

THE
MYSTICISM
DECEPTION

**What Christians
Should Know about
“Christian” Mysticism**

By

David A. DeWitt

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Relational Concepts has been organized to provide motivational instruction for men and women interested in being used by God.

We believe that Christian doctors, mechanics, realtors, housewives, lawyers, secretaries, plumbers, business men, business women, etc. are the most effective spokes people the church has.

These people are generally not in a position where they can take the time to go to a Bible college. Our purpose is to bring quality instruction to them, where they are, to be applied in their families, churches, businesses, and schools—the communities in which they live.



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Part I, The Case Against Mysticism

Chapter 1

Mysticism Is about the Mystic

The most common example of Christian mysticism is a claim something like, “God led me...,” “God told me...,” or “God called me...” Since these examples are very prominent, often a part of our regular Christian conversation, we should keep them in mind as we proceed.

Mystical revelation tends to be about the one receiving the revelation. Biblical revelation is about the glory of God (in the Bible, the phrase, *the glory of the Lord* occurs 37 times + *the glory of God* occurs 17 times + *His glory* occurs 40 times). Mysticism tends to be about a beneficial direction for the personal life of the mystic. God “told” them who to marry, what school to attend, what job to take, what car to buy, what mission field to go to, what church to pastor. Something better happened to the mystic because of a mystical revelation. Biblical revelation, given to the prophets, was not about their personal benefits and was often physically detrimental to the prophet receiving the revelation (Ezekiel 4:4-6; Daniel 8:27; John 15:18; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

You will notice that mystical experiences tend to have one thing in common—they are about the person having the experience. God called **me**. God told **me**. God led **me**. Or in the area of God’s will, it is God’s will for **me**.

The following excerpt is from Rebecca May [who BTW is my daughter] in her book “How ‘God’s Will For Me’ Derailed the Church.”

As we walk the spiritual life, we will inevitably come to a V in the road. To the right, “What is God’s will?” To the left “What is God’s will **for me**?” Whichever path we choose will take us further away from the other road. Most believers do not distinguish between the two. But there is one striking difference which cannot be ignored... GW4M [God’s Will For Me] has within it one of the most dangerous words a believer can use: **Me**. [Rebecca May, Unpublished Manuscript, 2022]

That V in the road is also what happens when we turn from the biblical road to the experiential road. At first, it is not very noticeable because we can see from one road to another. But the farther we travel down either road, the farther away we get from the other road. After a while, the other road is not visible at all.

“The Word of God” is all about God.

“The Word of God to me” is all about me.

“God said ...,” as recorded in the Bible, is all about God.

“God said to me” is all about me.

Definitions

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “mysticism” as

The belief that the direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience.

The basic idea of mysticism is that significant knowledge can be obtained subjectively and experientially.

Mysticism is part of, if not the central core of, every world religion and cult. For example, Britannica defines mysticism in Islam, Hinduism and Judaism:

[britannica.com/search?query=Sufism%2Ca+”mystical+Islamic+belief
britannica.com/topic/Hinduism/Philosophical-texts
britannica.com/search?query=three+types+of+Mysticism+in+Judaism]

In the case of Christianity, a formal definition would be:

Christian Mysticism is the belief that some knowledge about the work of God can be attained subjectively and experientially.

The Two Basic Questions

We shall explore many areas of Christian mysticism, but there are two questions we should always ask anyone who claims God led them (called them or told them something):

- # 1. **Is this personal leading objectively verifiable?** Can anyone else verify that you received this from God? Did anyone else hear it? Has this revelation been examined by other mature Christians (1 Corinthians 14:29-32)?
- # 2. **Do you understand that, in the Bible, there is no example of what you are claiming?** Do you realize there is no biblical basis, command, or example for what you are claiming?

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate those two points. Mystical messages are not objectively verifiable (or falsifiable), and they are not found in the Bible.

There is no verifiable difference between saying, “God led me (called me, told me)” and saying, “I was abducted by aliens from the planet Krypton.”

Chapter 2

Mysticism Is Subjective

By definition, mystical is knowledge “attained through **subjective** experience.” [Merriam-Webster, referenced above, emphasis mine] Mystical messages from God are not presented as something that could be, or should be, verified. When mystics say something like, “God told me (called me, or led me),” they are not suggesting something objectively verifiable, or verifiable at all. We must take their word for it. There is nothing to observe. Actually, there is nothing they intend for us to observe.

For example, let’s say someone claims they were driving down the road when God told them...something. The question is, “If I was sitting next to them in the car, would I have heard the same message?” If I would have also heard it, then it is not a mystical event. If I would not have heard the message, then it is a mystical event. If a pastor says, “God told me to preach this sermon today,” would I be able to hear God say that to him if I was with him at the time he received the directive? If not, it is mysticism.

Private Revelation vs. Mystical Messages

Although all (supposed) mystical revelations are private events, private revelations are not necessarily mystical events. For example, the prophets of the Bible claimed revelation from God, which was often a private event. But when biblical prophets reported that they had a revelation from God, they were claiming that something objectively verifiable happened. They received real revelation in real words, or what was describable in real words, which were ultimately (if not immediately) verifiable. Real events are real, whether someone is there to experience them or not. If a tree falls in the woods, it makes a sound, whether anyone

is there to hear it or not. If we were there, we would have heard the sound a tree makes when it falls.

Old Testament Revelation Was Objective, Not Subjective

The revelation of God to the Old Testament prophets was never subjective. They were always, ultimately (if not immediately) given in words. And they were usually audible words, anybody could hear if they were there. Here are a few examples.

- **Hosea 1:2**, *When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "... [quote, in audible words]*
- **Jonah 1:1**, *The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "... [quote, in audible words]*
- **Judges 6:12**, *The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "... [quote, in audible words]*
- **Zechariah 1:1**, *In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying, "... [quote, in audible words]*
- **Haggai 1:1**, *In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai...saying "... [quote, in audible words]*
- **Job 38:1**, *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, "... [quote, in audible words]*

We could go on. God spoke to Adam in real audible words. God spoke to Noah in real audible words. God spoke to Abraham in real audible words. God spoke to Jacob in real audible words. God spoke to Moses in real audible words.

In a few cases, a prophet received a dream in his mind. We will discuss dreams in a later chapter. But for now, we need to observe that revelation from God in dreams was always ultimately (if not immediately) verifiable—objective, not

subjective. And they were specific enough to be verified (or falsified).

Some dream interpretations were immediately verified. For example, Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 was immediately verified by the fact that Daniel knew the dream itself, as well as the interpretation. Other dream revelations were not verified until later. For example, Joseph's dream as a boy (in Genesis 37), his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (in Genesis 41), and Daniel's dream (in Daniel 7) were not verified until some time had passed, but they were specific predictions which could one day be objectively verified.

This is in contrast to mystical messages which are not meant to ever be objectively verified. Suppose a pastor says that God told him in a dream that he should be the pastor of a certain church. There is not, nor will there be, nor was there intended to be, any way to objectively verify (or falsify) the pastor's claim—ever.

New Testament Revelation Was Objective, Not Subjective

The Apostle John said revelation to the apostles was in *what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands* (1 John 1:1).

When questioned about His teaching by the Jewish leaders, Jesus said,

John 18:20, *“I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.”*

There are no examples in the Gospel records where Jesus ever communicated anything to anybody, or received anything from God the Father, by mental messages. Jesus gave this example. He said,

John 5:31, *“If I, alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.”*

Jesus is making the point that anybody could say anything about themselves. But Jesus goes on to verify His words objectively.

John 5:36, *“... for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.”*

The supernatural miracles of Jesus testified objectively about who He was. The life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was public knowledge. When Jesus approached the two on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection,

Luke 24:18, *One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?”*

Cleopas might have said, “What, are you from Mars? How could you not have heard about this? Everybody in Jerusalem knows about it.”

The revelation to the apostles was also in actual words.

- **Acts 18:9**, *And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision... “[quote, in words] do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent...”*
- **Revelation 4:1**, *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “[quote, in audible words].”*

When Paul was making his defense before Festus and King Herod Agrippa, he talked about the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus. Then he said to Festus, about Herod Agrippa,

Acts 26:26, *“For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.”*

Paul refers to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as public knowledge, something that King Agrippa was undeniably aware of.

