“What About Ghosts in a Haunted House?”

I’ve found your site helpful as I create a bible study on spirituality and dangerous “spiritualties.” I read over Michael Gleghorn’s “Communicating with the Dead,” but I felt it didn’t deal directly with my question for my Sunday School class this week: What does the Bible want us to think about ghosts and supposed ghostly encounters? Several people in our church have experienced what they call ghosts in their homes, and I want to explore what the Bible says about that during our class. Michael’s essay spoke about the small chance that souls from heaven, like Lazarus’s and Abraham’s, could return for very special occasions; what about the weird things that fall outside of human experience in a so-called haunted house? Should we always assume those are evil spirits parading as ghosts? What Bible verses help us to understand those things?

As I argue in my article, the Bible seems to suggest that it is a very rare event for a person who has died to return to earth to communicate some message to those still living. Also, given that the rich man was not able to return to warn his brothers (even though he wanted to), it seems that a dead person could only return with the permission of God (as one supposes was the case with Samuel returning to Saul to pronounce God’s judgment upon him, or with Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration). If this is correct, then I think that we would have to regard the vast majority of ghostly sightings, etc., to be either visions (caused by God or some other power), or hallucinations (caused by drugs, lack of sleep, sickness, psychological problems, a close emotional bond with the deceased, etc.), or demons. Of course, as I said, there may also be the rare instance when God allows a deceased person to return for some reason. In addition, I suppose a ghostly encounter could also be

explained in terms of an angelic visitation.

The bottom line, I think, is this: when it comes to questions of this sort, I don't think the Bible speaks clearly (or explicitly) enough to the issue for us to be dogmatic. There are many possible options for the sort of phenomena you mention—and each would have to be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis.

Morally and spiritually speaking, the Bible seems much more concerned to warn us against trying to communicate with the dead than it does in answering our questions about the nature of ghostly encounters, etc. This, I think, is the really important point: we are forbidden to attempt to make contact with the dead. If God wants to send someone back with a message, that's His business. Ours is to obey His commands. Having said this, however, I personally think that most ghostly sightings are probably either visions or hallucinations. Some may be demonic, others angelic. Rarest of all, I think, is the actual return of a dead person, but even this (as I've said) is not impossible—assuming that God commands it for some reason.

I hope this helps a little.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

© 2009 Probe Ministries