



WHAT IS BEHIND THE
SUPERNATURAL?



3 COVER SUBJECT Intrigued by the Supernatural!

4 What Does the Bible Teach About Spiritism?

Movies and TV shows today often feature supernatural characters—wizards, witches, and vampires.

What do you think? Is it all just harmless fun, or are there hidden dangers?

This issue of “Awake!” discusses why people are fascinated by the supernatural as well as what is really behind it.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

7 WAS IT DESIGNED?
The Landing Strategy of the Honeybee

8 HELP FOR THE FAMILY
When a Parent Dies

10 When Children Grieve

12 LANDS AND PEOPLES
A Visit to Spain

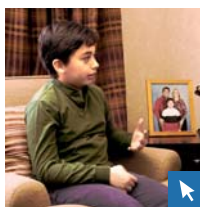
14 THE BIBLE’S VIEWPOINT
The Cross

16 Would You Like to Understand the Bible?



MORE ONLINE

YOUNG PEOPLE ASK



How Can I Deal With Tragedy?

Two young people share what helped them cope with deep personal loss.

(Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > TEENAGERS)

BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED



Are Demons Real?

If they are, where do they come from?
Can they affect you?

(Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED)



COVER SUBJECT

Intrigued by the Supernatural!

“Move over, vampires, werewolves and zombies
—demonic possession and exorcism are taking over.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*.

WIZARDS young and old, seductive witches, and good-looking vampires —these are just some of the supernatural characters that have invaded the book, movie, and video-game industries. What is the appeal?*

“Belief in ghosts has soared in recent decades, from one in ten Americans to one in three,” writes sociology professor Claude Fischer. “Young Americans are about twice as likely as old Americans to say they have consulted psychics, believe in ghosts, and believe in haunted houses.”

Not surprisingly, stories about evil spirits inhabiting humans are making a

frightening comeback. “The reborn success of demonic possession in popular culture owes something to the zombie, werewolf and vampire surge of the past decade,” writes Michael Calia in *The Wall Street Journal*.

One report states that “anywhere from 25 percent to 50 percent of people worldwide believe in ghosts, and ghosts feature prominently in the literature of most cultures.” And a survey done in the United States by sociology professors Christopher Bader and Carson Mencken “revealed that a staggering 70 to 80 percent of Americans strongly believe in at least one type of paranormal activity.”

Is involvement with spiritism and the paranormal just innocent fun?

* Supernatural: Something that is “unable to be explained by science or the laws of nature.”—*Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary*.

What Does the Bible Teach About Spiritism?

ALTHOUGH many people are skeptical about anything related to the supernatural and spiritism—considering them to be either a hoax or the product of the film industry’s creative scriptwriters—the Bible presents a different view. It provides explicit warnings about spiritism. For instance, Deuteronomy 18:10-13 states: “There should not be found in you . . . anyone who employs divination, anyone practicing magic, anyone who looks for omens, a sorcerer, anyone binding others with a spell, anyone who consults a spirit medium or a fortune-teller, or anyone who inquires of the dead.” Why not? The scripture further states: “Whoever does these things is detestable to Jehovah . . . You should prove yourself blameless before Jehovah your God.”

Why does the Bible so strongly censure all forms of spiritism?

UNSAVORY ORIGINS

The Bible tells us that long before God formed the earth, he created millions of spirit creatures, or angels. (Job 38:4, 7; Revelation 5:11) Each of these angels was endowed with free will—the ability to choose between right and wrong. Some of them chose to rebel against God, and they abandoned their position in heaven to cause trouble on the earth. As a consequence, the earth became “filled with violence.”—Genesis 6:2-5, 11; Jude 6.

The Bible says that those wicked angels wield great influence, misleading millions of people. (Revelation 12:9) They even exploit



Although the entertainment industry presents spiritistic themes and characters in a fascinating way, we need to be aware of the dangers associated with them



“Growing belief in witchcraft among teenage girls may have been influenced by recent portrayals of glamorous, seductive witches on television, in the movies, and in books.”
—Gallup Youth Survey, 2014

What Is Spiritism?

Interest in spiritism is reflected in such activities as astrology, witchcraft, and the occult. In many parts of the world, people try to communicate with wicked spirits with the help of a psychic or a witch doctor. Many use divination to try to find out about the future. They look at the stars, search for omens, use a crystal ball, read the palm of a person's hand, or have their own palm read.

