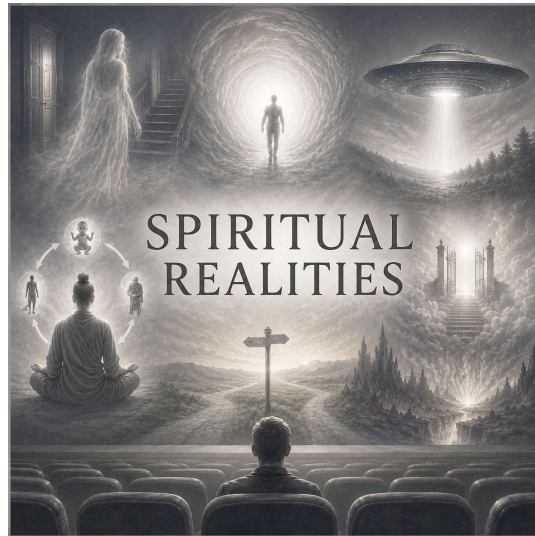


Spiritual Realities



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.

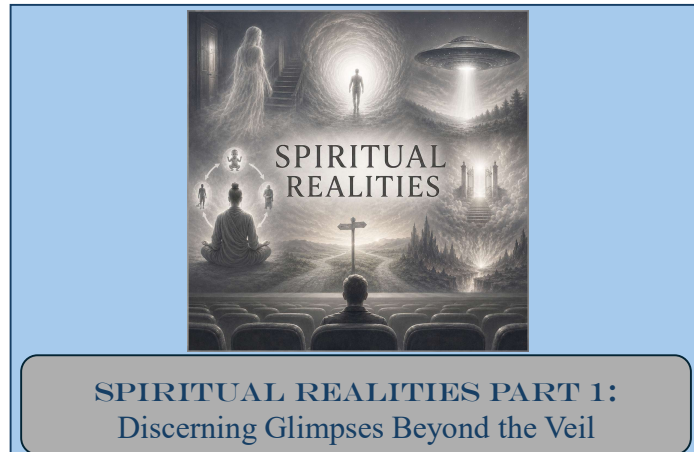
In the last series, *The Biblical Flood*, we saw that there may be direct connections between The Garden, the Fall, the Flood, the Messiah, and our current spiritual state. These are not isolated stories—they are foundational movements in God's unfolding plan. We found that the Flood is part of the path 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.



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 the paranormal.

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

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

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

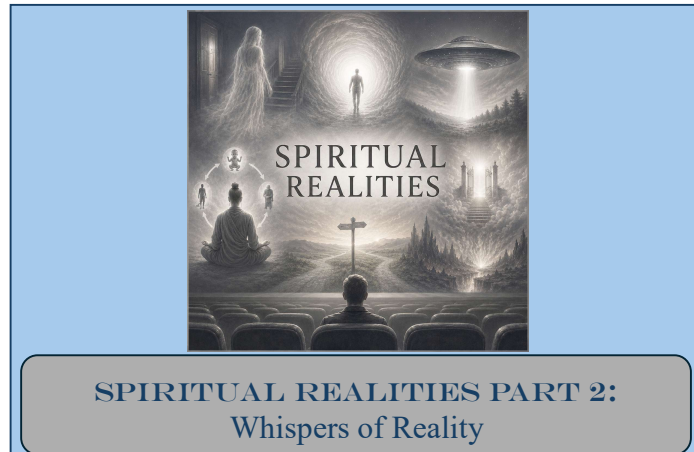
- Angelic Encounters
 - Gabriel and Zechariah (Luke 1), Gabriel and Mary (Luke 1), Angels at Jesus' tomb (Matt 28)
- Demonic Encounters
 - Numerous possession accounts: Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5), Boy with unclean spirit (Mark 9)
 - Spiritual entities interacting with humans: Speaking through individuals, 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.



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.

Why are we even talking about this?

- 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?
 - Dismiss them?
 - Accept them uncritically?
 - Investigate them carefully?
- 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

- 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.

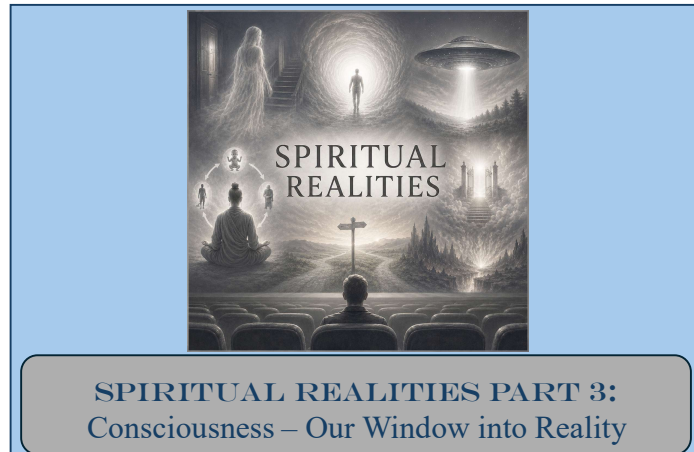
For example, we could put AI-driven ultra high-resolution, multi-spectral

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!



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.
 - More than information processing and storage.
 - It is subjective experience, the feeling of “being me.”
- The mystery
 - Why is there an inner experience at all?
 - Why isn't the brain just an unconscious computer?
 - How does matter become awareness?
 - Science has no accepted explanation.
- 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.

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 May Reveal

- What anesthesia reveals

- The brain's normal conscious processing is disrupted.
- Time and experience disappear.
- Consciousness returns instantly.

- 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...

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

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.

Avatar Model

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 Reality?

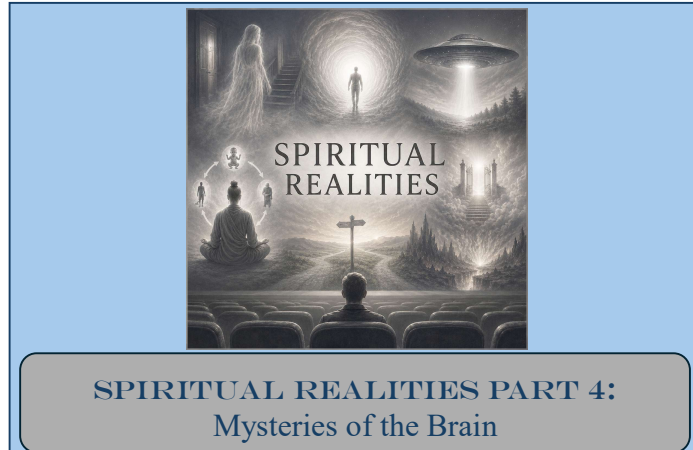
- Why embodiment?
 - Why physical life first?
 - Why mortality and suffering?
 - Why uncertainty instead of certainty? (i.e. the spiritual realm, the afterlife, and God's existence)
- Cake or recipe: Would God bake a cake?
 - God could cut to the case and create finished beings, right?
 - Instead, He 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.
 - Love despite suffering
 - Faith despite uncertainty.
 - 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

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.



