

Spiritual Realities

Today I'm starting a new series devoted to exploring the spiritual nature of reality. While we experience a physical world through our senses, Scripture consistently points to a deeper spiritual reality that surrounds, influences, and ultimately transcends the material one. Throughout this series, we will examine biblical teachings, historical claims, philosophical questions, and modern experiences in an effort to better understand the world as it truly is—and our place within it.

As usual, we'll take it one step at a time—following the text, testing ideas, and allowing space for clarity to emerge rather than forcing conclusions too early.

This series is part of a larger journey we've been on—understanding the work of the Holy Spirit across Scripture. Some series have been directly focused on the Spirit. Others, like this one, are more indirect—but no less important.

In the last series, *The Biblical Flood*, we saw that there may be direct connections between The Garden, the Fall, the Flood, the Messiah, and our current spiritual state. These are not isolated stories—they are foundational movements in God's unfolding plan. We found that the Flood is part of the path that ultimately leads to the restoration of God's Spirit dwelling within humanity. But the Bible is surprisingly sparse when it comes to details about the spiritual realm and our future within it. And information we experientially receive may not be trustworthy. We should nevertheless examine it. We should avoid the opposite error of dismissing spiritual claims simply because they fall outside the scope of scientific investigation and repeatability.

Unlike that last topic, which I was very reluctant to take on, I'm excited to see where this one goes. That's partly because I saw I didn't need to be afraid of the Flood story and partly because I've always been interested in the paranormal and evidence of the spiritual realm.

As I said in the previous series, I'm a scientist at heart, I reject using the Bible as a source of "supernatural scientific information", *but is it not our primary source of spiritual knowledge?* And what are we to make of paranormal? Such a strange and revealing term: para, Greek for "alongside", and "normal", that which we consider to be typical and ordinary. It's different but related to supernatural: above and outside what is considered typical and ordinary. Perhaps it implies how humans have always thought about inexplicable things that were not immediately attributable to God?

And that is our first challenge—not to dismiss the paranormal, but to determine what can be attributed to God and the Bible...and what cannot.

Part 1: Discerning Glimpses Beyond the Veil

What does the title mean? The “veil” is the barrier between our physical existence and the spiritual realm. “Glimpses beyond” refers to paranormal clues that some humans have experienced throughout time and including the present. “Discerning” refers to the Biblical concept of weighing the truth of something.

The question is not whether paranormal experiences are reported. They are—and of many different types. The question is whether those glimpses can be trusted. When it comes to the paranormal, the standard Christian answer is “that’s a hoax” or “that’s demonic”. Those could be true for many experiences, but it is unwise to dismiss them so quickly, especially if such experiences are rare.

Is it possible that some of these glimpses provide useful information about the spiritual realm? Does the Bible mention similar experiences? That is today’s topic.

Paranormal Experiences

Throughout history up to present times, humans have reported many different types of paranormal experiences.

Type of Experience	Possible Biblical Reference	Associated Population
Ghost / Apparition Encounters	Samuel and Saul (1 Sam 28); disciples think Jesus is a spirit (Luke 24:37)	Worldwide; reported across most cultures
Near-Death Experiences	Paul caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2–4); Stephen's vision (Acts 7:55–56)	Worldwide
Reincarnation Memories	Elijah/John the Baptist discussions (Matt 17:10–13)	Primarily Hindu, Buddhist, and related traditions; some secular reports
Organ Transplant Memory Claims	No direct biblical parallel	Primarily modern medical recipients
Alien Abduction Experiences	No direct biblical parallel; sometimes compared to angelic encounters	Primarily modern Western societies
Inter-Dimensional Entities	Angels, demons, cherubim, heavenly beings	Worldwide; modern paranormal and occult communities
Demon Possession Claims	Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5); slave girl of Philippi (Acts 16:16–18); many in Gospels	Worldwide; especially religious populations
Out-of-Body Experiences	Paul "whether in the body or out of the body I do not know" (2 Cor 12:2–3); John's Apocalypse	Worldwide