Chapter 3

Open to the Public

Notice:

- Mystical experiences are not public knowledge. Everything about the life of Jesus and the apostles was public knowledge.
- Mystical experiences are not open to public scrutiny. Everything about the message of Jesus and the apostles was open to public scrutiny. Jesus said, *“I have spoken openly to the world... I spoke nothing in secret”* (John 18:20).
- Mystical experiences are not objectively verifiable. The Christianity proclaimed in the New Testament was always objectively verifiable. Anybody could check it out.
- Mystics are essentially saying, “The reason I know God called me is because I know God called me.” Mystics can talk about their mystical encounters, but they cannot show anyone else their mystical encounters. Every message of Jesus and the apostles was in the context of general knowledge, not personal private experiences.

Mysticism Is Not Supernaturalism

A note of clarification. Mysticism, though its claims are supernatural, should not be equated with supernaturalism, a belief in the existence of supernatural events.

Supernaturalism understands that natural history has been interrupted by supernatural acts of God, angels, demons, or Satan. Supernatural acts are the natural acts of superior beings. Supernatural acts are contrary to the laws of our three-dimensional universe, not contrary to objective verification.

For example, when Peter was in prison,

Acts 12:7, ... an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

These events were supernatural, but they were natural acts for the angel. Supernaturalism claims that events which are supernatural (to us) occurred in observable, verifiable, time/space history. Luke tells us this event as something that happened in the real world, as if you would have seen it, if you had been there. And Peter was verifiably out of prison.

Mysticism is mental messaging, which, though it is a supernatural claim, it is not one that is intended to be observed by anyone else in time/space history.

The Unknown Is Unknown, Not Mystically Known

In a few cases, we are not told exactly how the prophet received his revelation. For example, Luke tells us Paul's missionary team was *forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia* (Acts 16:6). And we do not know how the Holy Spirit did that. Although we do not always know how God's prophet received revelation, we are never told that he received revelation mystically. There is no biblical example where anyone received revelation through unverifiable mental telepathy, subjective feelings, or circumstances he was to figure out.

So we have a known means of revelation (in words) and an unknown means of revelation (x) and there is nothing to tell us that the unknown was mystical. That would only be done by reading a personal mystical experience back into the unknown. All understanding must proceed from the known to the unknown. So, there is no basis for claiming any of God's revelation to His prophets was mystical

messaging. Let me repeat, **There is no verifiable difference between saying, “God led me...”, “God told me...”, or “God called me” and saying, “I was abducted by aliens from the planet Krypton.”**

Chapter 4

Mysticism Is a Form of Experientialism

Definition Clarification

Mysticism says that knowledge “can be attained through subjective **experience.**” [Miriam Webster, referenced above, emphasis mine]

Experientialism is “a philosophical theory that experience is the source of all knowledge not purely deductive, formal, or tautological.” (Tautological is “true by virtue of its logical form alone.”)

[merriamwebster.com/dictionary/experientialism]

If experience is “the source of all knowledge” and that source is “not purely deductive,” then where does that knowledge, the meaning of the experience, come from? The experiential answer is the meaning comes from the experience itself. Experientialism assumes that events speak for themselves. In other words, experiences themselves dictate their own meaning, they are self-interpretative.

But that is not true. Experiences are capable of being understood in a variety of different ways. The Zen Buddhist looks at the same world as the evangelical Christian with a nearly opposite meaning. Creationists and evolutionists are experiencing the same world, but they come to contradictory conclusions about it. Meaning must be brought to experiences.

Experiences do not speak for themselves. I remember years ago seeing a TV beer commercial that showed a man stumbling through a hot dry desert. The next scene was a cold beer being poured into a frosted glass. The only words in the commercial were, “Some things just speak for themselves.” But I thought of a Baptist preacher who

believed all alcohol was from the devil. I doubt he would get the same meaning from the experience of pouring a glass of cold beer.

Experiences do not come with meaning labels on them. When mystics say, “God called me ...,” they mean, “I have decided that my experience (feelings, inclinations, or circumstances) is a call of God.” But they only know that because they brought their idea of the call of God to their experience.

Suppose someone is late for a Bible conference they hope to attend. Then they get the next six traffic lights green, allowing them to get to the conference on time. The mystic will conclude that God gave them the green lights, to get them to the conference on time. But notice, this is a conclusion based entirely on experientialism. Going through green lights does not give off meaning. Meaning must be brought to the lights.

The same is true of the common example of people getting a parking place “up close” and concluding it is from God. But the parking place did not give off any meaning. Meaning must be brought to the parking place via experientialism.

Nowhere in the Bible do we have a command or example of God manipulating things, like streetlights or parking places, to help us with our personal (supposedly good) desires. Could God do that? Of course, He could. But there is no biblical basis for claiming He does, because He never did that in the Bible. Revelation in the Bible is about what God is doing, not our personal agenda. It is about God’s desires, not our desires. Any thought that God manipulated the streetlights or parking places is experientialism, bringing meaning to the experience.

Let's say I am a young man looking for a godly wife. A year later I find and marry a godly wife. Should I say this is an act of God, leading me to the wife He chose for me? No, I should not.

Understand: everything is in the sovereign plan of God. God is sovereign over my marriage. But that has nothing to do with my determining what God is doing. I might say that I think (or believe) God led me to the right woman to marry, but if I say, "God led me to the right woman to marry," then I am speaking as a prophet. There is no way to verify my understanding through my experience.

Chapter 5

Biblical Revelation Was Never Mystical

Mystical Christians usually have two areas they refer to, for determining direction from God:

- **Mental telepathy (feelings, inklings, notions, or impressions, as in “listening prayer”)**
- **Coincidental circumstances (events, or occurrences, sometimes called “divine appointments”)**

But we need to understand something when pursuing this line of thinking.

Nobody in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, ever received revelation from God that way. Nobody!

Whether they were audible, written, in a dream or vision, God’s messages were always ultimately (if not immediately) expressed in real words, which came from God. These words made up actual sentences with subjects, verbs, and objects, making rational statements. They were never through mental telepathy or coincidental circumstances which the recipient had to figure out.

Consider the revelation to Amos, who said, *“I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet”* (Amos 7:14). *The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel* (Amos 1:1). *“Hear **this word which the Lord has spoken** against you, sons of Israel ...The Lord has spoken! Who can but prophesy”* (Amos 3:1, 8).

How did Amos know *the Lord has spoken*? How do we know when he envisioned [literally, saw in visions], that it

was not a mystical experience (like “God called me..., led me... or told me...”)?

To say this was a mystical event would be to contradict what Amos said about his revelation. Correct interpretation of any communication is always, without exception, the author’s intended meaning. The obvious intention of Amos was for his readers to understand that his vision was an actual objective event, which was delivered to him in real words, **the word which the Lord has spoken**. The spoken words of the Lord is what Amos passed on to the priests at Bethel. It was not a vague mental image Amos was to figure out and put in his own words. The words he received did not come by mental telepathy or coincidental circumstances but by a real voice from God, with which Amos had a real discussion (in Amos 7:1-6).

Usually, Christian mystics do not claim God told them something in audible or written words or sentences, although that is more common than it used to be. Most are quick to qualify their direction from God as not having been in the form of a voice speaking to them or in written words. Seth Barnes (of Adventures In Missions) put it this way:

God spoke inwardly to me in a way that might as well have been audible. He said, “Seth, I love you.” That did it. I was a junky, ruined for anything that smacked of a tame, compromising faith. I shared with my children what they called praying the new way. One of them heard God say, “I love you more than the flowers and the trees.” [adventures.org/about/?iname=meet]

What is amazing to me is that there are so many mystical Christians who think that what they are experiencing is what God did in the Bible. Barnes said: “There are hundreds and hundreds of examples of God speaking to

people in the Bible. It is his modus operandi and he gives detailed instructions for this in both the Old and New Testament.” [referenced above]

What Barnes fails to do is give one single example of his claim. In reality, just the opposite is true. When God spoke to people, it was never ever merely contemplative, through the mental telepathy Barnes calls “inwardly” or “praying the new way” through what many call “listening prayer.” We are not always given a description of God’s revelation, but every description we do have in the Bible is of God’s revelation in actual inerrant words. There is not one single example of God speaking to people “inwardly.” Listening for inward messages is how people followed idols—not God.

