules of biblical study is “Scripture interprets Scripture.” This simply means that all Scripture, properly and soundly interpreted, lines up with other Scriptural truths.

LESSONS FROM JOB

As mentioned earlier, consider the incredible and detailed lesson we have on this subject from the book of Job. John P. Newport, in his *Satan and Demons: a Theological Perspective*, notes the following:

The most extensive Old Testament discussion of Satan is in Job. Here he is seen as God’s agent and minister, who tested human fidelity. He makes a wager with God, with Job as the stake. He acts, however, with the express permission of God and keeps within the limits which God has fixed for him.³²

In the opening chapters of this ancient book, we find that Satan’s request is being used to accomplish the purpose of God. It is Satan who makes the request that God should put forth His hand (that's God's

Whom Shall We Fear?

hand) and touch all that Job has in 1:11. And does God touch the property of Job? Certainly, just a few verses later we read that the “fire of God” (not the “fire of Satan”) fell from heaven. The messenger, who reports this sad news to Job, and obviously the author of the book, seems to believe that the extraordinary weather (fire from heaven) is a miraculous manifestation of God - not Satan. This is Job's understanding as well.

Note in Job 1:20 that Job falls to the ground and worships the Lord. He proclaims that it is the Lord who gives and the Lord who takes away. Then the author of the book notes that Job did not sin in believing that the wrath came from the hand of God and that he did not “ascribe unseemliness to God” (1:22). In other words, it was not inappropriate or ill-apportioned to understand that the catastrophic happenings were from the hand of God.

A little later on God Himself praises Job's response and confirms that it was the power of God that brought catastrophe into Job's life when He speaks to Satan, “And [Job] still holds fast his integrity, although you (Satan) incited Me against him” (2:2). Then again, Satan makes the request that God “put forth Thy hand” to touch Job's bone and flesh. In response, God then empowers Satan to do His bidding. Apparently, Satan was unable to do so on his own.

It is unpopular in today's Christian culture to suggest that disastrous things could be from the hand of God. Nevertheless, look carefully at Job 2:10 and consider Jobs' harsh but true words to his wife. “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” and “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” Job is praised in the text for understanding that his adversity was from God. Job understood that life and death; blessing and pain are all from the Lord. In Job 13:15 he declares, “Though He (God) slay me, I will hope in Him.” In chapter 16:11-12 he states, “God hands me over to ruffians, And tosses me into the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, but He shattered me, And He has grasped me by the neck and shaken me to pieces.” Job understands that the trials of his life are directly from the hand of God. And for that belief and trust he is commended by God. In the final chapter of Job, 42:7, God states His displeasure

with Job's friends and commends Job for rightly understanding that everything is from the Hand of the Lord.

God Himself declares this in other passages such as Deut. 32:39, “See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”

The book of Job provides us with at least two basic understandings regarding Satan: (1) that he is limited in his powers and actions, and (2) catastrophic destruction is not a normative practice in the Devil's arsenal. Rather, the “norm” that is portrayed for us in the book of Job is that Satan cannot work these adversities without special permission. What Satan can do is make accusations before God and request that God in turn empower him.

There does not appear to be any biblical evidence or support that Satan can control the weather or have supernatural authority over the physical nature of this world. Every example we find in Scripture regarding supernatural forces and weather connect the source of that weather to God. Examples would include everything from: the Creation account in Genesis; to the plagues of Egypt in Exodus (“the Lord rained hail...”); to the reminder in James of Elijah's answered prayers for God to restrain the rain. Each account throughout Scripture that speaks of supernatural involvement with weather patterns is attributed to God.

If Satan could control the physical world at his own whim, then Satan would need to possess omnipotence - an attribute of deity. Satan would need to be God. And he is not. If Satan could control the weather or manipulate physical objects by his own will and power he would be performing miracles. Again, Scripture is very clear in stating that only God can perform the miraculous. (Psalm 72:18, etc.). That is why Jesus used his miracles as an apologetic of His divine nature.

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. If I do not do the works of My Father, do not

Whom Shall We Fear?

believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (John 10:25; 37-38)

If Satan could or can perform the same miracles as Jesus then this defense used by our Lord would be of no value.

Is this to say that Satan does not interact at all with the physical world? Certainly, he has. Consider the examples of demonization that are recorded throughout Scripture – everything from taking the form of a serpent in the garden in Genesis to infesting the possessed man of Mark 5 with a legion of demons. But note carefully that in order for Satan to interact with the physical world, he is always embodied within a living being. We have no biblical examples of Satan (a spirit being) being able to manipulate natural objects without first entering a human being or animal (snake or pigs). For example, if Satan (without the use of some natural, physical form) had the ability to levitate an object or slide a book across a table, would that not be performing a miracle?