Before we continue, I'd like to remind everyone why I'm doing this series. The Bible is our primary source of knowledge about God and the spiritual realm, but it doesn't answer every question we might have. Throughout history, people have also reported experiences they believe point beyond the physical world. Individually these experiences are uncertain and subjective, so we should never build doctrine on them. Yet collectively they represent scarce experiential evidence we have concerning the spiritual realm.

How Should We Evaluate Experiential Knowledge?

- Scripture remains our foundation
 - Experience informs, but does not establish, doctrine.
- Exercise discernment
 - Neither automatic acceptance nor automatic rejection
- Recognize our biases and assumptions
 - Science seeks repeatable evidence that fits within current theoretical frameworks.
 - Many Christians seek biblical certainty and view rare experiences as unbiblical rather than *extra-biblical*.
- Simulation theory
 - Interesting, but it doesn't change the central question.
 - Whether reality is physical or simulated, our experiences and moral choices remain real.
- The question that guides this series
 - If these experiences are genuine, what might they reveal about the spiritual realm?

It would be easy to dismiss these reports simply because they are unusual. Unfortunately, that often leaves people who have had such experiences confused, isolated, or even ridiculed. But if some of these experiences are genuine glimpses beyond the physical world, however rare, then ignoring them entirely would also be a mistake. My goal isn't to prove that every extraordinary claim is true, but to ask a simple question: if some of these experiences that repeat over time are genuine, what might they reveal about the spiritual reality that Scripture tells us exists?

Both science and Christianity have good reasons to be cautious. My concern is that caution should not become dismissal. If God occasionally allows rare glimpses into the spiritual realm, then those experiences deserve careful discernment—not automatic acceptance but not automatic rejection either. Science and Christianity rarely agree on matters, which means experiential knowledge faces a steep burden of proof. before seriously considering other possibilities.

- Science generally prefers phenomena that are repeatable, measurable, and experimentally controllable. Rare, subjective experiences are difficult to study

and often have these phenomena are products of the brain or psychology, so researchers tend to be cautious or dismissive. At the same time, *if even one* of these phenomena were convincingly demonstrated, it would have profound implications for neuroscience and our understanding of reality.

- Many Christians are concerned about deception, false teaching, and giving undue authority to experiences. Since Scripture is sufficient for salvation and doctrine, many are understandably reluctant to explore experiences that are not explicitly described in the Bible. As a result, these experiences are sometimes treated as though they are automatically unbiblical or deceptive, when "extra-biblical" or "requiring discernment" may be more accurate descriptions.

That doesn't mean either community is wrong to be cautious. It simply means we should recognize our assumptions and biases and ask whether some experiences deserve thoughtful investigation rather than immediate dismissal.

Secondly, at the end of Episode 2, I said I'd spend part of an episode discussing simulation theory. The more I've thought about it, the less important I think it is to the overriding question of this series, "Does this possibility meaningfully change our understanding of spiritual reality?" And think the answer is no. Whether our universe is fundamental reality or an unimaginably sophisticated simulation, our conscious experiences, our moral choices, and the spiritual questions we're exploring remain essentially the same. If such a simulation exists, its creator would simply occupy the role we normally attribute to God. So rather than devote an entire episode to that possibility, I'd rather spend our time examining questions that more directly affect our understanding of consciousness and the spiritual realm.

Comparing Models of Consciousness

- Last week we talked about the first three models.
- This week I have a new one: **Brain-Then-Spirit** model.
 - During normal life almost all conscious processing occurs in the brain. At death the spirit receives those experiences
 - This typical flow can be interrupted by rare events like out-of-body and near-death experiences, where the spirit separates and later returns.

Model	Description	Strengths	Challenges
Materialist	Consciousness is produced entirely by the brain. No post-life consciousness.	Explains neuroscience, anesthesia, brain injury, and psychedelics well.	Difficult to explain NDEs, ESP, apparitions, and other phenomena—if genuine.
Integrated	Brain shapes or filters consciousness originating in the spirit.	Naturally explains both brain function and possible spiritual experiences.	How the brain and spirit interact remains unknown.
Avatar	Brain receives consciousness from spirit.	Easily explains survival after death and other spiritual phenomena.	Harder to reconcile with the brain's overwhelming influence on consciousness.
Brain-then-spirit	Brain performs nearly all conscious processing; only after life, the spirit receives those experiences and passes to the spiritual realm.	Fits most of neuroscience while preserving survival after death and NDEs.	Requires an unknown transfer of memories and experiences between the brain and spirit.

- The materialist model is absent of a spiritual reality and therefore has no explanation for any paranormal experience.
- I like the new Brain-then-spirit model because it is like the materialist view but with the strengths of the spiritual views.

Consciousness and the Importance of History

Everyone agrees that damage to the brain can erase memories. The disagreement is what that means. Did the memories cease to exist, or did the brain lose access to them? If the spirit survives death, might those memories still exist there? We simply don't know.

Cases like Phineas Gage show that damage to the brain can dramatically change someone's personality. Materialism naturally says the personality itself has changed. The spiritual models ask a different question: has the person changed, or has the damaged brain changed how that person is expressed? Cases like Phineas Gage show that damage to the brain can dramatically change someone's personality. Materialism naturally says the personality itself has changed. The spiritual models ask a different question: has the person changed, or has the damaged brain changed how that person is expressed?

One Experience, Four Interpretations

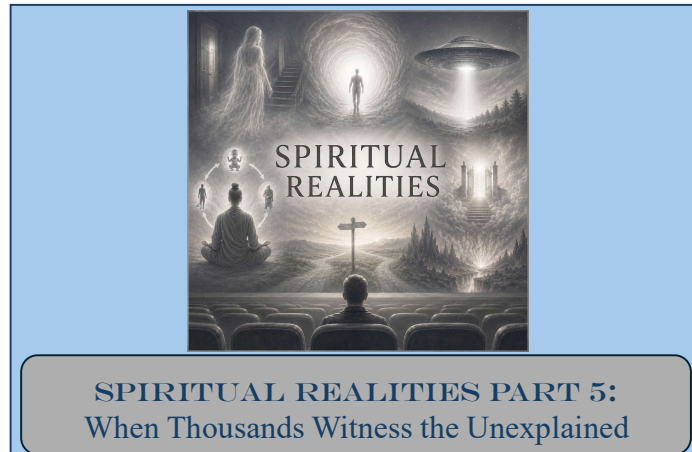
- Brain disorders and unusual experiences have often expanded our understanding of the brain. But can they also expand our understanding of spiritual reality?