Books, magazines, and movies present spiritism as harmless or intriguing. Some communication experts suggest that the way TV programs and movies portray the paranormal has strongly influenced what people believe.

mankind's natural curiosity about the future.—1 Samuel 28:5, 7; 1 Timothy 4:1.

True, some supernatural powers seem to help people. (2 Corinthians 11:14) In reality, however, the wicked angels are attempting to blind people's minds to the truth about God.—2 Corinthians 4:4.

According to the Bible, therefore, contact with wicked spirits is not harmless fun. That is why when potential disciples of Jesus were taught the truth about such activities, “those who had practiced supernatural methods brought their books together and burned them up,” even at a significant financial loss.—Acts 19:19, *Byington*.

Likewise, many today have decided to have nothing to do with activities and entertainment rooted in spiritism. For example, when Maria* was 12 years old, she seemed to be able to predict certain future events or dangers. She read tarot cards for her schoolmates, and since her predictions came true, she became fascinated with the occult.

Maria thought she had a gift from God that enabled her to help people. “But something disturbed me,” she admits. “When I read the cards, I read them for others. I was not able to read them for myself, even though I wanted to know my own future.”

Perplexed by many unanswered questions, Maria prayed to God and was later contacted by Jehovah's Witnesses, with

* Names in this article have been changed.

whom she began to study the Bible. Maria learned from the Bible that her ability to foretell the future did not come from God. She learned, too, that those who want God's friendship must get rid of any objects connected with spiritism. (1 Corinthians 10:21) The result? Maria threw away her occult paraphernalia and books. She now shares with others the accurate truths she has learned from the Bible.

When Michael was a teenager, he was an avid reader of fantasy novels about supernatural characters. "I enjoyed identifying with heroes my age who explored imaginary worlds," he says. Little by little, Michael grew accustomed to reading books about magic and Satanic rituals.

"Curiosity made me want to read books and watch movies that dealt with these subjects," he admits.

However, Michael's study of the Bible impressed on him the need to examine carefully what he was reading. "I drew up a list of everything that had a link with spiritism and got rid of it all," he says. "I learned an important lesson. At 1 Corinthians 10:31, the Bible says: 'Do all things for God's glory.' Now I ask myself, 'Is my reading of this material involving me with something contrary to God's glory?' If so, I avoid it."

The Bible is appropriately described as a lamp. It is a unique source of enlightenment that exposes spiritism for what it really is. (Psalm 119:105) But the Bible does more. It holds out a marvelous promise of a world free of the power of wicked spirits. The effect on humankind will be immense. For example, Psalm 37: 10, 11 states: "Just a little while longer, and the wicked will be no more; you will look at where they were, and they will not be there. But the meek will possess the earth, and they will find exquisite delight in the abundance of peace." ■



We invite you to learn more by reading chapter 10 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* It is published by Jehovah's Witnesses and is available for free download on jw.org. You can also scan this code.





The Landing Strategy of the Honeybee

HONEYBEES can safely land at virtually any angle without problems. How do they do it?

Consider: A safe landing requires that the honeybee reduce its approach speed to nearly zero before contact. One logical way to do this would be to measure two factors—flight speed and the distance to the target—and then reduce speed accordingly. However, that method would be difficult for most insects because they have close-set, fixed-focus eyes that cannot directly measure distance.

The vision of honeybees is very different from that of humans who use binocular vision. Honeybees seem to use the simple fact that an object appears to get bigger as they approach it. The closer they get to

an object, the faster it seems to increase in size. Experiments conducted at the Australian National University indicate that the honeybee decreases its flight speed so that the rate of apparent enlargement of an object remains constant. By the time the honeybee reaches its target, its speed has decreased to almost zero, allowing it to land safely.

The journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reports: “The simplicity and generality of this landing strategy . . . [make] it ideal for implementation in the guidance systems of flying robots.”

What do you think? Did the honeybee’s landing strategy evolve? Or was it designed? ■



When a Parent Dies



THE CHALLENGE

Dami was six years old when an aneurysm claimed the life of her dad. Derrick was nine when his father died of heart disease. Jeannie was seven when her mom passed away after a year-long battle with ovarian cancer.*

All too soon, these three young people were confronted with the death of a loved one. Have you had a similar experience? If so, this article can help you come to terms with your loss.† First, though, consider a few facts about grieving.

* You can also read about the experiences of Dami, Derrick, and Jeannie in the article that follows this one.