Old Testament Spiritual References

- Visions and Heavenly Realms
 - Jacob's ladder (Gen 28) - Angels moving between heaven and earth
 - Isaiah's throne room vision (Isa 6) - Direct glimpse into the heavenly court
 - Ezekiel's visions (Ezek 1, 10) - Cherubim, heavenly beings, divine throne
- Angelic Encounters
 - Abraham's visitors (Gen 18) - Spiritual beings appearing as men

- Balaam and the angel (Num 22) - Angel initially invisible to humans
- Daniel's angelic encounters (Dan 8–10) - Spiritual messengers and conflict
- Dream Revelations
 - Joseph's dreams (Gen 37) - Information received during sleep
 - Pharaoh's dreams (Gen 41) - Divine revelation through dreams
 - Daniel interpreting dreams (Dan 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11) - Daniel interpreting others and his own visions
- Apparitions and Spirit Communication
 - Samuel appearing to Saul (1 Sam 28) - One of the Bible's most unusual spiritual encounters. Often discussed in connection with apparitions and mediums

New Testament Spiritual References

- Angelic Encounters
 - Gabriel and Zechariah (Luke 1), Gabriel and Mary (Luke 1), Angels at Jesus' tomb (Matt 28)
- Demonic Encounters
 - Numerous possession accounts: Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5), Boy with unclean spirit (Mark 9)
 - Spiritual entities interacting with humans: Speaking through individuals, Possessing knowledge beyond normal means
- Visions and Revelations
 - Stephen sees heaven opened (Acts 7) and Jesus standing at God's right hand,
 - Peter's rooftop vision (Acts 10)
 - John's Revelation (Rev 1–22)
 - Extensive tour of heavenly realities
- Near-Death / Out-of-Body Themes
 - Paul's "third heaven" experience (2 Cor 12), "Whether in the body or out of the body I do not know"
 - Resurrection appearances of Jesus (end of each Gospel, Acts 1, Rev 3)
 - Physical yet unusual characteristics

Direct Biblical Afterlife Information

- The Old Testament provides surprisingly little detail
 - Little discussion of heaven as a human destination
 - Little discussion of hell as a place of punishment
 - Most focus is on life, covenant, land, and nation
- Hints rather than explanations

- Enoch "taken" by God (Gen 5:24)
- Elijah taken into heaven (2 Kings 2:11)
- Samuel appears after death (1 Sam 28)
- Daniel speaks of future resurrection (Dan 12:2)
- Jesus: Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) – Is this “real” information?
- Disagreement of the Sadducees and Pharisees
 - Sadducees denied: Resurrection, Angels, Spirits; Pharisees: affirmed all three
 - Paul (Acts 23:6-8)
 - Jesus highlighted it too (Matt 22:23-33): Sadducees challenge Jesus with the “seven husbands” question.
 - Jesus first gives some real information: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” and then argues for resurrection using from Exodus 3:6
- Conclusion
 - The afterlife was not a major focus of Old Testament revelation
 - Jews reached different conclusions from the same Scriptures
 - Jesus and the apostles provide much of the New Testament's clearest teaching

Next Episode

Next week we'll talk more about each paranormal type and see if there's anything at all we can glean for the concordance of credible paranormal experiences observed over history up to the present.

Part 2: Whispers of Reality

Why are we even talking about this?

Before we begin, I'd like to clarify something I said incorrectly last week. I was discussing the common Christian responses to paranormal photos and videos, and said:

*When it comes to the paranormal, the Christian answer is either "that's a hoax" or "that's demonic." They say it's a hoax more often nowadays because of AI and CGI and how easily things can be faked, whereas in the past they would have said it's a hoax only if you could see the strings or you could tell the person was being fake. Nowadays though, that's very difficult to do, **and so the more go-to answer is that's demonic.***

What I meant is that advances in AI-generated images and videos have made visual evidence far less convincing than it once was. Today, virtually any image or video can be fabricated so convincingly that our first reaction is (and should be) be skepticism—not an immediate conclusion that it's hoax or it's real and therefore demonic.