Experience	Materialist	Integrated	Avatar	Brain-then-spirit
Split brain	Two conscious processors	Brain–spirit interface divided	One spirit using a divided brain	Brain processing divided
Schizophrenia	Neurological disorder	Brain disorder; possible spiritual influence	Brain limits the spirit's expression	Brain disorder; spirit largely unaffected
Brain damage (memory)	Memories physically lost	Brain loses access to memories (spirit?)	Spirit remembers; brain cannot retrieve	Brain memories lost; spirit receives complete record at death
Brain damage (personality)	Personality produced by damaged brain	Brain damage alters expression of the spirit	Spirit unchanged; damaged brain alters expression	Brain changes personality during life; spirit receives experiences after death
Split personality (DID)	Dissociated brain states	Brain/spirit interaction disrupted	One spirit expressed through fragmented brain states	Fragmented brain processing; one spirit
Déjà vu / Premonitions	Memory error, coincidence, or subconscious pattern recog.	Possible spiritual perception	Spirit occasionally perceives beyond ordinary awareness	Rare spirit awareness communicated to the brain
Psychedelics	Altered brain chemistry	Brain filter altered; possible spiritual influence	Brain filter altered; spirit experiences differently	Brain processing altered; may occasionally permit unusual spirit interaction

I would say that if brain damage didn't affect us because the spirit is the main element of consciousness, then that would be too direct information to us that a spiritual realm exists. Instead, the idea of "brain plasticity" makes more sense. Also, if people knew there was no risk in doing dangerous things that could injure the brain, this would greatly affect their experience on earth.

Next Time

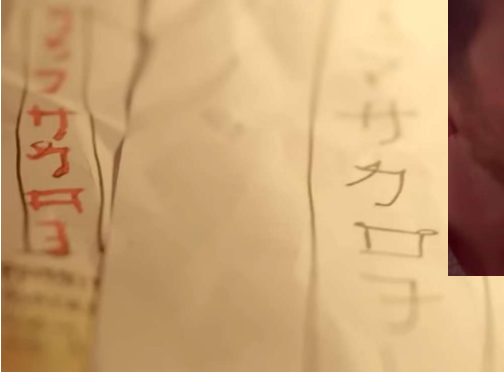
There have been several mass spiritual experiences throughout history. Some Catholic in nature, other Christian ones, and ones from other religions. What could these say about the nature of spiritual reality?



Throughout this series, we're exploring whether our physical world contains reliable clues that point to a deeper spiritual reality. So far, we've looked at individual paranormal experiences and at what consciousness and the brain may reveal about our nature. Today we're examining a different category of evidence: mass paranormal and spiritual experiences witnessed by hundreds or even thousands of people. Science, historians, and the public generally take events with multiple independent witnesses more seriously than reports from a single individual. While large numbers of witnesses don't automatically prove an event was supernatural, they can strengthen the historical evidence that something extraordinary occurred. The question we'll explore is whether these shared experiences reveal additional—or perhaps more certain—insights into the nature of spiritual reality.

Shared Psychedelic Experiences?

- DMT + diffuse laser band
- Independent reports of the same symbols & characters
- What would it be like to know you live in a simulation?
- Still under investigation
- Can people under DMT be trusted?



- Last week we briefly discussed simulation theory and psychedelics, and I mentioned that simulation theory likely has few consequences for understanding spiritual reality. But this week I came across something that, while it doesn't prove simulation theory—or anything supernatural—is nevertheless fascinating from an evidentiary standpoint.
- Several researchers and investigators, including Chase Hughes and Danny Goler, are exploring reports that people under the influence of DMT or 5-MeO-DMT, when exposed to a diffuse band of laser light projected onto a wall, independently report seeing the same fixed symbols and characters.
- If these reports continue to hold up under careful, controlled testing, they would represent something quite unusual: a shared experience that doesn't fit our normal explanations and isn't simply one person's subjective account.
- Whether the explanation ultimately proves to be neurological, psychological, or a clue to the nature of reality, it reminds us why shared experiences deserve careful investigation.
- That brings us to today's topic: What should we make of extraordinary experiences reported by not just one person, but by hundreds—or even thousands—of witnesses? Science already regards reproducibility as one of its highest standards; therefore, whenever an unusual experience appears to

be reproducible across many independent observers it naturally deserves our attention.

Biblical Mass Experiences

- Scripture remains our foundation
- Israel
 - Mount Sinai - thunder, lightning, fire, trumpet, voice. Exodus 19:16–20; 20:18–21
 - Pillar of cloud/fire & Red Sea – Jews and Egyptian witnesses. Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19–31
 - Jordan crossing – the water “piled up”. Joshua 3:14–17; 4:1–24
 - Jericho – Walls collapse before Israel. Joshua 6:1–27
- New Covenant
 - Darkness at the Crucifixion – future Christians, Jews, and Romans. Matthew 27:45–54; Mark 15:33–39; Luke 23:44–48
 - The Resurrection – Pivotal to Christianity. women, disciples, doubters, 500+, James, and Paul. Matthew 28; Luke 24; John 20–21; Acts 1:1–9; 1 Cor. 15:3–8
 - Pentecost: 3000+ witnesses from many backgrounds and locations. Acts 2

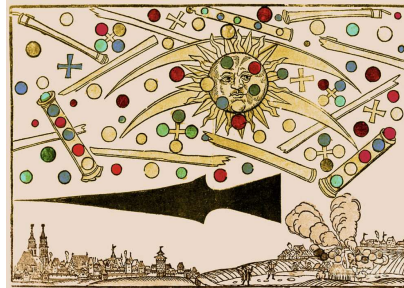
- The Resurrection testimony did not come from one psychologically uniform group. It included women, committed disciples, doubting disciples, hundreds gathered at once, Jesus’ previously skeptical brother James, and eventually Saul—an active persecutor of Christians.
- 1 Cor. 15:6 - "He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are **still living**..."
- Large numbers establish that an experience was shared; diversity among witnesses strengthens the argument that it was not merely produced by one group’s prior beliefs.
- If God has at times revealed Himself publicly in Scripture and showed that human witnesses are sometimes important, should we be surprised if history contains reports of similar public experiences?

Nuremberg (1561) & Basel (1566)

Mass Aerial Phenomena

• Nuremberg

- April 14, 1561
- Hundreds (perhaps thousands) of witnesses
- Documented in a contemporary broadsheet
- Objects described as spheres, crosses, cylinders, and a large black spear combating each other
- Their interpretation: A sign from God, a warning, and a call for repentance.



• Basel

- July–August 1566
- Multiple days of sightings
- Contemporary broadsheets
- Black spheres reported moving and "fighting" in the sky



- History is replete with mass paranormal and spiritual experiences—including Knock, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Heroldsbach, Hessdalen, the Phoenix Lights, and numerous Marian apparitions. For the sake of time, I've chosen just three that I believe best represent the range of evidence.

- Pre-industrial era; Contemporary written records; Numerous witnesses

On April 14, 1561, a remarkable celestial event occurred in Nuremberg, Germany. Residents witnessed what they described as an "aerial battle" in the sky, which included various shapes and objects.

Description of the Event:

Time: Early morning, between 4 and 5 AM

Witnesses: Many men and women in Nuremberg and surrounding areas

Objects Observed: Hundreds of spheres and cylinders, A large black triangular object, Other odd-shaped objects moving erratically.

A "Battle Scene": They called it a "battle" because the printed description personifies the objects as combatants: it says the "globes...started to fight among themselves," that they "fought vehemently," and that the conflict continued for over an hour before the "combatant" objects became "fatigued," then fell to earth

Documentation: The event was documented by Hans Glaser in a broadsheet,

which included a woodcut illustration. This broadsheet is significant for its detailed account of the phenomenon and is archived in Zürich.