Chapter 6

In the Bible, God's Revelation Came Through His Prophets, Not Directly to His People

The Bible tells us about a narrow band of people, who received communication from God. It was only certain people, like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament apostles and prophets, who received direct revelation from God.

If you will allow me to refer to those who received revelation from God as prophets, then most believers, during biblical times, were not prophets. In the Bible, believers in general had to get God's revelation through those prophets. That is what the Bible is, a record of God's revelation, and it came through a very few selected people.

We are not Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, the apostles, or prophets. There is no evidence that God ever gave messages to believers in general about their personal lives, or directions for them to follow. This is a common mistake made by experientialists. For example, Henry Blackaby writes:

As you read the accounts of God's miraculous work through men and women in the Bible, you may wonder whether God still performs such miracles today. Be assured that the same God who walked with Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, James, John, and Paul now lives within you.

[s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/005693757_Seven_Realities_Samplepdf.pdf]

When Blackaby says, "the same God who walked with Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, James, John, and Paul...now

lives within you,” he neglects to mention that the same God did not give that revelation to other believers surrounding those prophets. The Israelites had to get God’s revelation from His specifically designated prophets like Moses, Joshua, and Elijah. For example, there were over 2,000,000 Israelites in Egypt, and they had to get the revelation of God from Moses.

We can see God’s attitude toward the idea that everyone can receive information from God during the Korah rebellion. A group following Korah,

... assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Numbers 16:3).

And here is God’s response to the idea that *all the congregation are holy, every one of them.*

As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions (Numbers 16:31-32).

The point is—God has designated certain prophets and those prophets are God’s specific means of carrying His Word to His people.

God’s revelation came through a very few selected people. The selected prophets were not always as prominent as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, the apostles (Numbers 12:6; 2 Kings 21:10; Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 21:9). But they were specifically designated prophets. Most of the believers were not prophets receiving revelation from God. Even most of the more mature people, those seeking the

will of God, were not designated as prophets (Malachi 3:16; Isaiah 66:2).

The New Testament church had to get God's revelation through the apostles and prophets, men like Peter, James, John, and Paul, and those who had the gift of prophecy (Ephesians 2:20).

Let's suppose you consider the gift of prophecy as ongoing today, and a basis for claiming you received mystical revelation from God ("God led me...", etc.). Then the question I would ask you is, "Are you claiming to have the gift of prophecy described in Scripture, and if so, how would we verify that you are not a false prophet?" Verification must come from objective observations and logical interpretations which determine a rational meaning. Subjective experientialism leaves us with no way to determine false teaching. It cannot be verified (or falsified).

Remember, claiming to be a prophet when you are not is serious business. Ezekiel wrote,

Ezekiel 13:1-3, Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those **who prophesy from their own inspiration**, 'Listen to the word of the LORD!' Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are **following their own spirit and have seen nothing.**"

Here is another section from my daughter Rebecca May's book, "How 'God's Will For Me' Derailed the Church."

SIPHONING AUTHORITY

The same Spirit who empowered the apostles dwells in us. It is the same Spirit. It is not the same power. Why understand that power, the Spirit's

miraculously intervening power, as unique to the apostles? To set them apart. To isolate their ministry above all others. To put them on the same revelation-of-God-pedestal Jesus did. The apostles had seen the risen Christ. They were “eyewitnesses of His majesty” that they might “make known” His power. The apostles had a license we do not, cannot have, will not have. Of course, we strive to mimic their courage, model their strength, run in the likeness of their faith. But we cannot claim their experience, pilfer their power, embezzle their authority. We can only be rendered speechless, as the Jewish council was “seeing the man who had been healed standing with them.” The early church had the apostles. We have the epistles. [Rebecca May referenced above]

Chapter 7

Subjective Messages Are Not Revelation

By the way, why is it that many of the mystical messages of Jesus to an individual (such as the ones claimed by Seth Barns) just picture Jesus as a nice guy? They are usually something like: “Seth, I love you,” “You are one of Mine,” “You already belong to me,” “I love you more than the flowers and trees.”

Most mystical messages do not say,

- **Mark 8:34**, *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must **deny himself**, and take up his cross and follow Me.”*
- **Luke 12:4-5**, *I say to you, My friends, “do not **be afraid** of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to **fear**: **fear** the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into **hell**; yes, I tell you, **fear Him**.”*
- **Luke 13:3**, *“I tell you, no, but unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish.”*
- **John 7:24**, *“Do not judge according to appearance, but **judge with righteous judgment**.”*
- **John 3:19**, *This is the **judgment**, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.*
- **Romans 6:23**, *For the **wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- **Revelation 3:19**, *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and **repent**.*

Christian mystics will tell you that their divine leading is consistent with the Bible, did not violate anything in the

Bible, and biblical things happened because of it. For example, they were led to someone who received Christ, needed help, wanted an answer to a crucial question or something else good happened. Sometimes they find a Bible verse that seems to affirm their mystically-obtained directive from God.

All that just means the Bible gets a seat at the table, but it is not the foundational authority. Their calling, direction, or leading was not an application of Bible study. It was “attained through subjective experience.” [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]

Audible Verbal Revelation from God Today Challenges the Canon of Scripture

If someone received an actual verbal message from God in words, then we should be able to add it to our Bible, because, like the rest of Scripture, we can learn about God from it and apply that knowledge to our lives.

But if someone claims they have received an actual verbal message from God, then we need to deal with the clear statement of the Apostle Paul: *if there are gifts of prophecy they will be done away; if there are tongues [prophecy with interpretation] they will cease...* (1 Corinthians 13:8). Paul may have had in mind the gift of prophecy being done away with before the time of the Rapture or the Second Coming of Christ, *when the perfect comes the partial will be done away* (verse 10). But Paul died in the late A.D. 60s. He did not know about, or take into consideration, the canon of Scripture being closed before the Second Coming. That was revealed to the Apostle John at the end of the book of Revelation in the A.D. 90s.

We also need to understand the statement by the Apostle John,

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18).

This book is the book of Revelation. The word for prophecy is the general word for revelation from God (not the more specific word “apocalypse” used in Revelation 1:1). So, we need to ask what prophetic addition, to the book of Revelation, John is warning about. Certainly, John is not warning about someone opening the scroll he has just written, erasing or adding words into it. Clearly, he is referring to someone adding other prophetic revelation, supposedly from God, to the book of Revelation, which he just finished writing. Any new prophecy (before the tribulation period leading to the Second Coming of Christ – Revelation 11:3; 22:20) would add to the prophecy of the book of Revelation and result in the judgment of God. God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book.

Athanasius in A.D. 367, and the church in 397, understood the canon of the Scripture to be closed in the first century with the book of Revelation. There are 27 Christian writings from the first century A.D., and they are all in the New Testament. We have been looking for over 2000 years now, and we have found nearly 2900 New Testament manuscripts, but only of those 27 books. Any claim that God is communicating something to someone in actual words, denies the claims of the Apostles Paul and John, understood by Athanasius and the early church, to close the canon of Scripture with the book of Revelation.

Mysticism Is Often a Coincidental Puzzle

If Christian mystics coincidentally run into someone they know, say, at an airport, they might consider it a leading from God. Or if several friends mention something, then they hear some preacher on the radio say something

similar, it might be considered a clue from God (especially if it happens in threes). They do not just mean everything is in the sovereign plan of God. They mean God specifically set this up for some reason. It is like a calling they are supposed to figure it out.

This is all without biblical support. God never initiated a revelation to anyone in the Bible with circumstances. Of course, answers to prayer were circumstantial. Nearly all our prayers are about God maneuvering circumstances. But we have no evidence, or example, where God ever initiated a message to anybody by giving them circumstantial clues.

Chapter 8

The Possibility of God Giving Mystical Revelation to Individual Believers Today

But could God do that? Could God give mystical revelation to individuals today?