That's one reason this series isn't built on viral internet clips. Instead, I'm looking at broader categories of reported human experiences, historical accounts, and recurring patterns that, taken together, may deserve thoughtful consideration.

- The Bible affirms a spiritual reality:
 - The spiritual: God and His Spirit, angels, demons, the human spirit.
 - The afterlife: Heaven and Hell.
 - Spiritual experiences: miracles, visions, other supernatural encounters.
- The Bible tells us surprisingly little about that reality.
 - It answers questions necessary for salvation.
 - It leaves many questions unanswered.
 - Curiosity is neither fully satisfied nor completely discouraged.
- Human experience has reported additional phenomena throughout history
 - Apparitions, near-death experiences, past life memories, out-of-body experiences, etc.
- How should Christians respond?
 - Ignore them?
 - Accept them uncritically?
- This series chooses a different option:
 - Neither gullible nor dismissive.
 - Examine the evidence. Give weight to historically repeated phenomena..
 - Compare it with Scripture.
 - Ask what, if anything, it implies.

The purpose of this series is not to prove paranormal claims, but to ask whether recurring human experiences may provide additional clues about a spiritual reality the Bible affirms but only partially describes.

Evaluating Evidence

Before we begin, I'd like to say a few words about evidence itself.

- Every kind of evidence has strengths and weaknesses.
- Science is valuable, but not exhaustive.
- Testimony is imperfect, but not worthless.
- Personal experience is informative, but not conclusive.
- AI and CGI have greatly weakened visual evidence.
- Historical patterns deserve consideration.
- Our goal is neither gullibility nor dismissal.
- Christians must know their biases
 - Careful not to appeal to science only when it supports their conclusions.
 - Their own proclivity to judge things unusual as “demonic”.
- Science is practiced by humans with biases
 - Not every important question is easy (or cheap) to investigate experimentally.
 - Research priorities are influenced by funding, career incentives, and prevailing paradigms.
 - The absence of scientific consensus is not the same as evidence of absence.
 - Some questions are so consequential that they deserve exceptional scientific attention. Examples: Are we alone in the universe? Can consciousness exist apart from the brain? Are there aspects of reality we do not yet understand?

To Christians: I also think Christians should be careful not to appeal to science only when it supports conclusions they already hold. Most Christians believe in realities that science cannot directly demonstrate—God, angels, demons, miracles, and the resurrection. So we should be consistent in how we think about evidence. Christians must also know their own proclivity to judge things unusual as “demonic”.

To Scientists: Sometimes topics are dismissed rhetorically before they're carefully examined. Skepticism is appropriate; ridicule is not evidence. This is especially true because scientists understand the need for funding and they know that they have to carefully choose their topics in order to get funding for the present and not exclude themselves from future funding.

Some categories of reported phenomena are difficult to study scientifically, while others could be investigated much more systematically than they are. Science has overturned its own models many times—not because science failed, but because science investigated anomalies.

For example, we could put AI-driven ultra high-resolution, multi-spectral cameras in low orbit space to constantly scan the atmosphere, the oceans, and space for unexpected phenomena. The AI would know about where planes are (even military secret ones), what drones look like, where Venus, swamp gas, and Chinese lanterns are, etc.

If Genuine, What Would They Imply?

Type of Experience	Possible Spiritual Implications if Genuine
Ghost / Apparition Encounters	Conscious existence after death. Some conscious beings may remain able to interact with the physical world.
Near-Death Experiences	Consciousness may survive bodily death. Moral accountability and an afterlife become more plausible.
Past Life Memories	Personal identity or memory may survive death in some form, raising questions about the nature of the soul, human identity, and whether some people may receive another earthly opportunity under certain circumstances.
Organ Transplant Memory Claims	Probably points toward an undiscovered biological mechanism rather than a spiritual one.
Extraterrestrial Entities	Intelligent non-human beings exist. This would raise theological questions about creation, redemption, and humanity's uniqueness. Could God be an extraordinarily advanced extraterrestrial civilization?
Inter-Dimensional Entities	Reality may include dimensions or realms beyond ordinary human perception. Is it possible for us to go to another realm?
Demon Possession Claims	Non-human spiritual beings may influence or inhabit human beings. Spiritual conflict is real.
Out-of-Body Experiences	Consciousness may be capable of existing independently of the physical body while the body is still alive.