Interpretations The interpretations of this event vary widely:

Ufologists: Some believe it may have been an encounter with extraterrestrial spacecraft.

Skeptics: Others argue it was likely an atmospheric phenomenon, such as a sun dog, although the details do not fit typical descriptions of such events.

This incident remains a topic of interest in both historical and ufological discussions, highlighting the blend of natural phenomena and human interpretation in the 16th century.

- **Just 5 years later: Basel** BAH-zuhl
- Very similar event described by witnesses and documented (note: documenting an event took a lot more effort back then!)
- What's fascinating isn't just what people reported seeing. It's how they interpreted it. Sixteenth-century Europeans naturally interpreted unusual events through a biblical worldview—as signs from God. Today, many people would interpret the same descriptions as UFOs or interdimensional phenomena. The observations may be similar, while the interpretations reflect the culture of the observers.

The Fatima Events (1916–1917)

- **Angel of Peace (1916)**

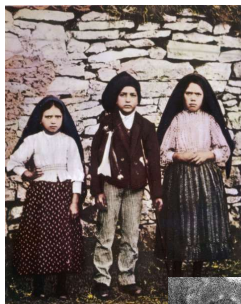
- Three shepherd children
- Preparation & instruction

- **Marian Apparitions (1917)**

- Six monthly appearances
- Public prediction: October 13

- **Miracle of the Sun**

- 30,000–70,000 witnesses
- Believers, skeptics & journalists
- Widely differing interpretations



Note about personal bias

- Before we look at Fatima and Zeitoun, I want to acknowledge my own bias. Based on my understanding of Scripture, I don't believe the Virgin Mary presently appears to people or serves as an intermediary between God and humanity. So I begin these accounts skeptical of the traditional interpretation. My goal isn't to determine whether these were appearances of Mary, but to ask what actually happened and what, if anything, these events might reveal about spiritual reality.
- Observation is one question; interpretation is another.

Angel of Peace

- A year before the famous Fatima events, the three shepherd children reported three encounters with an angel who encouraged prayer and repentance. Since only the children witnessed these events, I don't consider them strong evidence by themselves, but they provide important historical context.

Marian Apparitions

- Beginning in May 1917, the children claimed the Virgin Mary appeared monthly and announced that a public sign would be given on October 13. Because of that prediction, larger crowds gathered each month, including many skeptics.

Miracle of the Sun

- On October 13, somewhere between thirty and seventy thousand people gathered despite heavy rain. Many reported extraordinary movements of the sun, brilliant colors, and the soaked ground drying rapidly. Not everyone described exactly the same thing, and interpretations vary—from miracle to atmospheric phenomenon—but the event is unusually well documented because journalists and skeptics were present.
- Even if authentic, the photo doesn't show the sun dancing, zigzagging, changing colors, or plunging toward the earth. It simply shows a bright circular object over a crowd.

Zeitoun (1968–1971)

- **St. Mary's Church, Zeitoun, Cairo**

- Repeated apparitions
- Nearly three years

- **Witnesses**

- Thousands over time
- Christians, Muslims & skeptics
- Police & government officials

- **Evidence**

- Photographs & video
- No messages
- No single visionary



- Unlike Fatima, Zeitoun wasn't a single dramatic event. Reports continued intermittently for nearly three years above St. Mary's Coptic Church in Cairo.
- One of the strongest aspects of Zeitoun is the diversity of the witnesses. Christians, Muslims, tourists, police officers, and government officials all reported seeing a luminous female figure. There wasn't just one visionary describing what everyone else was supposed to believe.
- Photographs and video exist, although they're not conclusive by modern standards. Another unusual feature is that the apparition reportedly delivered no messages or prophecies. People simply watched. Whether one concludes this was supernatural, psychological, or something else entirely, Zeitoun remains one of history's most remarkable mass experiences.

The Coptic Orthodox Church investigated from the beginning. Coptic Orthodox Church Pope Kyrillos VI (Cyril VI) personally took the reports seriously but did not immediately endorse them. After investigation, the Church officially recognized the apparitions as authentic.

Government officials and police were repeatedly present. Because the crowds became enormous and disrupted traffic, police were sent to maintain order. Many officers reported seeing the luminous figure themselves.

Egypt's government did not attempt to suppress the reports. President Nasser

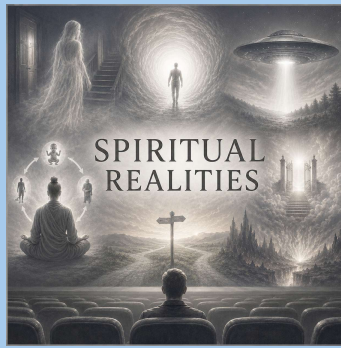
was reportedly informed, and government officials observed the phenomenon. Although this wasn't a formal scientific investigation, the state treated the events as significant enough to monitor closely.

Photographs and film were taken by numerous people over the three years.

None are definitive by today's standards, but they provide more physical evidence than exists for many historical apparition claims.

The witnesses were unusually diverse. This is perhaps the most compelling feature. They included:

- Coptic Christians
- Roman Catholics
- Muslims
- Non-religious observers
- Foreign visitors
- Police officers
- Government officials



SPIRITUAL REALITIES PART 6:
From Strange Phenomena to Scriptural Reality

What Can These Experiences Tell Us about Reality?

- Neuro-physical Reality: The brain's role in conscious reality
- Paranormal Reality: Consciousness beyond the “provable” physical reality.
- Supernatural Reality: Possible activity of spiritual beings in the physical reality.
- Scriptural Reality: Divine revelation possibly expanding our knowledge of the spiritual reality.
- I've added amnesia and dissociative fugues to “Brain phenomena”.
- I've expanded upon the Zeitoun Marian event.

Reality Explored	Representative Phenomena	Possible Knowledge Gained
Neuro-physical Reality	Brain injuries, amnesia, dissociative fugues, consciousness models	How does the brain produce or interact with consciousness?
Paranormal Reality	Out of Body Experiences and apparitions	Can consciousness exist beyond the physical body?
Supernatural Reality	Demonic encounters, Marian apparitions (Fatima, Zeitoun, Assiut, Warraq)	Can spiritual beings interact with humanity?
Scriptural Reality	Near death experiences, the New Testament	How does this expand upon what God reveals about salvation and the afterlife?

- Before we move into the New Testament, I'd like to review what we've actually learned from these various phenomena. Not every phenomenon answers the same question.
- First, there's what I'll call **neuro-physical reality**—how consciousness relates to the brain itself. Along with the consciousness models we discussed, I should have also mentioned amnesia, and dissociative fugues. These are well-documented phenomena that demonstrate how profoundly damage to the brain can affect memory, personality, and identity. They present a significant challenge to simple spiritual models of consciousness and, in my opinion, fit best with the fourth 'brain-then-spirit' model we discussed.
- Second is **paranormal reality**. Experiences such as out-of-body experiences, apparitions, electronic voice phenomena, and similar reports don't necessarily tell us anything about God, but if genuine, they suggest that consciousness may not be completely confined to the physical body.
- Third is **supernatural reality**. Here we're no longer simply asking whether consciousness survives death but whether intelligent spiritual beings interact with humanity. We looked at demonic encounters and the remarkable mass Marian sightings at Zeitoun. Since recording those episodes, I also discovered two similar large-scale events in Egypt—at Assiut beginning in 2000 and Warraq beginning in 2009. Whatever one's interpretation of these events, they show that reported mass spiritual phenomena have continued into modern times.