Of course, God could do that. I have tried to make the point, along the way, that apart from what He has told us in the Bible, I do not know what God is doing today any more than the mystic. I do not know God's agenda, or how He is bringing it to pass. I would never want to be in a position of saying that I know what God is doing, or not doing, or how He is doing it, unless I am dealing with an idea contrary to the character of God or biblical revelation.

Romans 11:33-34, Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?

This is not about what God can do. The relevant questions I am asking here are:

- “Is there any objectively verifiable evidence that God gives mystical revelation to people today, or is it all subjective and experiential?”
- “Do we have any objective verifiable evidence that God ever did that, recorded in the Bible?”

Here is what we do know:

- In the Bible, there is no example where God ever revealed His will, led, called, or communicated with anybody mystically (through any kind of message via

feelings, inklings, notions, impressions, mental telepathy, or circumstances).

- In the Bible, God never indicated that He would change His way of revelation from objective and verifiable to subjective and experiential. So, “If God never did it then, and never said He was going to do it in the future, and the only justification for mysticism is subjective and experiential, is it responsible to proclaim that He is giving revelation now, to me?”

“I Think God Led Me” Is Different from “God Led Me”

If you want to say, “I **believe** God led me,” or “I **think** God called me,” or “I **believe** God answered my prayers with a certain event,” I have no problem with that. In that case, you are just talking about yourself and your personal thoughts.

But if you say, “God led me,” or “God told me,” Or “God called me,” or “God spoke to me during my prayer,” then you are talking about God. You are telling me you know what God is doing. You are speaking like a prophet. And I do not think you are a prophet.

As Christians, we believe we can see God’s hand in our lives in the past. But that is about our personal thoughts and beliefs. And it is about the past, not a directive for the present or the future. And it is a speculation, if those thoughts and beliefs are not objectively verifiable.

What we **do** know, is that God is sovereign over our lives (Romans 8:28) and involved in our lives (see the next chapter). But that is quite different from saying I know what He is doing in my life, or what He is calling or leading me to do. If you say, “God led me,” or “God told

me,” meaning He told you what to do, then you are talking about a knowledge of God outside the Scripture. And I do not think you know what God is doing, outside of what He has revealed in the Scripture. I do not think you know God’s agenda.

Chapter 9

God Is Involved in Our Lives

The Bible describes an involved God. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God is working in your life. But the work of God in our lives given in the Bible is not mysticism. Some of His work is positional and some is experiential, but none of it is mystical. Here are some biblically determined positional and experiential examples.

Positionally

Positionally, God does things for us at salvation, through the Holy Spirit, which we do not observe through experience.

1. The Holy Spirit **regenerates** (cleanses and purifies) believers in Christ.

Titus 3:5, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.

2. The Holy Spirit **indwells** (is present in the new nature of) believers in Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19, Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

3. The Holy Spirit **baptizes** (immerses) believers in Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13, For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

4. The Holy Spirit **seals** (secures salvation for) believers in Christ.

Ephesians 1:13, ...*having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.*

Experientially

Experientially, God works in our lives in ways we can observe, to conform us to the image of Christ.

1. The Holy Spirit **convicts** us of sin.

John 16:8, *And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*

2. The Holy Spirit gives believers an **assurance of our salvation**.

Romans 8:16, *The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God*

3. As believers we can know we are being **led by the Spirit of God** (Romans 8:14), not when we receive mystical (mental or circumstantial) messages, but when we are

Romans 8:13, ... *putting to death the deeds of the flesh.*

Galatians 5:24-25, *Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

4. The Holy Spirit helps believers **understand that the Bible is true**.

1 Corinthians 2:14, ...*a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

5. The Holy Spirit gives believers **spiritual wisdom**.

1 Corinthians 2:6, *Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this*

age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away.

6. God the Father gives believers **comfort** during our afflictions.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

7. God the Father works in the lives of believers to bring about **His good pleasure**.

Philippians 2:13, *for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*

8. God gives believers a **peace** that is beyond our comprehension.

Philippians 4:7, *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

9. God gives believers an **anointing to discern false teaching**.

1 John 2:26-27, *These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things.*

10. God **disciplines** those who belong to Him.

Hebrews 12:7, *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

These are the kinds of things God is doing in our lives positionally and experientially:

Positionally: He regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals our salvation.

Experientially: He convicts us of sin, assures us of our salvation, leads us away from the deeds of the flesh, helps us to understand and apply the Bible, gives us spiritual wisdom, comforts our affliction, works for His own good pleasure, gives us peace, anoints us to discern false teaching, and disciplines us.

Chapter 10

The Differences Between Experiential Mysticism and the Experiential Work of God

Experientialism includes the assumption that the experience itself gives off meaning. The experiential work of God is not experientialism. Here are some differences:

1. The experiential works of God are things described in the Bible which conform us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28). Mystical experiences are not described in the Bible and are not necessarily about conforming us to the image of Christ. For example, the Bible tells us about conviction of sin, peace that passes comprehension, discipline, etc. The Bible does not say God will tell you who to marry, what car to buy, or who to witness to.
2. The experiential work of God is about **what** God is doing, mysticism is often about **how** God is doing it. For example, God will discipline believers (Hebrews 12:7). But mysticism might tell you how God is disciplining you through your life circumstances (like the conclusions of Job's friends). God is sovereign over your life circumstances but that does not mean you can look at your circumstances and determine what God is doing.
3. The experiential work of God is **never** about God initiating a communication to someone through mental messages, feelings, coincidences, or circumstances. Mysticism is **all about** God communicating to someone

through mental messages, feelings, coincidence, or circumstances.

4. Experientially, God gives us **wisdom** (1 Corinthians 2:6). Mysticism says God gives us **messages**. For example, God gives us the wisdom to understand that the Scripture is true (1 Corinthians 2:14). Mysticism gives us messages which do not require knowledge of the Scripture at all.

5. The experiential work of God is about the **leading** of the Holy Spirit to put *to death the deeds of the body* (Romans 8:13-14). Mysticism speaks about the leading of the Holy Spirit to do something which has nothing to do with *putting to death the deeds of the body*. For example, saying, “The Holy Spirit led me to go to the mission field,” has nothing to do with putting to death the deeds of the body. If a mystic claims that the apostles were so led, I would ask them if they are claiming to be an apostle. Remember, Paul gave the signs of a true apostle:

2 Corinthians 12:12, *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.*

6. Obedience to the experiential work of God is an application of Scripture. Everything in the Bible is written to someone else. It has been said about Bible study, “We are always reading someone else’s mail.” Nothing in the Bible is written **to** us, but everything in the Bible is written **for** us. Everything must be interpreted according to the author’s intended meaning and then applied to us. Obedience in mysticism is an application of mental messages, feelings, coincidences, or circumstances, which are seen as given directly **to**

us. Mystical application is not the result of observation, interpretation, and application of Scripture.

7. Although it comes from God, the exact source of the experiential work of God does not need to be identified. It could come from our new nature in Christ, our conscience, or a new understanding of Scripture. Mysticism, however, tends to identify experiences as a specific directive from God. For example, let's say a believer is convinced that he or she should not watch movies which have blasphemy. Where does that conviction come from? We know conviction of sin comes from the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), but we do not know how He will do that, and it does not matter. What matters is to do the right thing. But mystics will tend to say that God told them, for example, that they should not watch movies which have blasphemy.
8. Experientialism brings meaning to experiences, while thinking that meaning is coming from the experiences. The experiential work of God is an awareness that God is working in our lives, but not an interpretation which brings meaning to specific life events.
9. The experiential work of God is usually something that happens over a long period of time, as a process of maturity. Mystical experience is usually something that happens over a short period of time. For example, a Christian using bad language will be convicted of it and it will usually decrease over a period of time, with many setbacks requiring multiple confessions of sin. The mystics are more likely to say that God suddenly took away their bad language.

Once again, I am not suggesting God cannot, does not, or will not use feelings, coincidences, or circumstances to

initiate communication with an individual believer. I am only pointing out:

- (1) There are no examples of them in the Bible.
- (2) There is no objective way to verify that they are messages from God.