Next week: We'll talk about consciousness and simulation theory!

Part 3: Consciousness – Our Window into Reality

Thus far in this series, we've explored the limited information the Bible gives us about the spiritual realm and even more limited information the afterlife, and we've examined the many types of paranormal experiences that have been reported consistently throughout history—and what they might imply about spiritual reality.

But many of us have never had such an experience.

Today, we're going to examine something we all share: consciousness.

Every waking moment of our lives is experienced through consciousness, yet we still don't know precisely what it is or why it exists. Could the mystery of consciousness itself reveal something profound about the true nature of reality?

Ecclesiastes 3:11: *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart though men cannot fathom it.*

Job 32:8: *There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.*

The Bible doesn't explain consciousness, but it does suggest something remarkable—that God has placed within us an awareness that reaches beyond this physical life.

Consciousness is stranger than we realize

What is Consciousness?

More than intelligence: When we hear the word "consciousness," we often think of intelligence. But they're not the same thing. A calculator is intelligent in a very narrow sense. Modern AI can perform tasks that surpass human ability. Yet none of those systems necessarily have an inner experience. Intelligence is about solving problems. Consciousness is about experiencing them.

More than information processing: Every computer processes information. Your thermostat processes information. Even a plant responds to information in its environment. But processing information doesn't explain why there should be an inner experience associated with it. A computer can calculate the color red. Only a conscious being actually experiences redness.

Memory isn't consciousness either. You can remember events while unconscious through a security camera or a computer log, but there was never anyone "there" experiencing them. Likewise, during anesthesia, memories simply stop forming—but that's because consciousness itself seems to disappear.

It is subjective experience, the feeling of "being me": Consciousness is what philosophers call *subjective experience*: the personal and individual emotional and cognitive impact of an event which cannot be objectively measured or fully understood by others. You don't merely detect light—you experience color. You don't merely detect sound—you hear music. You don't merely process pain—you actually feel pain.

Every one of us knows exactly what consciousness is because we experience it every moment we're awake. Yet it's one of the hardest things to describe. It is the undeniable sense that there is someone behind your eyes experiencing the world. There is a "me" having experiences.

Science has become remarkably good at explaining *what the brain does and how it does it*. But explaining why any of those processes should be accompanied by an inner experience remains one of the greatest unsolved mysteries in science. For instance, imagine that I built an exact atom-for-atom copy of your brain. Would it also have an inner life? Would there now be another 'you'? Or would it simply behave as though it were conscious?

The Mystery

Why is there an inner experience at all? We can describe what the brain does electrically and chemically, but that doesn't explain why those processes should be accompanied by an inner experience. Why isn't everything happening "in the dark," with no one experiencing it?

Why isn't the brain just an unconscious computer? The brain processes information, much like a computer does. But computers don't appear to have an inner life. So why should billions of neurons suddenly produce the feeling of seeing, hearing, loving, or fearing?

How does matter become awareness? Every atom in your brain is unconscious. Every molecule is unconscious. Every neuron appears to follow the laws of physics. So where does the first-person experience—the awareness of "I am"—come from?

Science has no accepted explanation: Neuroscience has made incredible progress in understanding how the brain works. But when it comes to explaining why consciousness exists in the first place, there is still no widely accepted explanation. It's one of the deepest mysteries in science and philosophy.

That doesn't prove the existence of a spirit. But it does mean that anyone claiming consciousness is 'just the brain' is making a philosophical claim, not stating a settled scientific fact."

What consciousness reveals

- We experience reality from the inside.
- Our consciousness cannot be directly observed by others.

- Every worldview *account* for consciousness.
- Therefore, consciousness may be our best window into reality.

What anesthesia reveals

We experience reality from the inside: All of us have slept and dreamed. Under anesthesia, it's different. There is no dreaming, no awareness, no passage of time—it's as though conscious experience is simply absent. Most of the brain has been shown to operate unphased. What's most different is that the different parts of the brain are not connected anymore.