† Although this article is about the death of a parent, the principles discussed also apply to the death of a sibling or a friend.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

There are many ways to grieve. This means that the way you express your sorrow might differ from the way others do so. “Coping with a death does not follow a simple pattern or set of rules,” says the book *Helping Teens Cope With Death*. The important thing is that you do not unduly suppress your grief. Why? Because . . .

Suppressing grief can be harmful. Jeannie, mentioned at the outset, says: “I thought I had to be strong for my little sister, so I buried my emotions. Even today, I tend to suppress painful feelings, and that’s not healthy.”

Experts would agree. “Feelings denied or bottled up won’t stay bottled up forever,” says the book *The Grieving Teen*. “They will return when you least expect [them to] in the form of emotional flare-ups or physical ailments.” Suppressed grief can also lead to the abuse of alcohol or drugs, all done in an effort to numb the pain.

Grieving may be accompanied by confusing emotions. For example, some people feel anger at the person who died, feeling that the person “abandoned” them. Others blame God, thinking that he should have prevented the death. Many who grieve feel guilt for things they did or said to the person, since there is now no way to make amends.

Clearly, grieving can be a complex process. How can you get relief and be helped to move forward?



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Talk to someone. You might be inclined to isolate yourself during this difficult time. But pouring out your feelings to a family member or a friend will help you deal with your emotions and keep this tragedy from overwhelming you.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 18:24.*

Keep a journal. Write about the parent you lost. For example, what is your most cherished memory of that person? Write about his or her commendable qualities. Which ones would you like to imitate in *your* life?

If you are plagued with negative thoughts—for example, if you cannot stop thinking about something harsh you said to your parent before he or she passed away—write down *what* you feel and *why*. For example, “I feel guilty because I had an argument with my dad the day before he died.”

Next, challenge the reasonableness of your guilt. “You cannot blame yourself for not knowing that there would never be an opportunity to apologize,” says *The Grieving Teen*. “To suggest that one must never say or do anything that might call for a future apology is simply not realistic.”—*Bible principle: Job 10:1.*

Take care of yourself. Get adequate rest, sufficient exercise, and proper nutrition. If you do not feel like eating, have a number of healthful snacks throughout the day instead of full meals—at least until your appetite returns to normal. Do not soothe your grief with junk food or alcohol; they will only make things worse.

Talk to God in prayer. The Bible says: “Throw your burden on Jehovah, and he will sustain you.” (Psalm 55:22) Prayer is *not* merely an emotional crutch. It is real communication with the God who “comforts us in all our trials.”—2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

One way that God comforts those who mourn is through his Word, the Bible. Why not examine what it teaches about the true condition of those who have died and the hope of a resurrection?—*Bible principle: Psalm 94:19.* ■

* See chapter 16 of the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 1. It is available for free download at www.jw.org. Look under PUBLICATIONS.

KEY SCRIPTURES

“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”—Proverbs 18:24.

“I will speak out in my bitter distress!”—Job 10:1.

“When anxieties overwhelmed me, you [God] comforted and soothed me.”—Psalm 94:19.

YOU CAN HELP OTHERS

“My family and I are Jehovah’s Witnesses. A few years ago, two children we know lost their mother to cancer. They were 6 and 3 years old—virtually the same ages my sister and I were when our dad died nearly 17 years earlier.

“My mom, my younger sister, my brother, and I decided to make ourselves available to this family. We would invite them over. We would let them talk when they needed to. We would spend time with them and be whatever they needed us to be at the moment, whether it was someone to play with them or listen to them or give them advice.

“Losing a parent is devastating, and you never get over it. It gets easier, but you are constantly reminded of your loss. I knew what this grieving family was going through, and that’s one reason why I’m glad our family reached out to them. It helped us to draw closer to them and to each other as well.”—Dami.

When Children Grieve

Are you grieving over the death of a family member? If so, how can you cope with your loss? Consider how the Bible helped three young people deal with this very challenge.

DAMI'S STORY At first, it seemed to be a simple headache. But when my dad's pain got worse, my mom called an ambulance. I still remember the paramedics taking him away. Little did I know that it was the last time I would see him alive. Three days later, my dad died as a result of an aneurysm. I was just six years old.

For years, I blamed myself for my dad's death. In my mind I would replay that scene of the paramedics taking him away, and I would ask myself: 'Why did I just stand there? Why didn't I do something?' I would look at older ones with health problems and wonder, 'Why are they alive and my dad isn't?' In time, my mom helped me to talk about my emotions. And as Jehovah's Witnesses, we had wonderful support from the congregation.