Chapter 11

What God Is Doing Through the Circumstances In Our Lives Is None of Our Business

God Criticized Job for Thinking He Could Figure Out What God Was Doing in His Life

The account of the suffering of Job is a biblical example of someone who tried to discern what God was doing in his life through his circumstances. Job was suffering because of a confrontation between God and Satan (Job 1 and 2). It even involved the death of Job's children. Job's friends thought they had it all figured out. For example,

- **Job 8:1, 4**, Bildad the Shuhite answered, *"...If your sons sinned against Him, then He delivered them into the power of their transgression."*
- **Job 11:1, 5**, Zophar the Naamathite answered, *"...But would that God might speak, and open His lips against you"*
- **Job 15:1, 6**, Eliphaz the Temanite responded, *"...Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; and your own lips testify against you."*

Job's friends all concluded that they knew what God was doing. They all said Job was suffering because of some sin for which God was punishing him. They went on for days trying to get Job to believe that. Job agreed in principle, but he was also trying to understand what he had done to deserve this suffering from God. The one thing Job agreed with his friends about was that a person should be able to figure out what God is doing in his life from his life circumstances. So, Job wanted an explanation from God.

Job 38:1-4, *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, "Who is this that darkens counsel by*

words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me! Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"

God went on to give Job a science quiz, asking him if he knew what God had done. But Job did not know any of the answers. Then:

Job 42:7, *It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right..."*

The theme of the Book of Job is that we cannot figure out what God is doing from our feelings, or circumstances, or the advice of our friends, and what God is doing in our lives is none of our business.

God Controlled Jonah Through Circumstances That He Did Not Have to Figure Out

God spoke to Jonah in clear words, which formed logical sentences.

Jonah 1:1-2, *The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."*

But Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh, which was the military center of Assyria, Israel's biggest enemy. So, he disobeyed, and headed in the opposite direction, *To Tarshish [a city in southern Spain near Gibraltar, 2,500 miles (4,000 km) west of Israel] from the presence of the Lord.*

Then God intervened with circumstances that guided the path of Jonah's life.

First,

Jonah 1:4, *The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.*

Second,

Jonah 1:17, *And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.*

Third, after Jonah turned to God in prayer,

Jonah 2:10, *Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.*

During this time, we have no record of God saying, communicating, or revealing anything to Jonah. There was no circumstantial message or mystical feeling or coincidental events or any other kind of message that Jonah had to figure out. God arranged the events surrounding Jonah to put him where He wanted him. No communication was necessary.

Notice:

1. Jonah understood that his circumstances came from God, but not as some message from God he was supposed to figure out. He already knew the message of God, it came from the words of God, understood literally.
2. God created circumstances that forced His prophet to keep His will, *The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea (1:4)*.
3. The sailors responded to the circumstances, first with logic *they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea (1:5)*, then with mysticism, *they cast lots (1:7)*. The sailors were not believers using mysticism to find God's will. They were idolaters using mysticism to call on their gods.

4. God used the mysticism of the sailors to force His prophet back on course (Proverbs 16:33). God might use anything, including evil things (1 Samuel 16:14; 19:9). But God never directed people to use mysticism for anything.

Then God once again spoke to Jonah, and once again it was in real, actual words composing real, actual sentences:

Jonah 3:1-2, *Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."*

God did not speak to Jonah from the storm, or from the belly of the fish. But He did direct Jonah's life with the storm and the fish. Without saying a word or giving any communication to Jonah which he was supposed to figure out, God forced him in the direction He wanted him to go.

We could also consider Daniel, who was taken as a captive to Babylon, and Joseph, who was sold as a slave to Egypt. In both cases, God was manipulating their circumstances without an explanation, and they did not need to know what God was doing through their circumstances, nor did they have to figure it out.

We can, therefore, conclude:

1. When God spoke to His prophets, it was (ultimately, if not immediately) in actual words, given in logical rational sentences that could be written down, word-for-word. By way of application, we should only look to the words of God revealed to His prophets, and recorded in the Bible, as His leading (Psalm 119:97-105).

2. God directed the lives of His prophets, so that they were in the place where He wanted them to be, even if they went where He did not want them to go. They did not have to figure out where He wanted them to be, or what He wanted them to do. By way of application, when God wants to direct our paths through circumstances, there is nothing we can do about it, and there is nothing about it that we need to figure out.

Part II, Some Specific Issues

Chapter 12

What About Hearing a "Still Small Voice" from God?

The King James Bible has the following translation of 1 Kings 19:12.

And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

The NASB translates that phrase a *sound of a gentle blowing*.

The ESV translates it *the sound of a low whisper*.

The Douay Bible translates it a *whistling of gentle air*.

The three Hebrew words are, a *sound* (or voice), *calm* (or still), *small* (or thin).

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) applied the King James translation to conviction leading to salvation. He said,

“What, then, doth God use to touch the heart? Our heavenly Father generally uses that which is soft, tender, gentle, quiet, calm, peaceful— a still small voice. In the work of real conversion, of bringing the soul to decision and complete obedience to God, the calling voice is often so gentle that it is quite unperceived by others...”

Generally, I like Spurgeon, but 1 Kings 19:12 is not about salvation, nor is it a message from God. Whatever the sound was (in verse 12), Elijah received no message or leading or calling of God from it. What Elijah received, as

a leading of God, was an actual voice, one that Elijah had an actual discussion with. The next verse says,

1 Kings 19:13, *When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him* [NASB], *there came a voice unto him* [KJV], *there came a voice to him* [ESV], *and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

The Bible does not say Elijah received a message from God through what Spurgeon called a “soft, tender, gentle, quiet, calm, peaceful— still small voice.” But, very importantly, observe what it does say. There **was** a **voice**. It was not a feeling, an inclination, or a coincidental set of circumstances that Elijah was to use as clues to figure out the call of God. It was not an inward feeling Elijah received while doing a “listening prayer” or any other mental telepathy. This was a distinct, real, actual, audible voice from God, giving a message to Elijah in complete, rational, verbal sentences. The point the author of the text is making, is that if you were there, you would have heard the same voice.

David Did Not Look for or Receive a “Still Small Voice” from God

David knew two things God was doing in his day:

- (1) God was establishing Israel as a nation and
- (2) God had anointed David as king when he was a boy.

On two different occasions (1 Samuel 24 and 1 Samuel 26) David’s friends looked at their circumstances and determined God was mystically leading David to kill Saul as a means of accomplishing God’s purpose for David.

- **1 Samuel 24:4**, *The men of David said to him, “Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold;*

I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.”

- **1 Samuel 26:8**, *Then Abishai said to David, “Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time.”*

But God never said what *the men of David* said He said. What they meant was, David should understand the leading of God mystically, through his circumstances. But David looked at what God was doing through God’s verbal revelation given by His prophets and in His written Word (Psalm 119:97-105). David did not look for direction from God through his circumstances, nor through the urging of his friends, even though David knew God was sovereign over the circumstances (Psalm 139). David looked for revelation from God like Ezra did.

Ezra 7:10, *For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

If We Are Not to Seek a “Still Small Voice,” How Can We Know What God Is Doing Today?

There are two things we know God is doing today:

1. Christ is building His church (Matthew 16:18).
2. God is conforming His church to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

But notice, those are things **He** is doing, they are not things He is asking us to do. Jesus never asked us to build His church for Him, or to help Him build His church.

Rather than looking for a “still small voice” from God, what Jesus told the apostles to do was,

Matthew 28:19-20, *“...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and*

the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Rather than looking for a “still small voice” from God, Paul told Timothy,

2 Timothy 2:2, *“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”*

Rather than looking for a “still small voice” from God, we are told,

Romans 12:1-2, *...present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Rather than looking for a “still small voice” from God, we are told to,

2 Timothy 4:2, *... preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

Chapter 13

What About Dreams, from God?

A Perspective

I want to suggest two things you (and I) should never do.

First, never attribute an experience, which is not discussed in the Bible, to God or Satan. Never say “God did that,” or “The devil did that,” because you do not know that.

Second, do not evaluate experiences. For example, it is common for me to hear that many middle eastern and far eastern people are coming to Christ through dreams, followed by the question, “What do you think about that?” My answer is (and I suggest your answer should be), “I have no idea. I do not comment on experiences.” Once you start evaluating experiences, you join the mystical world that assumes meaning is derived from experiences. My only evaluation is (anyway it should be) to see what the Bible says.

