

***Question: At this time of the year, we hear a lot about ghosts. Does the Bible teach that ghosts really walk about the earth?***

The word “ghost” does not occur frequently in the Bible. However, you find the phrase “gave up the ghost” which is the translation of one Hebrew or Greek word that means “to die.” Some of the oldest English translations of the Bible, including the King James Version, translated the Greek word for “spirit” as “ghost.” When the King James Version of the Bible was translated and published in 1611, the word “ghost” meant the same thing as the word “spirit” does today: it represented the ethereal or spiritual part of a person as opposed to the material body. However, as with other words in the English language, the word ghost carries different connotations for people today. In 1611, reference to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost did not communicate the idea of something eerie or spooky that was to be feared. Instead of being feared, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is given to Christians as a blessing (Acts 2:38; 5:32).

The only case of a human spirit coming back into this world is that recorded in 1 Samuel 28. Although King Saul had expelled all mediums and spiritualists as the law of God commanded, he disguised himself and visited the witch (or medium) of Endor and asked her to call up the prophet Samuel. To the surprise and horror of the woman, Samuel did appear. Most biblical scholars have concluded that God brought forth Samuel for the special purpose of telling Saul that he and his sons would soon join Samuel in death because of his disobedience. This event was exceptional and in no way supports the idea that spirits are allowed to walk the earth as they please.

In reading the New Testament account of the death of Jesus on the cross, we learn that “tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life,” and “after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people” (Matthew 27:52-53). But these were not disembodied ghosts or spirits. They were bodies which had been raised up miraculously just as Jesus had raised up Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Finally, Jesus told a story of a rich man who was being tormented in Hades. When he asked that someone from the dead be sent to warn his brothers on earth, he was told that “if they do not listen to

Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31). No one was sent.

All of the above seems to confirm that spirits of dead people, or ghosts, do not roam around on the earth. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews says that “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Since there is no appointment between death and the judgment, there is no reason to expect human spirits to be wandering about the earth.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12<sup>th</sup>, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. ] 2011/11/04 adapted from 2007/10