Some people think that you can grieve right after a tragedy and then be over it, but that wasn't the case with me. I didn't really grieve until I was in my early teens.

My advice to young people who have lost a parent in death is, "Talk to someone about what you're going through. It may be that the sooner you let your emotions out, the healthier it will be for you."

Yes, it's hard to go through milestones in my life and know that my dad isn't here with me. But I find comfort in the Bible's promise at Revelation 21:4, which says that soon God "will wipe out every tear from [our] eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore."

DERRICK'S STORY Some of the best memories I have are of fishing with my dad and camping with him in the mountains. He loved the mountains.

My dad had heart problems for some time; I remember visiting him in the hospital once or twice in my early childhood. But I didn't understand the severity of his illness. My dad died of heart disease when I was nine years old.

After he died, I cried and cried. I felt as if I were suffocating, and I didn't want to talk to anyone. I hadn't felt this bad in my whole life, and I didn't feel like doing anything anymore. The church youth group I was part of showed interest in me initially, but it quickly faded. People there would say things like this, "It was your father's time" or "God called him" or "He's





Derrick

in heaven now.” Those answers never really satisfied me, but I had no knowledge of what the Bible really teaches about those things.

Then my mom started studying the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses, and later my brother and I joined her. We learned about the condition of the dead as well as God’s comforting promise of a resurrection. (John 5:28, 29) But the scripture that helped me the most was Isaiah 41:10, where God says: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be anxious, for I am your God. I will fortify you, yes, I will help you.” Knowing that Jehovah was with me was a tremendous comfort during my grieving, and it still is.

JEANNIE’S STORY When I was seven years old, my mom died of cancer. That whole day seemed surreal. I recall that she died at home and that my grandparents were there. I remember that everyone was calm. I remember that we had scrambled eggs for dinner. I felt as if my whole life were turning upside down in slow motion.

At the time—and for years after that—I thought I had to be strong for my little sister, so I buried my emotions. Even today, I tend to suppress painful feelings, and that’s not healthy.

I remember the love and support we had from the local congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Even though we had just

started attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall, fellow believers rallied around us as if we had been family for years. I don’t think my dad had to cook dinner for an entire year because it was always waiting by the front door.

One scripture that stands out to me is Psalm 25:16, 17. There the psalmist implored God: “Turn your face to me and show me favor, for I am alone and helpless. The distresses of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish.” It is comforting for me to know that you are never really alone when you are sad. God is there for you. With help from the Bible, I have been able to move forward with my life and focus on positive things, such as the Bible’s comforting promise of a resurrection. I have hope of seeing my mother again and getting to know her in perfect health on a paradise earth.—2 Peter 3:13.

Would you like to learn more about the Bible’s comforting message for those who are grieving? Download a free copy of the publication “When Someone You Love Dies.” Go to www.jw.org, and look under PUBLICATIONS > BOOKS & BROCHURES. ■



Jeannie



A Visit to **SPAIN**



PRINCIPAL LANGUAGES: SPANISH, BASQUE, CATALAN, GALICIAN, AND VALENCIAN

POPULATION: 46,439,000 **CAPITAL:** MADRID

CLIMATE: VARIES FROM HOT SUMMERS TO SURPRISINGLY COLD WINTERS



SPAIN is a land of diversity in both its landscape and its people. Much of Spain is clothed with wheat fields, grapevines, and olive trees. To the south, only some nine miles (14 km) of water separates mainland Spain from the African continent.

Many peoples—including the Phoenicians, the Greeks, and the Carthaginians—migrated to this southwest corner of Europe. When the Romans arrived in the third century B.C.E., they called their newly conquered territory Hispania. The land was subsequently occupied by Visigoths and Moors, all of whom left their cultural legacy.

In one recent year, more than 68 million people visited Spain. Most come for the sunshine, the golden

Dancing flamenco



Teide Peak



◀ Toledo captures the historical and cultural flavor of Spain. It was designated a World Heritage site in 1986 and is a popular stop for tourists

DID YOU KNOW?

Spain produces more olive oil than any other country in the world.

With an elevation of 12,198 feet (3,718 m), Teide Peak, in the Canary Islands, is Spain's highest mountain. If measured from its base on the seabed, it is the third-tallest volcano in the world.

Mariscada is a typical seafood dish



beaches, and the country's artistic, historical, and architectural treasures. Spanish food also attracts many visitors. Typical fare includes seafood, cured hams, rich stews, salads, and vegetables cooked or seasoned with olive oil. Spanish omelets, paella, and tapas are renowned the world over.