For example, when it comes to dreams from God, I can say that no one in the New Testament Church ever reported having a dream from God, and Paul said the gospel is spread by people telling other people. He never mentioned dreams.

Romans 10:14-15, *How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”*

Definitions

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary a Dream is “a series of thoughts, images, or emotions occurring during sleep.”

In the Bible, the difference between a dream and a vision is, dreams come while recipients are sleeping, and visions come while they are awake.

Note: we will here only be discussing dreams, not visions.

Three Differences Between Mysticism and Dreams

1. There is no example of God using mysticism to communicate anything to anyone in the Bible. But God did give revelation to certain people through dreams.
2. Mystical messages (as in coincidental circumstances, feelings and mental telepathy) require subjective imagination to believe they happened. Dreams actually happen.
3. Mystical experiences are capable of different meanings. Experiences do not tell you what they mean. Meaning must be brought to them. In some cases, dreams can be verbal messages which can give the dreamer a meaning. The challenge then is, “How does one know the meaning of the dream came from God?”

What Does the Bible Say about Believers Having Dreams, from God?

God said He would use dreams and visions in the future. Joel prophesied (in Joel 2), and Peter repeated the prophecy (in Acts 2), that God will use dreams and visions.

Joel 2:28, *It will come about after this [It shall be in the last days, God says (1 Peter 2:17)] that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.*

Because God said He would use dreams and visions in the future, we should not say God will not use dreams to communicate.

There is, however, a major contextual interpretive qualification for the above passage. The verse addresses the Millennial Kingdom, *in the last days*. Joel is making a prediction about what will happen during the future millennial reign of Christ over all the earth.

Peter is using Joel's prediction to show God does miracles, like the tongues speaking at Pentecost. The point is, the people should understand the apostles were not drunk. Their tongues speaking was from God, who said He would do that sort of thing. So, although we should not say God will not use dreams, the Joel 2/Acts 2 example is about the Millennial Kingdom, not this church age.

There is No Example of Anyone in the New Testament Church Receiving Any Revelation from God Through Dreams

Although God used dreams for revelation in the Old Testament, and He will use them again in the Millennial Kingdom (Joel 2:28-32), we should note that there is no example of them in the New Testament church. Only one believer received dreams in the New Testament, Joseph concerning his marriage to Mary and care for the baby Jesus. Here are the only dreams given to a believer recorded in the New Testament:

- **Matthew 1:20-21**, *...behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

- **Matthew 2:13**, ...*an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt.”*
- **Matthew 2:19**, ... *angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, “Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel...”*
- **Matthew 2:22-23**, *Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth.*

These dreams given to Joseph were received over 30 years before the church began. There is no record of anyone receiving dreams from God after the church age began, after the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. Another way to observe it is, after believers were individually indwelt with the Holy Spirit, as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19), there is no more mention of them having dreams from God.

In the Old Testament, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was selective (Judges 14:6). During the Millennium, Joel 2 says, *I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind*, not selective believers, or all believers, but upon all mankind. So, all the dreams in the Bible are during ages when individual believers are not singled out as those indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Once again, it is not to say God cannot or will not give people dreams today. But it is to say there is no biblical basis or expectation for them, in this church/grace age.

**There Is No Teaching from Jesus
or the Apostles about how to Deal with,
Understand, or Apply Dreams**

We would expect that if dreams were a part of what God intended for the church, Jesus and the apostles would have

given some instruction about them. The New Testament offers much instruction about the directives given for the church. But dreams are never mentioned.

Christian Scholars Did Not Encourage Paying Attention to Dreams

Although there are stories about dreams and visions in all religions (such as Muslims having dreams about a man in white garments), the primary Christian Bible scholars, throughout the history of Christianity, did not report having nor encouraging people to pay attention to dreams, as revelation from God. For example, I am not a historian, so I am open to being corrected, but I know of no exhortations about paying attention to dreams or visions from Athanasius, Augustine, Benedict, Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Calvin, Knox, von Zinzendorf, Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards, Spurgeon, Moody, Darby, Scofield, Lewis, McGee, Ryrie, or Graham. There is no encouragement to look for or give credence to dreams and visions from the Moravian Brethren, the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Reformed, the Puritans, the Separatists, or the Baptists.

In the Bible, Recorded Dreams from God Were Either Given in Words or Interpreted into Words

For example, the first use of a dream in the Bible was to Abimelech concerning Sarah.

Genesis 20:3, But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married."

Notice that the dream was in actual words that made up a clear message.

When Jacob had a dream about a ladder extending into heaven, we read,

Genesis 28:13, *And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac... [then God repeated the Abrahamic Covenant]*

Notice that the dream included actual words that made up a clear message.

When Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2) and Pharaoh (Genesis 41) had dreams, they could not know what they meant until God’s man put them into words.

When Biblical Dreams Used Metaphorical Symbols, They Were Ultimately (if Not Immediately) Given Meaning in Words

Sometimes, in the initial dream, God used metaphorical symbols which had to be described in words to be understood. For example, Joseph as a boy (Genesis 37:5-10), the servants of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:5ff), Pharaoh himself (Genesis 41), Gideon’s enemies (Judges 7), Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel 2 & 4), and Daniel himself (in Daniel 7–12) received revelation from God through dreams in the form of metaphorical symbols. But the interpretations of dreams from God, were verbal, not subjective or experiential. Peter said,

2 Peter 1:20-21, *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

God Gave Numerous Severe Warnings, Which Should Serve as Cautions about Following Dreams

The Mosaic Law says:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he

*spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that **dreamer of dreams** ... But that prophet or that **dreamer of dreams** shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God ... So you shall purge the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).*

Through Jeremiah, God warned of the use of dreams by false prophets. He wrote:

*"I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a **dream**, I had a **dream!**' ... For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they **dream**" (Jeremiah 23:25, 28; and 29:8).*

Zechariah confirms,

*...the diviners see **lying visions** and tell **false dreams**; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep, they are afflicted, because there is no shepherd (Zechariah 10:2).*

Solomon's advice was:

*For in many **dreams** and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God (Ecclesiastes 5:7).*

A Summary and Conclusion about Dreams

1. Although God used dreams and visions as a form of revelation in the Old Testament, there is no evidence that God communicated through dreams to the church, in the New Testament. There is no record of believers receiving dreams after the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

2. There is no teaching from Jesus or the apostles which encourages dreams or gives instruction about dreams.
3. The leading Bible scholars throughout church history did not encourage the use of dreams as a source of revelation from God.
4. Many religious people, from idolatrous religions, experience dreams. That does not prove every Christian's dream is cultic. But it is reason for concern.
5. The idea of individual believers using dreams as direction from God is filled with warnings.
6. Attention to dreams takes a person away from the sufficiency of the Bible.

Could God be using dreams today? Of course, He could. As I have emphasized throughout this material, I do not know God's agenda, any more than the mystic. My only comments are an attempt to relate the subject to the Bible.

*Notice, I have not commented on Muslims being converted to Christianity through dreams because my objective is to give a biblical perspective. I try to not comment on personal experiences.

Chapter 14

What About ... Casting Lots?

The casting of lots is a process of decision-making when the goal is to not personalize or prioritize a selection.

Here are some thoughts about casting lots, drawn from some biblical examples.

#1. Casting lots is random selection when the outcome makes no discernable difference.

- **Leviticus 16:8** — *Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.*

As part of the Day of Atonement, two goats were taken, one was sacrificed and the other let go in the wilderness. Casting lots was not a way to mystically bring God into the decision. It was simply a way to not prioritize one goat over the other.

#2. Casting lots makes an impartial selection instead of a personal decision.

- **Joshua 18:8** — *Then the men arose and went, and Joshua commanded those who went to describe the land, saying, “Go and walk through the land and describe it, and return to me; then I will cast lots for you here before the LORD in Shiloh.*
- **Proverbs 18:18** — *The cast lot puts an end to strife and decides between the mighty ones.*

After the land was surveyed and put into portions, Joshua randomly cast lots to see which tribe got what portion. This made the decision impartial and impersonal. Proverbs says that can avoid *strife*.