The Bible teaches that the power of the demonic is limited. Man can never be so totally corrupt that the forces of darkness have complete control over human history. The devil acts only within the limits set by the divine sovereignty. The devil is one whose power was originally granted to him by his Creator. We must beware of ascribing to Satan an authority which verges on the absolute.³³

R. F. Holland defines a miracle as an event that is (1) empirically certain (actually having occurred), (2) conceptually impossible (inexplicable without appealing beyond our experience), and (3) religious (calling for a religious explanation).³⁴ A more simplified definition is put forward by Dr. Montgomery as “a unique, nonanalogous occurrence.”³⁵ Dr. Norman Geisler defines a genuine miracle as “a special act of God in the world, a supernatural interference into nature, a special divine intervention.”³⁶ C.S. Lewis has said, “I use the word *Miracle* to mean an interference with Nature by supernatural power.”³⁷ Lewis goes on to say that,

Most stories about miraculous events are probably false: if it comes to that, most stories

about natural events are false. Lies, exaggerations, misunderstandings and hearsay make up perhaps more than half of all that is said and written in the world. We must therefore find a criterion whereby to judge any particular story of the miraculous.³⁸

That is most assuredly true. Much of the confusion in people's understanding of the role and activity of Satan comes from a misunderstanding of what constitutes the miraculous and the exclusive nature of the miraculous as an attribute of deity. It also comes from a lack of biblical knowledge. When we examine claims to the miraculous we need to be diligent in discerning as both Holland and Lewis suggest, that they actually took place, that they are unique and beyond our understanding, and that they are unanalogous as Montgomery points out. If the phenomenon in question does meet these definitions then we must diligently turn to the Word of God and the expertise of those trained in identifying illusionary deceptions to gain understanding of what is genuine (that is of God) and what is a lie (that is of Satan).

To attempt to understand unique and unanalogous phenomena from our personal experience is to place ourselves at the mercy of those who are skilled in manipulating our senses. Alex Konya, in his work on demon exorcism agrees:

Measuring experiences by the Word is absolutely essential because the Word of God gives the only completely trustworthy and authoritative information about these wicked unseen foes... The preoccupation with experiences can lead one to an acceptance of false doctrine because it is "proved" to be correct by experience. If one accepts the validity of exorcism based upon experiences, he has logically opened the door to accept any false doctrine upon the same basis.³⁹

We do well then to understand the operation and activity of the supernatural realm primarily from Scripture, and then to be informed by those with expertise in identifying deception. This may leave some holes in our complete understanding of exactly how supernatural beings operate. If, however, we can model the attitude of Job - trusting in God for all things and keeping our eyes fixed on Him who drives out all fear – then we can be confident that we are not living in the *illudere*, but living in the confidence of the one true God, who alone we are to fear.

Whom Shall We Fear?

ENDNOTES:

¹ All quoted scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible unless noted otherwise.

² See Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989).

³ Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 21.

⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact*, (Newburgh, IN: Trinity Press, 1978), pp. 180-181.

⁵ Mike Hertenstein & Jon Trott, *Selling Satan: The Tragic History of Mike Warnke*, (Chicago, IL: Cornerstone Press)

⁶ John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), p. 13.

⁷ Frank Newport and Maura Strausberg, "Americans' Belief in Psychic and Paranormal Phenomena Is up Over Last Decade: Belief in psychic healing and extrasensory perception top the list," in *Poll Releases*, Gallup News Service, June 8, 2001.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169

⁹ Erich Goode, "Two Paranormalisms or Two and a Half? An Empirical Exploration," *Skeptical Inquirer*, Volume 24, Number 1 (January/February 2000)

¹⁰ Dan Korem, *Powers: Testing the Psychic & Supernatural*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, p. 179.

¹¹ Robert L. Alden, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, ed., (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 572.

¹² Gerard Van Groningen, *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁴ Paul Gilchrist, *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹⁵ Disclaimer that appears at the conclusion of each Crossing Over with John Edwards broadcast: "The Producer has relied heavily on the contributions of John Edward and other third parties in the creation of this program, which has been produced for entertainment purposes only. The materials and opinions presented in this program by John Edward and other third parties, including statements, predictions, documents, photos and video footage, come solely from their respective third party sources and are not the views, opinions and responsibility of the Producer and are not meant or intended to be a form of advice, instruction, suggestion, counsel or factual statement in any way whatsoever."

¹⁶ Robert L. Alden, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ Merrill Unger and William White, *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 242.

¹⁸ Montgomery, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁹ Dennis F. Kinlaw, "The Demythologization of the Demonic in the Old Testament" in *Demon Possession*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1976), p. 33.

²⁰ Robert T. Carroll, *The Skeptics Dictionary*, (SkepDic.com, 2002), <http://skeptdic.com/levitat.html>.

²¹ John Anderson, *Psychic Phenomena Unveiled*, (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p. 182.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²³ Louis Goldberg, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²⁴ Jeane Dixon, *The Call to Glory*, (New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, 1971).

²⁵ Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), pp. 28-30.

²⁶ Carl Murchison, ed., *The Case for and against Psychological Belief* (Worcester, MA: Clark University, 1927).

²⁷ L. R. G. Crandon, "The Margery Mediumship: Experiments in Psychic Science" in *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

²⁸ For example see:

Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Prometheus Books, 1984).

Gerald B. Bryan, *Psychic Dictatorship In America*, (Paolini International, 2000).

Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychological Research in England, 1850-1914*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Massimo Polidoro, *Final Séance: The Strange Friendship between Houdini and Conan Doyle*, (Prometheus, 2001).

John Mulholland, *Beware Familiar Spirits: A Investigation into the Occult and Psychic Phenomena*, (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979).

²⁹ Joseph Jastrow, in "The Animus of Psychological Research," Murchison, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

³⁰ Geisler, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

³² John P. Newport, "Satan and Demons: A Theological Perspective" in *Demon Possession*, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

³⁴ R.F. Holland, “*The Miraculous*,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January, 1965, p. 49.

³⁵ John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact*, (Newburgh, IN: Trinity Press, 1978), p. 50

³⁶ Geisler, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1947), p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁹ Alex Konya, *Demons, A Biblically Based Perspective*, (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press), pp. 90, 93.