



## GHOSTS • Ghosts and Hauntings

### What Do I Need to Know?

As the Apostle Paul comes into Athens (Acts 17), he actually compliments them on their religious fervency, though they believed in pagan idolatry. Using common spiritual examples, and working within their framework of belief, Paul is able to point the Athenians toward God. This is what we are attempting to do: to tap into current beliefs concerning ghosts, and turn the conversation toward God. While certain topics within this evangelistic series do not pose a contradiction to a Christian worldview, we believe that ghosts do. Heb. 9:27 states, “We are apportioned to die once and after that to face judgment.” The belief that ghosts linger around for centuries is contradictory to this Scripture, and therefore cannot be true. If there is a spiritual presence that interminably remains, it is assuredly demonic. But like Paul, we don’t want to walk into the secular marketplace of ideas and simply begin criticizing. Rather, in a non-threatening way we want to enter into the dialogue, and see if we can turn the conversation to God.

We begin with a few ghost stories. Again, if true, we believe the spiritual presence would be demonic – not a person. We are simply asking people what they believe about these stories and why they believe it.

The next two questions deal with the issue, of why ghosts would linger around for centuries. The first question deals with the possibility that souls would only stay around shortly after death, or make a brief appearance. The second question deals more with the traditional idea that these souls (ghosts) remain around for centuries, haunting people and places. While seeking to contact the dead is in violation of the Scripture, the idea that God may allow a dead loved one to momentarily appear to someone is not contrary to a Christian worldview (C.S. Lewis, for example, claimed to have seen his wife, Joy). The idea of a lingering, haunting, presence is not plausible from a Christian viewpoint. Just remember, in asking these questions you are simply encouraging people to share what they believe, not trying to push the conversation in any direction.

The next question deals with animal souls, as the woman in the example thinks she has a doggy ghost. From a Christian viewpoint we really don’t know what happens to animals when they die. God does not tell us in the Bible. In Genesis, larger animals are referred to as “soulish” creatures, so most likely they have a soul. Whether it survives death, we don’t know, but it isn’t wrong to discuss or speculate about such things.

### What’s the Big Idea?

In this discussion, you neither want to affirm, nor refute, the existence of ghosts. You simply want to engage people in a conversation about the supernatural. In subsequent weeks, we will move closer to the truth about the spiritual world. Here you just want to get people thinking about the possibility of life after death.



In this next section, we have tried to introduce the thought that these apparitions are perhaps demonic. As previously stated, this is probably more to the truth, and important to bring up for discussion. This also helps to explain God's strict prohibition in contacting the dead.

Next, we move to a biblical example, where King Saul uses a Medium to contact the dead prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 28). This example serves several purposes. First, notice that the Medium Saul consults is, herself, surprised by the actual appearance. Her profession was a fraud, and apparently, she had never really seen a ghost. Second, note that God had driven Mediums from the land of Israel. They are harmful, and lead people away from God, and it's important for the group to see this. Last, God is the author of this apparition, and He has chosen this ironic means of communicating to make a commentary on the spiritual condition of Saul. Saul had chosen to ignore the words of God, spoken through the prophet Samuel when he was alive, and now as a ghost he is willing to seek Samuel's council. God uses this as the means of communicating His rejection and judgment on the reign of Saul as King of Israel – a fitting and ironic means of communication for one who had turned from the council of God. Hopefully this section, without being heavy handed, will act as a deterrent to people dabbling in this arena.

OK, we now get to the good stuff – Jesus. The scene is where Jesus, following His resurrection, appears to His disciples (Luke 24:36-43). Jesus mentions that He is not a ghost, not to give credibility to the belief in ghosts, but to say that He has risen bodily from the dead, and is not simply a vision or disembodied soul. In rising from the dead, He demonstrates His authority and control over the ultimate power – death. And, “Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it” (Jn. 5:21). If people in the group believe in ghosts, that's fine. But if they receive Christ, they can know that they won't be stuck in some disembodied state, but upon death will go directly to be with Jesus – like the thief on the cross to whom Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

### What if There's a Problem?

Christians in the group, with good intentions, may shut down the discussion in the early stages. Set the ground rules in the beginning of the study, that your goal is to encourage dialogue and discussion, not simply to teach. As people state their opinions, ask them, “Why do you think that?” Encourage open & honest discussion.

## What Are the Answers?

1. Have the group share.
2. Allow group sharing. There's no correct answer.
3. There's a part of most people that wants to think things like this happen. This question is meant to surface that attraction.
4. It's fine to let people share different thoughts. From a Christian perspective, if there is a spiritual presence that lingers around, it would be demonic. See above in "What Do I Need To Know?"
5. We really don't know what happens to animals when they die. God does not tell us in the Bible. In Genesis, larger animals are referred to as soulish creature, so most likely they have a soul. Whether it survives death, we don't know. Let people express whatever they want, and enjoy the discussion.
6. Let the group share. This is another problematic aspect of believing ghosts are dead people just "hanging" around. What would they do?
7. This is just to connect with a viewpoint of ghosts brought out in a recent movie. Let people share their thoughts.
8. This is the predominant Christian perspective, though people might not assent to its truth, nor should you force it. Simply allow people to share their view.
9. This might be a time to mention the following verse: Heb. 9:27 states that we are "apportioned to die once and after that to face judgment." From this passage, it would seem most likely that these spirits are probably evil spirits. But allow for dissenting views or the possibility of the scenario raised in question 4.
10. See explanation above in "What Do I Need To Know?"
11. Her profession was a fraud, and apparently she had never really seen a ghost.
12. Because the spiritual world has dangers, and in many cases, the Mediums were either frauds, like this woman, or making contact with evil spirits.
13. Hopefully, one thing to be learned is to stay away from trying to contact the dead.
14. To make it clear that He had risen bodily from the dead, and was not simply a vision or disembodied soul. In rising from the dead, He demonstrates His authority and control over the ultimate power – death. There are many instances of people claiming they've seen a ghost – not a resurrection.
15. Share.
16. Share and look for an opportunity to share your testimony, or the basic gospel message.

## What's Our Response?

The application of this study has been to use the topic of ghosts to cause the group to consider the reality of the afterlife. The last three questions are designed in such a way, as to make it appropriate for you to share your testimony, or the basic gospel message. The last question specifically asks, "Where do you want to go when you die?" – it would seem very appropriate, after the group has shared, to explain why you are looking forward to being with Jesus in Heaven. It may also provide an opportunity to discuss the basic elements of the gospel: that Jesus has died for our sins and risen from the dead, and if we invite Him into our life, we can know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13).