#3. The casting of lots is a chance event, but God is sovereign over every chance event.

- **Proverbs 16:33** — *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*
- **Jonah 1:7** — *So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.*

Although real chance is part of our everyday lives, and we use it in making decisions, it is equally true that God is sovereign over all chance events. We can use casting lots for decision-making because randomness is real. But it is equally true that God is sovereign over all randomness. Nothing we do, including casting lots, removes God from the situation.

In Jonah's situation, the sailors on the boat attempted to use lots mystically to get an answer from their gods. The lots were random, but God maneuvered the lots in order to get His prophet back on track. God's plan is not subject to our actions. Whether we make reasonable decisions or chance selections, His plan will prevail. Do not think you can mystically bring God in, or keep God out, by casting lots.

#4. There is nothing uniquely Christian about casting lots.

- **Matthew 27:35** — *And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.*

Unbelievers used casting lots for the same reason believers did, random selection.

#5. Casting lots is not condemned, nor is it suggested, as a means of determining God’s will.

- **Acts 1:26** — *And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

The eleven selected two equally qualified men and cast lots to select a replacement apostle. The apostles had no directive from God to do it. Neither did God condemn it. Matthias was numbered with the 12 throughout the beginning of the church. When Paul discusses his apostleship, it was separate from the 12 (1 Corinthians 15:1-10). The use of casting lots was never condemned as a means of decision-making, but neither was it seen as a mystical connection to God.

#6. Casting lots does not bring God into a decision, it just takes us out of the decision.

- **James 3:17** — *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable...*

Normal biblical decision-making is by wisdom, which is morally *pure* and factually *reasonable*. For example, we may want to use casting lots to take our sin nature out of a decision. But if you do that, it also takes reason, wisdom, and morality out of it.

#7. Casting lots should not be used to relieve you of responsibility. Suppose you cast lots and believe you should abide by the lots, but later information reveals the lots provided a foolish choice. For example, suppose a church elder board cast lots to decide between one of two elder candidates. The lots fall on one who is later revealed to be having an adulterous affair. Then you need to decide that the lots gave you the wrong choice. To decide by casting lots may cause you to make a wrong decision.

Conclusion: Casting lots should never be seen as a connection to a mystical solution to anything. It does not bring in some mystical universal force, nor does it bring in God. God is in every decision. He is not brought in by lots. Casting lots assumes that wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are not useful, or available.

But how many decisions in life are best made that way? Should a doctor give a diagnosis, a jury decide a case, or an architect design a bridge by casting lots? If you want to make the decision impartial, if you have considered all options and they are all completely equal, if you have no personal preference for one or the other, if there is no moral or spiritual issue involved in one choice or the other, if there is no wisdom, understanding, or knowledge that leans the decision one way or the other, and you are not trying to mystically inject God into the decision, then cast lots. But I have not had any significant decision in my life where I wanted to do that. Have you?

Chapter 15

What About Gideon's Private Revelation?

The Revelation of Judges 6

The question is, "Was Gideon's private revelation in Judges 6, and were similar ones among the prophets, mystical experiences?"

First, let's briefly review what happened to Gideon.

Judges 6:11-12, *Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."*

This is followed by a long discussion between Gideon and *the angel of the Lord*, followed by a meal Gideon prepared and the angel of God burned up miraculously. At that point Gideon realized, *now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face*. Then, *the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight*.

On that same night, with another verbal command, the Lord told Gideon to destroy his father's idolatrous altar *and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold*.

Gideon's Fleece

After Gideon did all that and called together a Jewish army to go to war with the Midianites, he asked God for another verification.

Judges 6:37, *behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it*

is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.”

Then Gideon asked for the sign to be reversed, and again, God granted his request.

Notice, when God initiated the revelation to Gideon, it was only in words. The request for the fleece miracle came from Gideon. It was not something initiated by God. Often our prayer requests are like Gideon’s fleece. We want God to manipulate our circumstances. And God often does that. But, in the Bible, there is no evidence or example of God ever initiating a message to anyone, in anything but actual words, or what became actual words.

A Private Experience is Not the Same as a Mystical Experience

Gideon had a private revelation from God, as did many of the prophets. No one else was around to objectively verify his revelation. So, is this a mystical revelation? Here are five differences between a mystical revelation and a private revelation. [These points are a summary of what was discussed in Chapter 1.]

1. Revelation from God, privately to an individual prophet, is presented (by the author of the text) as an objective event, such as, “The word of the Lord came to me saying.” It is not a subjective episode of mental telepathy, such as, “God led me.”
2. In private revelation from God, the meaning comes from the revelation, it is not read back into the revelation, as it is with mysticism.
3. All private revelations from God would be verifiable if someone was there to verify them. A tree makes noise when it falls. If you were there you would have heard it. The question is, if someone else were there, would

they verify that the event actually happened, beyond someone's imagination.

4. If another person was there to verify it, the other person would understand the event with the same meaning. If another person was present when someone had a mystical revelation, they would not be able to verify that the event happened, or its meaning.
5. The intent of the author of a revelation, from God in the Bible, is always for us to understand that this is an objective event, one that we would verify if we were there. Mystical events ("God led me.. told me... called me") are not intended to be verifiable. The person telling you about them is not claiming you would verify the event if you were there.

For example, suppose you meet a celebrity because you were upgraded to first class and assigned a seat next to them on an airplane. No one you know is there to verify the experience, so it is a private experience. But it is not a mystical experience. Why not? Because the nature of the event is that it is verifiable. If your friends were there, they would verify it. It is an objective, not a subjective, event. It is also not understood experientially, bringing the meaning to the experience. Any friend that was with you would give the experience the same meaning, confirming this is indeed that celebrity.

In other words, if you were there when the angel of the Lord came to Gideon, you would have heard and seen the same things that Gideon did.

Two Biblical Examples

One example is God's revelation to the parents of Samson. His mother received a visit from the *angel of the Lord*, who predicted things about Samson's birth and life. When she told her husband, Manoah, he asked God, *O Lord, please*

let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again... Then God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again, to the woman. But this time, she ran quickly and told her husband, and he came and also spoke with the same angel of Lord (Judges 13:1-21). The revelation was not subjective and experiential, it was objective and undeniable.

Another biblical example is when the Lord appeared to Abraham when he was 99 years old, and the Lord (evidently a preincarnate theophany of Christ) told him his wife Sarah would have a child (Genesis 18:1-12). Next, we read, *And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Sarah laughed [because] Sarah was past childbearing [years].* Notice, the verification that this was not a mystical revelation to Abraham is that Sarah heard the same thing from the same person, while she was still in the tent.

Supernaturalism Is Not Mysticism

Now suppose the private experience included a miraculous event, as it did with Gideon. A supernatural event does not make a private event into a mystical event. An event is not mystical because it includes the supernatural. A supernatural event is just the natural action of a superior being. An event is mystical when it is evaluated subjectively (without objective verification) and experientially (when the meaning is imposed on the event).

Now Let's Apply This to Gideon's Revelation

1. The author of Judges, who recorded the revelation to Gideon, presents it as an objectively real event. Interpretation of anything is always the author's intended meaning. Clearly, the author of Judges 6 intended his readers to understand this as an objective

event, not a subjective episode of unobservable mental telepathy.

2. In the revelation to Gideon recorded in Judges 6, the one clear meaning comes from verbal communication. There is no thought that the meaning was in mental inclinations to be read back into the revelation.
3. The author of Judges 6 presents the revelation as something objectively verifiable. If we ask the author, he would affirm that if anyone was there with Gideon, they would verify that it was an objective event that actually happened. It was not just someone's imagination.
4. The author does not present this as something available for various personal interpretations. The idea is, if someone else was there to verify it, the other person would give it the same meaning as Gideon.

Chapter 16

What about the New Testament Gift of Prophecy?

Was the prophecy of the New Testament prophets, mystical or empirical? Was it subjectively experiential, or objectively verifiable?

During the first-century church, before there was a New Testament, there were apostles and prophets who brought God's revelation to the church.

