

# What About ... Superstition

By Dave DeWitt

## Definition

Superstition is “a widely held but unjustified belief in supernatural causation leading to certain consequences of an action or event, or a practice based on such a belief.” [New Oxford American Dictionary] Practically, we can think about a lucky shirt, a four-leaf clover, or a rabbit’s foot. But notice:

- It is unjustified, no objective case can be made for it.
- It is a belief, someone understands it to be true.
- It is supernatural, not observable in the natural universe.
- It is a causation because it leads to certain consequences.

## Examples

The ancient world (like the modern world) was filled with superstition. Most ancient superstitions were connected to idolatry. People believed that if they gave sacrificial gifts to the idols of their gods, the gods, or the idols, would make their lives better, or at least not make them worse, via some “supernatural causation.” When the focus was on their gods, that was mysticism. When the focus was on their idols, that was superstition. For example, the Israelites “...have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” (Exodus 32:8).

God sometimes used the superstition of the people to accomplish His purpose. For example, when Jonah was on a boat headed for Tarshish instead of Nineveh (Jonah 1), God caused a great wind to almost sink the ship. The sailors used their superstition to determine whose god was causing the wind. God used their superstition to get His prophet thrown overboard. But we should not get the idea that God approved of their superstition. [I am not here going to talk about supernatural demonic activity. I am only discussing the superstitions of people.]

**Habakkuk 2:19**, *Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ And that is your teacher?*

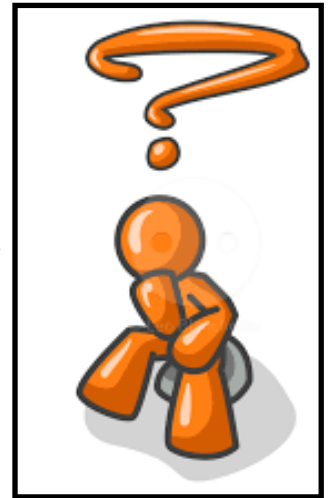
**Isaiah 44:9**, *Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit.*

**Jeremiah 10:2-8**, *...For the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. They decorate it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers. So that it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, and they cannot speak, they must be carried because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good....they are altogether stupid and foolish.*

People built and worshiped idols because they thought the idols had some supernatural significance. Idol worshipers had an “unjustified belief in supernatural causation.” They were superstitious. But Isaiah said it was *futile...of no profit*. Jeremiah said it was *altogether stupid and foolish*. When the people saw the idol as a representative of a god, that was false worship. When the people saw the power in the idol itself, that was superstition.

The Apostle Paul ran into superstition after he was delivered from a shipwreck to the island of Malta.

**Acts 28:3-4**, *But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ [But when Paul did not die] they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.*



The superstition, the “unjustified belief in supernatural causation,” led the people of Malta to two contradictory conclusions, neither of which could be verified by any objective evidence.

### Humans Are Superstitious

We humans have physical life like plants, and personalities like animals, but unlike plants and animals, we are spiritual beings with the capacity for thinking beyond the material universe. And we humans have not just the capacity but the tendency to look beyond the physical/personal world and imagine “supernatural causation.”

Why do we humans favor superstition over rational justification? Paul gave us a clue. He told us that our spiritual nature allows us to know about God through rational observations of our universe (Romans 1) and our consciences (Romans 2). The problem is we can also come to that knowledge with the impure lusts of our hearts (Romans 1:24).

For example, it is easier to believe in a lucky rabbit’s foot because the rabbit’s foot does not demand obedience or accountability. Luck from a rabbit’s foot is all about me and the lusts of my heart. The rabbit’s foot gives me no morality or commandments. To believe there is luck in a rabbit’s foot is superstition. It is “unjustified.” No objective case can be made for it.

We knock on wood, wear our lucky shirt to the ball game, and carry lucky charms. We believe things happen in groups of three. We believe black cats, stepping on sidewalk cracks, walking under ladders, and doing something on Friday the 13th leads to bad luck. Stop it! That is just a bunch of silly nonsense!

### Here is What Makes Superstition Sinful

If superstitions are true, then what causes them? God? If God causes my team to win if I wear my lucky shirt, then I can maneuver God to do what I want by simply wearing my lucky shirt. But most Christians would probably not think they could maneuver God into making their team win if they wear their lucky shirt.

Then what does cause their team to win, if they wear their lucky shirt? Fate? Mother Earth? The Universe? Karma? Some unknown mystical force? Is this mystical force separate from God? Well, if so, then God has competition.

If I believe in superstition, then either I have power over God, or something else does.

It is important to understand that in the Bible there is absolutely no superstition whatsoever prescribed, or sanctioned, by any of the people led by God.

If I get my knowledge of “supernatural causation” from Bible study, my belief is objectively justified. The Bible is not some universal mystical force. It is a hard copy of revelation which actually exists in the real world. It can be examined by anyone and everyone.

The accuracy of what the Bible says: creation, the history of Israel, the literal fulfillment of prophecy, the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and the accounts of the apostles are all available for examination by anyone. We have over 5,800 complete or partial manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek, its original language. There are nearly 20,000 in other languages. And if we had no manuscripts at all, all but 11 verses could be obtained from other ancient manuscripts that quote from it. There is nothing: no history, no science, no ...isms or ...ologies or any study of our universe, more objectively justifiable than the Bible.

Superstition, on the other hand, is not objectively verified by anyone. As Jeremiah said, it is ***altogether stupid and foolish.***