- Finally, there is what I'll call **Scriptural reality**. This is where the New Testament becomes indispensable. Paranormal and supernatural phenomena may suggest that another realm exists, but they cannot tell us with confidence how God relates to humanity.
 - **Near-death experiences** are unique because they occasionally intersect with specifically Christian themes such as Christ, judgment, salvation, and the afterlife. Taken together, these suggest that both the brain and the spirit may have essential—but different—roles in human consciousness.
 - Is the NT rightly a phenomena? I'd say yes: Christians believe (en masse) that God has supernaturally delivered the stories and narratives of the OT and NT (but uniquely the NT to Christians). So, the it isn't a phenomenon in the same sense as an NDE or the Zeitoun event. Those are **observed phenomena**. The New Testament is **claimed divine revelation** that records and interprets phenomena.
- **Expanding on Zeitoun (Zay-toon).**
 - **Zeitoun (1968–1971):** Cairo
 - **Warraq (2009–2012):** another district of Cairo (~10 miles away)
 - **Assiut (2000–2001):** Upper Egypt, ~200 miles south
- Interestingly, the later reported mass Marian sightings weren't confined to Zeitoun. Similar reports occurred both nearby in Warraq, another district of Cairo only about ten miles away, and much farther south in Assiut, roughly two hundred miles away. All three shared in common: A glowing female apparition interpreted by Mary, luminous dove-like lights moving rapidly and sometimes in formation, and numerous reported healings.
- Beginning today, our primary goal is to examine the New Testament itself and see what it reveals about these spiritual realities.

How Near-Death Experiences Inform Spiritual Reality?

- Thousands of reported experiences
 - ~**10% of the general population** report an experience meeting established research criteria for an NDE in one international study using the Greyson NDE Scale.
 - **10–20% of people who come close to death** report an NDE across many prospective hospital studies.
 - Among **cardiac arrest survivors**, studies often report **15–20%** experiencing an NDE
 - Major researchers: Raymond Moody (Psychiatrist, *Life After Life*, 1975), Bruce Greyson (Psychiatrist), Sam Parnia (Critical care physician), Pim van Lommel (Published perhaps the most influential prospective hospital study in *The Lancet* (2001). Showed about 18% of cardiac arrest survivors reported NDEs), Eben Alexander (Harvard-trained neurosurgeon, had his own NDE, *Proof of Heaven*), Mary Neal (Orthopedic surgeon, had her own NDE, *To Heaven and Back*)
 - Many describe heaven, hell, Christ, relatives, peace, judgment...
-
- NDE's suggest consciousness may continue beyond clinical death and provide remarkable, albeit, varied firsthand reports. Raise important questions about the afterlife. Require discernment and cannot establish doctrine.
 - 1975: Raymond Moody introduces the modern discussion.
 - 50 years of research
 - Thousands of published cases
 - Neurologists, psychiatrists, cardiologists, intensivists, psychologists
 - No universally accepted explanation.
 - **Up to 85% Pleasant**, 10% Distressing, 5% Emotionally neutral
 - This could agree with **dual moralism predictions: if NDEs reflect genuine glimpses of the afterlife, pleasant experiences should greatly outnumber distressing ones.** You can present that as a prediction of your model rather than as evidence for it, which keeps the distinction between prediction and proof clear.
 - "Near-death experiences deserve serious consideration. But as Christians, our ultimate question isn't merely what people report. It's what God has chosen to reveal."

How Does the New Testament Reveal Spiritual Reality?

- The New Testament “NDEs”

- Multiple people Jesus raised from the dead:
 - Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43) – Dead an hour? Do not say anything about this!
 - Widow's son (Luke 7:11-15) – A couple of hours dead? Sat up and talked about what?!
 - Lazarus (John 11:1-44) – 4 days dead!
- **None report what they experienced** (or if they did, it's not recorded)
 - Stephen (Act 7) might have, but this would be a rare glimpse of heaven just before one's death.
- Instead, Scripture teaches about the unseen world through revelation

- If God wanted us to know what these people experienced while dead, the New Testament had numerous opportunities to tell us.
- Instead, it consistently teaches us about death, resurrection, salvation, judgment, angels, demons, and the afterlife through Christ and the apostles—not through the testimony of those who returned.

Mark 5: ²² Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” ²⁴ So Jesus went with him.

Mark 5: He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha kum!*” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ **He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this**, and told them to give her something to eat.

Luke 7: ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from

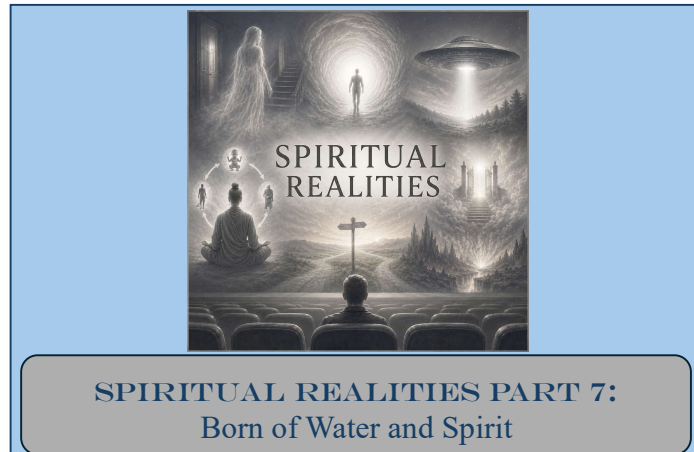
the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” ¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” ¹⁵ ***The dead man sat up and began to talk***, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

- Luke says Jesus encountered the funeral procession as the body was being carried out of Nain for burial. The man was already placed on a bier and accompanied by a large crowd, so enough time had passed to wash and prepare the body, assemble mourners, and begin the procession.
- First-century Jewish burial normally occurred **within hours of death**, generally on the same day rather than after several days. Bodies were carried to burial on a bier much like the one Luke describes.