Our consciousness cannot be directly observed by others: One moment you're talking with the anesthesiologist and maybe counting down—the next moment you're waking up in recovery. There is no sense that minutes or hours have passed. Your personal timeline has a gap in it.

Consciousness returns instantly: Then, almost as suddenly as it disappeared, consciousness returns. Your thoughts continue. Your personality is still there. Your memories are still there. It's as if someone flipped a switch. Your heart may have continued beating. Your lungs were being supported. Your brain remained alive. Yet your conscious experience disappeared completely. What was actually turned off? Was consciousness produced by the brain alone? Or does the brain somehow enable a deeper aspect of ourselves to participate in conscious experience?

One of my experiences of being put under: One time I was getting steroid shots in my lower spine but of chronic severe back pain I was experiencing. Only a sedative was used because the patient still needed to cooperate with the medical staff by following orders to reposition themselves. In the first procedure, I had no memories whatsoever. It was like general anesthesia with missing time for the event. The second procedure, though, I had a vague memory of having to turn around and bend over and try to relax while the needle was inserted. Although I wouldn't describe this foggy memory as fearful, that was nevertheless the last time I did it—mostly because I don't really think the steroids worked for a long enough time—but I think that, even without memory or recollection, other parts of my brain were affected by the experience, which led to negative feelings with unknown sources for the procedure.

It turns out that there are more than just long-term and short-term memory. Memory and emotional conditioning can still occur through other pathways, especially involving the amygdala, basal ganglia, and certain subcortical loops. These don't require the same level of hippocampal-neocortical dialogue or global broadcast that conscious experience does. The amygdala, in particular, *can tag experiences* with emotional valence (threat, pain, vulnerability) even when the person has little or no conscious recollection.

Three possible models

Model	Brain's role	Spirit's role
Materialist	Brain creates consciousness	Unnecessary/non-existent
Integrated	Brain and spirit create consciousness together.	Both are essential
Avatar	Brain receives consciousness from spirit.	The brain is just an interface.

Which model best fits reality when factoring in...

We're not going to prove one model tonight. Instead, let's ask which model naturally explains the evidence with the fewest assumptions.

- Near-death experiences
- Anesthesia
- Past-life memories
- Apparitions
- Bible teaching
- Brain damage/coma

Notice that in the Avatar model, the spirit already possesses its own consciousness. The brain simply provides an interface to the physical world. As attractive as this model sounds, I actually don't think it's what the evidence points to.

Why would God create this kind of world?

- Why embodiment?
 - Why physical life first?
 - Why mortality and suffering?
 - Why uncertainty instead of certainty? (i.e. the spiritual realm, the afterlife, and God's existence)
- Cake or recipe: Would God bake a cake?
 - God could cut to the case and create finished beings, right?
 - Instead, He creates a process.
 - Character cannot simply be downloaded—It must be experienced.
- Why shortcuts fail
 - Real choices require real consequences.
 - Certainty of an afterlife or a “do over” changes behavior.

- Knowing the ending bypasses formation.
- What kind of beings does this world produce?
 - Courage despite fear.
 - Faith despite uncertainty.
 - Love despite suffering.
 - Character through sacrifice.

Consciousness and the Importance of History

- History is borrowed experience
 - Our lives are too short.
 - We inherit the experiences of other people and whole civilizations.
 - Wisdom accumulates across generations.
 - History is *experiential technology*.
- Why remembering matters
 - Scripture repeatedly says “remember.”
 - Forgetting history repeats failure.
 - Books, teachers, and AI can preserve wisdom...or manufacture false history.
- What does this mean for us?
 - We cannot afford to ignore those who came before us
- We cannot afford to stop teaching history and critical thinking

Summary

Perhaps one of God's greatest gifts isn't simply that we are conscious, but that we can learn from the consciousness of those who came before us. That's why Scripture repeatedly tells us to remember.

Today we've explored one of the greatest mysteries in science and philosophy: consciousness itself. Next time we'll continue asking what consciousness—and reality itself—might reveal about the spiritual world.