Spanish people are friendly and outgoing. Most profess to be Roman Catholic, but relatively few actually attend Mass. In recent years people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America have emigrated to Spain. Many of them enjoy discussing their religious beliefs and customs. Jehovah's Witnesses have had productive

conversations with them and have been able to help them learn what the Bible teaches on many subjects.

During 2015, more than 10,500 Witnesses volunteered to build or renovate 70 of their meeting places, called Kingdom Halls. Municipalities provided land for some of those projects. To help immigrants, Jehovah's Witnesses hold meetings in more than 30 languages in addition to Spanish. In 2016, more than 186,000 people attended a special meeting held by Jehovah's Witnesses to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ. ■



THE CROSS

Many people view the cross as the symbol of Christianity. Yet, not all believe that crosses should be worn or should be displayed in homes and churches.

Did Jesus die on a cross?

WHAT SOME PEOPLE SAY The Romans executed Jesus by hanging him on a cross made of two pieces of wood.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS Jesus was executed “by hanging on a tree.” (Acts 5:30, *The New Jerusalem Bible*) Both of the words used by Bible writers to describe the instrument of Jesus’ death suggest *one* piece of wood, not two. The Greek word *stau-ros*’, according to *Crucifixion in Antiquity*, means “a pole in the broadest sense. It is not the equivalent of a ‘cross.’” The word *xy’lon*, used at Acts 5:30, is “simply an upright pale or stake to which the Romans nailed those who were thus said to be crucified.”*

The Bible also relates the method of Jesus’ execution to an ancient Israelite law. The law stipulated: “If a man commits a sin deserving the sentence of death and he has been put to death and you have hung him on a stake, . . . the one hung up is something accursed of God.” (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23) Referring to that law,

* A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament, 11th Edition, by Ethelbert W. Bullinger, pages 818-819.



the Christian apostle Paul wrote that Jesus became “a curse instead of us, because it is written: ‘Accursed is every man hung upon a stake [*xy’lon*].’” (Galatians 3: 13) Paul thus indicated that Jesus died on a stake—a single piece of wood.

“They killed him by hanging him on a tree.”—Acts 10:39, The New Jerusalem Bible.



Did Jesus' disciples use the cross to worship God or to symbolize Christianity?

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS Nowhere does the Bible suggest that the earliest Christians used the cross as a religious symbol. Instead, it was the Romans of that era who used the cross design to symbolize *their* gods. Then, about 300 years after Jesus' death, Roman Emperor Constantine adopted the cross as the emblem of his armies, and it thereafter became associated with the "Christian" church.

Since pagans used the cross to worship their gods, would Jesus' disciples have used it in their worship of the true God? On the contrary, they knew that God had long disapproved of worship using

"the form of any symbol" and that Christians were to "flee from idolatry." (Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 1 Corinthians 10:14) "God is a Spirit," unseen by human eyes. Therefore, the early Christians did not use visible objects and symbols to help them feel closer to God. Rather, they worshipped him "with spirit," guided by his invisible holy spirit, and with "truth," in harmony with God's will as revealed in the Scriptures.—John 4:24.

"True worshippers will worship the Father with spirit and truth."—John 4:23.

How should Christians show their respect for Jesus Christ?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY "It was quite natural and logical that the instrument of salvation should become an object of special respect and veneration. . . . He who adores the images, adores the person it represents."—*New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS Christians are indebted to Jesus, for his death makes it possible for them to have their sins forgiven, to approach God, and to receive eternal life. (John 3:16; Hebrews 10:19-22) They are not told to show their respect for that gift by displaying a symbol of Jesus or merely confessing their belief in him. After all, "faith by itself, without works, is dead." (James 2:17) Christians must exercise their faith in Jesus. How?

"The love the Christ has compels us," the Bible says, "because this is what we have concluded, that one man died for all . . . Those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised up." (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15) Christians are compelled by Christ's outstanding act of love to adjust their lives to follow his example. In this way they honor Jesus in a far more meaningful way than by using a religious symbol. ■

"This is the will of my Father, that everyone who recognizes the Son and exercises faith in him should have everlasting life."—John 6:40.



TM

Would you like to understand the Bible?

What you do *not* need

- High intellect
- Money
- Blind faith

What you *do* need

- “Your power of reason.”—Romans 12:1
- A humble attitude

Some things that the Bible teaches may surprise you.

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