John 11:

- John doesn't explain why he specifies four days, but he does emphasize that Lazarus was undeniably dead and beginning to decompose.
 - Early Jewish tradition held that the soul lingered near the body for three days before departing completely. If a similar belief already existed in Jesus' day, John's mention of the fourth day would make the miracle even more extraordinary—but that connection remains a historical possibility rather than something the text itself states.
 - Until fairly recently in history, people occasionally **were mistakenly thought dead**. Without ECGs, EEGs, pulse ox'es, or modern neurological testing, profound coma, hypothermia, poisoning, or catalepsy could sometimes be mistaken for death. Even today there are rare cases where someone declared dead is later found to have signs of life before burial.
 - It removes any suspicion that Lazarus was merely unconscious.
 - It emphasizes visible decomposition (KJ: “he stinketh”).
 - It makes the miracle unmistakably one of resurrection rather than resuscitation.
 - If the three-day tradition was already known, it would underscore that this was beyond any conceivable natural recovery
- Could Lazarus or Jairus' daughter have shared something privately with family or friends? Certainly. The New Testament simply doesn't tell us. If they did, the Holy Spirit chose not to preserve those accounts for the Church.
- All of these resurrections occurred **before Jesus' own resurrection**, so even if they had described their experiences, they would have reflected the pre-resurrection state of the dead. When I say NT Scripture, I'm primarily referring to the post-resurrection spiritual reality.
 - John 14:1-3 – “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God^[a]; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a

place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.”



Review: Over the past few weeks, we've been exploring different models of consciousness—how the body, the brain, the soul, and the spirit might relate to one another. There are various ideas about what memories or experiences accompany a person's own spirit (their soul) when they die. We simply aren't told all the details. But one thing Scripture makes absolutely clear: God knows every thought, every word, every action, every motive, and every decision of our lives. Whatever the mechanics of human consciousness may be, nothing is lost from God's perspective, and He will judge each of us with perfect knowledge.

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Jesus told Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Earlier, Jesus Himself had entered the waters of baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Is there a connection? Today, I want to examine Jesus' baptism, our own, and what Scripture reveals about how God's Spirit enters human life.

In a way, this episode is about baptism—but from an entirely different

perspective. Rather than beginning with the familiar doctrinal debates and proof texts, I'd like to step back and ask some more fundamental questions. Why was Jesus Himself baptized? What changed when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him? And why did Jesus later tell Nicodemus that we must be born of water and the Spirit?

Today we'll be in the opening chapters of the Gospel of John, where Jesus' public ministry begins. We'll examine His baptism, His conversation with Nicodemus, and His teaching about the Holy Spirit to discover what Jesus' own spiritual reality reveals about our own—specifically, what changes when God's Spirit comes to dwell within us.

God's Perfect Knowledge

Passage	What God Knows
Matthew 12:36	Every careless word.
Luke 6:45 (<i>Matt. 12:34</i>)	The heart is revealed through our words.
Luke 8:17	Nothing hidden will remain concealed.
Romans 2:14–16	God judges even the secrets of men.
2 Corinthians 5:10	Each person receives according to what they have done.
Hebrews 4:12–13	Everything is uncovered before God's eyes.
Ecclesiastes 12:14	Every deed, including every hidden thing.

- These aren't meant to scare us—far from it—they are meant drive us to God.
- God not only knows how we chose to live, but He also knows the things we didn't choose, like how we were raised, things that happened to us in our formative years, and what our mental and emotional capacities are, etc.
- They also likely mean our spirit does retain all of our experiences despite common things like memory loss and rarer things like brain damage, multiple personality disorder, amnesia, fugues, etc.
- Today, I'd like to move away from speculation about consciousness and focus instead on what Scripture does reveal with remarkable clarity: the reality of the Holy Spirit and what changes when God's Spirit comes to dwell within a person.

<go back to scene>

The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Event	Scripture	Description
Temple at age 12	Luke 2:41–52	Jesus remains in the Temple, astonishing the teachers with His understanding. Then returns to Nazareth and continues to grow in wisdom and stature.
About Age 30	Luke 3:21–23; Matt. 3:13–17; John 1:29–34	Jesus is baptized by John. The heavens are opened, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and remains on Him, and the Father declares, "This is my beloved Son."
Tempted by Satan	Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13	Filled with and led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He fasts forty days and is tempted by the devil.
First Disciples	John 1:35–51	John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael begin following Him.
First Sign	John 2:1–11	Jesus turns water into wine at Cana—John calls this "the first of His signs."
Passover in Jerusalem	John 2:13–25	Jesus cleanses the Temple. Many believe because of the signs He performs.
Nicodemus	John 3:1–21	Jesus teaches that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Observation: Every major event that publicly reveals Jesus' ministry—His temptation, His first disciples, His first sign, and His teaching about new birth—occurs **after** His baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

- **Jesus' Baptism** (*centerpiece*)
- **Tempted by Satan** (*Spirit leads Him immediately into testing*)
- **Nicodemus** (*born of water and Spirit*)
- **Baptism → Spirit → Ministry**

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

- John the Baptist objects, but Jesus pushes back, Matthew 3:15 – *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."*

1. To identify with the humanity

- Jesus was sinless, yet He willingly entered the same waters as repentant sinners.
- His ministry begins by identifying Himself with those He came to redeem.

2. To publicly begin His Messianic ministry

- The Pharisees of the MIP (Messiah Identification Protocol) committee would have seen this as an official declaration of Jesus' ministry as a messiah candidate.
- Note: It is likely no one heard the voice. John says he only "saw".

3. To fulfill God's spiritual purpose

- To "fulfill all righteousness" means it was required because Jesus had to be fully righteous.
- Literally what happens: the Holy Spirit descended and remained upon Him, then He is led by the Spirit, then He begins His public ministry beginning.

- To identify with the humanity – this is the common reason given by theologians.
- To publicly begin His Messianic ministry – I argue this in my second livestream series, the Pharisaical Lens.
- Who heard the voice and saw the dove?
 - John says: "And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:33-34)
 - Wait! "The one who sent me to baptize"? It wasn't Jesus otherwise he'd say, "the same person who told me to baptize...and then it happened to that person. Maybe it was an angel or maybe God Himself. The most human explanation would be whomever his rabbi was, but I don't know if that makes sense.
 - John says twice emphatically, "I myself did not know him". John would have known Jesus as his cousin, but it seems as though he did not know Jesus was the Messiah.
 - If all present had heard the voice, the scriptures would likely have said it.

- I believe all three of these are true, but the last one is of most importance to this episode.
- Jesus does **not** say He was baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Instead, He says it was necessary "to fulfill all righteousness."
 - Jesus was without sin, so this clearly wasn't a baptism of repentance.
 - Righteousness is more than obedience to God's laws. It is also doing what God requires of you.
 - But why would God require Jesus to be baptized?
 - Could Jesus' baptism have established the pattern for receiving the indwelling Holy Spirit?

A Possible Spiritual Reality of Jesus Baptism

Biblical Observations	A Possible Explanation
Jesus at the Temple at age 12 (Luke 2:41–52)	Possibly still indwelt with the Holy Spirit, consistent with His extraordinary understanding of the Scriptures.
Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry (Luke 3:23)	Jesus waited until the customary age at which His ministry would be recognized as legitimate by the Jewish religious community.
The Spirit descended and remained upon Him (John 1:32)	Something spiritually significant happened at His baptism.
Immediately afterward, Jesus was led by the Spirit, tempted by Satan, and began His ministry (Mat 4:1, Luke 4:1)	His baptism may have marked more than a public commissioning but a spiritual empowering (“Led by the Spirit”, “full of the Holy Spirit”)
Hebrews says He was made like His brothers “in every respect” and was tempted as we are (Heb. 2:17; 4:15).	If Jesus experienced a temporary absence of the indwelling Spirit after reaching moral accountability, His earthly experience would more closely parallel ours.

- Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil introduced a new spiritual reality: spiritual separation from God and moral accountability for themselves and their offspring.
- Perhaps every morally accountable person experiences that same separation from God's indwelling presence.
- If so, Jesus may also have experienced it—not because of personal sinfulness—but because He truly entered the human condition. His baptism would then represent the restoration of the indwelling Spirit before His temptation and public ministry.

- Exploring the nature of Christ Jesus is a very precarious thing to do. Many churches and theologians have split over this. 😊
- Nevertheless, we must be allowed to ask questions and posit new ideas.
- From the Christian perspective, Jesus was inarguably sinless before His baptism. Therefore, Jesus did not need baptism for forgiveness or repentance.
- However, in the spiritual reality I've been presenting in my livestreams, humans have the indwelling Spirit at birth, but then the Spirit departs when God has determined they have matured enough to *apprehend* the knowledge of good and evil.
 - While this is a consequence of Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, I would not call this “original sin” or “Adam’s sin”.
 - I would just that it is a consequence of the spiritual aware and what makes them spiritually aware and/or accountable to the knowledge of good and evil—even though no human can comprehend it and observe it their whole life.
- If Jesus experienced a temporary absence of the indwelling Spirit, then he could relate more to us. God already took a tremendous “step down” leaving Heaven and coming to earth. But He shows his love for us even more. We

know he allowed us to crucify him. Perhaps he also temporarily allowed himself to be without the indwelling—not because of personal sinfulness, but because He truly entered the full human condition.

- His baptism would then represent the restoration of the indwelling Holy Spirit before His temptation and public ministry.
- I'm not asking you to accept this hypothesis. I'm asking you to keep it in mind as we continue through John's Gospel and see whether it explains the pattern we find there.

Born of Water and Spirit

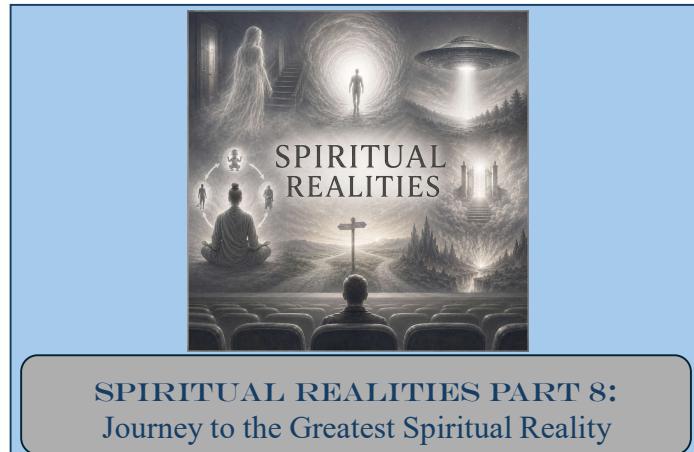
John 3:1-8

- Jesus immediately introduces the necessity of being "born again" before Nicodemus even asks a question.
- Nicodemus misunderstands and thinks Jesus is speaking only of physical birth ("enter his mother's womb").
- Jesus clarifies—not by removing water—but by adding the Spirit: "born of water and the Spirit."
- Jesus distinguishes two births: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."
- Jesus joins water and Spirit together as prerequisites for entering the kingdom of God.

- People who don't believe baptism is necessary will say Jesus is talking about the waters of birth.
- People who do believe baptism is necessary will say it's the water of baptism.
- **I think it's both!** Not just to appease both groups, but because the scripture points to it.
- Nicodemus doesn't even get to asking his question. Jesus cuts to the chase and says, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."
- It's then *Nicodemus* that brings up the "mother's womb to be born" aspect.
- Then Jesus they gives the full answer: *Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*
- Jesus would not give "one must be born" as a prerequisite because that's obvious—they wouldn't be having this conversation if Nicodemus weren't born! :-)
- But Jesus does tie in physical birth: Flesh gives birth to flesh (and I would add

“through water”), and Spirit gives birth to Spirit (“also through water”).

- If Jesus intentionally connects both physical birth and spiritual birth with water, what role does water play in the new birth?
- **Next Week:** We’ll discuss the connection of water to the indwelling Spirit of God.



For centuries, people have reported extraordinary experiences that seem to point beyond the physical world: near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, apparitions, unexplained encounters, questions surrounding the nature of consciousness and the brain, and other phenomena that challenge a purely material understanding of reality.

Throughout this series, we have explored what these experiences, taken together, might reveal about the true nature of reality.

In this final episode of the *Spiritual Realities* series, we complete the journey from these experiential clues to the spiritual patterns revealed in Scripture. Rather than building doctrine from extraordinary experiences, we ask how those experiences compare with the consistent testimony of the Bible.

As the New Testament unfolds, a remarkable pattern emerges—one that culminates in what may be the greatest spiritual reality available to humanity: God's indwelling Holy Spirit.

What Can These Experiences Tell Us about Reality?

- **Neuro-physical Reality:** The brain's role in conscious reality
- **Paranormal Reality:** Consciousness beyond the “provable” physical reality.
- **Supernatural Reality:** Possible activity of spiritual beings in the physical reality.
- **Scriptural Reality:** Divine revelation possibly expanding our knowledge of the spiritual reality.

Reality Explored	Representative Phenomena	Possible Knowledge Gained
Neuro-physical Reality	Brain injuries, amnesia, dissociative fugues, consciousness models	How does the brain produce or interact with consciousness?
Paranormal Reality	Out of Body Experiences and apparitions	Can consciousness exist beyond the physical body?
Supernatural Reality	Demonic encounters, Marian apparitions (Fatima, Zeitoun, Assiut, Warraq)	Can spiritual beings interact with humanity?
Scriptural Reality	Near death experiences, the New Testament	What additional spiritual realities has God revealed through Scripture?

Before we move into today's subject, I'd like to remind everyone where this journey began. Back in Episode 6, we asked a simple question: *What can these experiences actually tell us about reality?* We divided the evidence into four broad categories.

- **Neuro-physical Reality** — We learned a tremendous amount about how the brain relates to consciousness. Brain injuries, amnesia, and other conditions taught us that memory and consciousness are closely related to the brain, but they didn't completely answer what consciousness is.
- **Paranormal Reality** — Reports like out-of-body experiences and apparitions raise the possibility that consciousness may not be completely confined to the body. Whether every report is genuine is almost beside the point; collectively they motivate the question.
- **Supernatural Reality** — We also looked at reports suggesting that spiritual beings may interact with the physical world. Again, these experiences are intriguing, but they don't give us a systematic understanding of spiritual reality.
- And that brings us to the fourth category **Scriptural Reality**—the one that I believe matters the most. Unlike experiences, Scripture doesn't merely provide clues. It claims to be divine revelation. If God has spoken, then Scripture doesn't just suggest spiritual reality—it defines it.
- So today we're going to finish the journey. Rather than asking what extraordinary

experiences might imply, we're going to follow the New Testament itself and see where its spiritual patterns lead. As we'll discover, they lead to what may be the greatest spiritual reality available to mankind: God's indwelling Holy Spirit—and how God intends for us to receive it.

John 3: New Birth and Belief are Explicit

John 3:3 – Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

John 3:16 – Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

- Jesus introduces the necessity of a new birth.
- Jesus later emphasizes belief as the means of eternal life.
- Both are foundational to becoming a child of God.
- Yet Jesus has not fully explained *how* the new birth occurs.

- John 3 is one of the most familiar chapters in the Bible.
- Nearly every Christian agrees on two things found here:
 - First, Jesus says we must be born again.
 - Second, He teaches that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.
- Those truths are clear but notice that Jesus doesn't stop there. Between those two famous statements, He says something that has generated discussion for nearly two thousand years.

John 3: Jesus Hints at Something More

John 3:5-6 – *Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*

- Why mention water at all?
- Why doesn't Jesus simply say, "born of the Spirit"?
- Nicodemus clearly does not understand.
- Yet Jesus expects a “teacher of Israel” to recognize the concept.

- Jesus introduces a spiritual reality without much explanation.
- But the meaning won't become fully clear until after the resurrection.
- This is where the mystery begins.
- Jesus doesn't merely say, 'You must be born of the Spirit.' He says, 'born of water *and* the Spirit.'
- Nicodemus is confused, but Jesus seems surprised that he doesn't understand.
- Jesus expects Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, to have at least some framework for understanding it, “*You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’*”
- In other words, Jesus speaks as though He's referring to a pattern that should eventually make sense.
- My question for this episode is not, 'What have Christians traditionally believed this means?' My question is, 'How does the New Testament itself eventually explain it?'

The Gospel of John: The Pattern of Water and Spirit

- John 1 – Jesus baptized and then Spirit descends and remains on him.
 - The other Gospels show this immediately precedes His temptation, selection of His disciples, and His public ministry.
- John 2 – Water becomes wine.
- John 3 – New birth: water and Spirit; eternal life through belief.
- John 4 – Living water; worship in Spirit and truth.
- John 7 – Rivers of living water (*John explains this refers to the Holy Spirit*)
- John 19 – Blood and water flow from Jesus' side (v34)
- John 20 – Jesus breathes on the apostles: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

- John 7:37-39 – *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.*
- John 19:34 – *Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.*
 - “The man who saw it”? John is referring to himself as he has used this technique throughout his Gospel.
 - John himself flags this evidence as important by interjecting, “I saw this!”
- Whether symbolic, historical, or both, John's Gospel repeatedly intertwines the themes of water and the Holy Spirit.
- John 3 isn't meant to stand completely on its own. John expects the reader to carry "water and Spirit" forward as the Gospel unfolds.

Acts: The Pattern Becomes Reality

Chapter	What Happens	Belief	Water Baptism	Indwell. Spirit	Gifts Spirit
Acts 2	Believe, repent, be baptized, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.	✓	✓	✓	
Acts 8	Samaritans believe and are baptized; Philip explains the Gospel to the Eunuch who is then baptized.	✓	✓	✓	✓*
Acts 9	Saul believes; Ananias restores his sight; Saul is baptized (three days later).	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts 10	Cornelius' household receives the Gospel and then are baptized.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts 16	Lydia and the Philippian jailer believe and are baptized.	✓	✓	✓	
Acts 18	Apollos teaches Jesus but only knows John's baptism.	✓			
Acts 19	Disciples who had not yet received the Holy Spirit are baptized in Jesus' name	✓	✓	✓	✓

- A checkmark means the passage either explicitly states the event occurred or very strongly implies it as part of the narrative. It doesn't mean every detail is recorded.
- Notice I've separated the indwelling Holy Spirit from miraculous gifts. Acts often records tongues, prophecy, or laying on of hands, but those are not presented as universal. The indwelling Spirit, however, is. Please see my series, "The Holy Spirit Through the Eras" where I discuss Pneumatological Dualism, the idea that the Old and New Testaments distinguish between God's indwelling Holy Spirit and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- In Acts 2, while the Apostles display miraculous signs, nothing says the 3000 did.
- In Acts 8, the miraculous gifts are given to the Samaritans after Peter and John arrive. The miraculous gifts are not mentioned with the Eunuch.
- In Acts 18: Apollos is interesting because Luke intentionally leaves his story unfinished. The very next chapter answers the question by describing another group who knew only John's baptism.

Acts 19:1-7 – *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when^[a] you believed?" They answered, "No, we have*

not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”³ So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied. ⁴Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord

Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues^[b] and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.

- Notice that Paul's first question isn't, 'Were you baptized?' It is, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'
- If this is the recurring pattern Luke records, why does the New Testament consistently connect these events? That question leads us to the final part of our investigation.

A Possible Explanation of the Pattern

- Saving faith is what God desires first.
- Water is consistently associated with the reception of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- The only other “medium” given in the Bible is “the breath of God” (Gen 2:7 and John 20:22)
- The indwelling Holy Spirit is distinct from miraculous gifts (which are associated with flames/plasma and the laying on of authoritative hands).
- Therefore, the New Testament may be describing belief *followed* by God's use of water as the means or mechanism of indwelling, rather than a human ritual that mechanically conveys salvation.
- This would explain why the New Testament consistently joins belief, water, and the Holy Spirit while allowing the exact timing to vary.
- The water might not have to come in the form of a ritual where someone immerses another in water, nor would the person necessarily have *to know* water is the mechanism.

- Whether you ultimately agree with this proposal or not, I hope you'll agree with the question.
- The New Testament repeatedly connects belief, water, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Rather than beginning with a theological tradition, I've simply tried to ask what explanation best accounts for the recurring pattern in the New Testament.

The Proposal

- God's normal pattern for the New Covenant is that saving faith is followed by the believer becoming surrounded by water, at which point God Himself gives the indwelling Holy Spirit. The water is God's chosen means, but not necessarily a ritual that must be administered in a particular way or even consciously understood as the mechanism.
- If this proposal is correct, it may also help explain why Christians have wrestled for centuries with questions such as: What exactly is baptism? What does it accomplish? Who may administer it? How much water is required? How old must a person be? Is rebaptism ever necessary?
- Whether this explanation proves correct or not, I believe it is worth asking whether we've sometimes focused more on the human ritual than on the greater spiritual reality God intended—the gift of His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Summary:

- We began this series by asking what extraordinary experiences might reveal about reality. We end it by recognizing that the *greatest spiritual reality isn't found in extraordinary experiences at all, but in God's desire to dwell within His people through the Holy Spirit.*
- I suspect this investigation has only begun and will continue into the next series:
 - I'd like to explore how baptism, the Holy Spirit, moral accountability, and God's justice fit together into a single biblical framework.
 - You may recall that I introduced the concept of moral accountability near the end of *The Biblical Flood* series. My hope is that the next series will begin connecting those ideas with what we've explored here about baptism and the indwelling Holy Spirit.