The apostles included the 12 and a few others. Besides himself, Paul mentions Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James (Galatians 1:19). Some of the prophets include: Agabus (Acts 11:27-28), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9), some of the leaders in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1), and those with the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14. Prophecy is also listed as a gift in the New Testament church (Acts 13:1; 15:32; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 3:5; 4:11.) [Note: we do not know if there was a difference between a prophet, like Agabus, and those with the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14. So, we will treat them the same.]

But the question we must deal with here is, "Was the revelation given to the apostles and the New Testament prophets, mystical?"

First, Consider the Revelation to the Apostles

Acts 9:5-7, And he said "Who are you Lord," And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus was a revelation in words, confirmed by those who were with him.

Acts 13:2, *While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

The prophets in the church at Antioch received a revelation from the Holy Spirit in words.

Acts 15:28, *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: ...*

The men at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 were claiming a filling of the Holy Spirit, but not a special revelation from God.

Acts 16:6, *They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.*

Luke does not tell us how the apostles were *forbidden* to go to the Roman province of Asia, so any speculation would be a guess.

Acts 16:9-10, *A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

This is a vision given to Paul with the meaning in literal words.

Acts 18:9-10, *And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on*

speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

While teaching in Corinth, Paul received a revelation from the Lord in words.

We can conclude that the only kind of revelation we know of, given to the apostles, was in actual words which became part of the New Testament.

Next, Consider the Revelation to the New Testament Prophets

Prophecy is called a foundational gift. Paul said,

[We are] of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone (Ephesians 2:19-20)

Like the apostles, the New Testament prophets were part of the founding of the church before there was a New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:8; Ephesians 3:5; 4:11; Revelation 22:18). The church does not continue to be founded. It was founded by Christ Jesus, then His apostles and prophets built upon that foundation.

The only place we find the gift of prophecy discussed in an assembly of the church, is in 1 Corinthians 14.

1 Corinthians 14:29-33, *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

The question is, “Were these prophetic messages, in the church at Corinth, mystical?” Initially, we need to note that these are not like the revelations claimed by today’s mystics. These were messages given to the assembly of believers at Corinth. This was not comparable to “God told me to marry Suzi,” or “God called me to be the pastor of this church.”

Next, we should ask our two basic mystical questions, “Were these prophecies in Corinth (1) subjective or objective and (2) were they experiential or rationally observable?”

First, were these prophecies subjective? Were they a form of mental telepathy or were they able to be objectively verified (or falsified)? We do not know how the prophetic messages were initially given to the prophets speaking in 1 Corinthians 14. We also do not know if these prophetic messages were from God or false prophecies, until they were verified by the other prophets in the assembly. If they received prophecy in audible words, then it would be, like the rest of biblical prophecy, objectively verifiable by anyone present to hear it. If a tree falls in the woods, it makes an objective noise.

If the prophecy came to the mind of the prophet inaudibly through mental telepathy, then that message would indeed be subjective, until it was revealed. The time between when they received it and when they declared it would be subjective if it came in the form of mental telepathy.

But to claim that would be a pure guess, and it would be the only example of that in the Bible. And that does not seem to be the case here. It seems like the prophets received the message while they were seated at the assembly and

immediately spoke the message to the assembly, which was then immediately to be evaluated by the other prophets.

No conclusion can be made about the initial reception of the Corinthian prophecy as to it being objective or subjective, since we do not know how the prophet received it.

But when the message was delivered to the assembly, it was in audible words, so the delivery of the prophecy was objectively verifiable (or falsifiable). Paul said, *let the others pass judgment ... and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets*. So, although we cannot verify how the message was received, we do know that the message itself was verified (or falsified) objectively, by *the others* who *pass judgment*.

For example, suppose a mystic used 1 Corinthians 14 as justification for saying something like, “God told me to marry Suzi,” or “God called me to be the pastor of this church.” We should then ask: “Are there others claiming to have the gift of prophecy, who have passed judgment on this revelation since *the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets*?”

Second, we should ask, “Were these prophetic messages interpreted experientially?” But the answer is obvious. Clearly, they were not experiential, since they were delivered in actual words making up logical sentences which the other prophets present were able to pass judgment on. The message came from the words. The meaning was not brought to an experience.

We must, therefore, conclude that the revelation given to the New Testament apostles and prophets, was ultimately neither subjective nor experiential, therefore it was not mystical.

Chapter 17

What about the Prayer of Abraham's Servant in Genesis 24

When Abraham was old, and his son Isaac had not taken a wife, Abraham sent his servant (probably Eliezer - Genesis 15:2) to Haran to get a wife for Isaac with the instruction,

Genesis 24:4, *“you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”*

When the servant arrived, he prayed,

Genesis 24:14, *“now may it be that the girl to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also’ — may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master.”*

Then we read that Rebekah arrived and did what the servant prayed for, fulfilling the prayer request.

Notice:

- The reason Moses recorded this event is because it was part of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3). Moses does not intend for us to understand that God gives this kind of confirmation to everyone, or anyone else.
- This event tells us about an answer to the servant's prayer. It was about the servant's prayer request, not something God told or led the servant to do. There is no mention of any kind of word from God in the whole event. If this was a revelation from God, we would expect to hear God saying something like, “When you

get to Haran, look for a woman who will say, “*Drink, and I will water your camels also.*” And that would have been an audible voice that anyone present would have heard. But no such revelation was given.

- This was not an example of God initiating a revelation. It is the servant carrying out an assignment from Abraham. The servant initiated the event.
- This is an objective, not a subjective, event. Moses meant for us to understand this as a real prayer request with a real answer that anyone could observe if they were there. This was not a (“God led me, told me, called me”) subjective event that only the servant experienced.
- The meaning comes from the event, it is not experientially brought to the event. From the context, we can assume Moses meant this to be a circumstantial confirmation from God, where the meaning is undeniably derived from the event.
- Abraham’s servant did not look at the event mystically, as a subjective leading from God. The text says,
Genesis 24:21, *Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the LORD had made his journey successful or not.*

Abraham’s servant only knew she was the right girl when he learned what family she came from.

Chapter 18

What about the Urim and Thummim

(Exodus 28:30; 1 Samuel 28:6)

The question relevant to our discussion is, were the Urim and Thummim a means of God communicating to man without words?

There are seven references to the Urim (literally “lights”) and Thummim (literally, “perfections”):

- **Exodus 28:30**, *You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the LORD;*
- **Leviticus 8:8**, *He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim.*
- **Numbers 27:21**, *Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD.*
- **Deuteronomy 33:8**, *Of Levi he said, “Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man,”*
- **1 Samuel 28:6**, *When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets.*
- **Ezra 2:63**, *The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.*
- **Nehemiah 7:65**, *Repeats the same statement as Ezra 2:63.*

The Ryrie Study Bible says,

“Urim and Thummim. Possibly two precious stones, which were put inside the pouch. They may have been used, like lots, to determine God’s will.”

It is unclear exactly how the Urim and Thummim were used. Apparently, they were gemstones carried by the high

priest as part of his ephod, the breastplate of his priestly garments. In some situations, they were something the priest could use to ask God's will on a certain matter. For example, when David inquired of the Lord it may have been through the priest using the Urim and Thummim (as in 2 Samuel 2:21).

Notice:

1. The Urim and Thummim were for the priests, not the people.
2. The Urim and Thummim could, in some unknown way, tell the user whether or not God would answer using them.
3. The Urim and Thummim were to only be used by priests who were godly men.

Appendix

What about Superstition

Superstition and mysticism are not exactly the same. I am not saying that all mystics are superstitious. Nonetheless, there is a significant overlap between the two concepts, so I have included it here, just for comparison.

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.

From the definition, we can see that, although it is not the same thing, superstition is a close cousin to mysticism.

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, 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*.

Summary and Conclusion

A Summary

The urgency of this book is because I understand mysticism to be one of the most damaging ideas in Christianity. Mysticism marginalizes the Bible to be insufficient as a directive for Christian living. The Bible gets a seat at the table, but it does not determine the truth of the conversation. Mysticism, in various different forms, is the foundation of nearly all our current world religions, and the idolatry of the past. But none of it is found in the Bible.

My analysis has followed the Merriam Webster definition that mysticism is “The belief that the direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience.” So, we explored the idea of obtaining truth subjectively and experientially.

In the first 10 chapters I made the case against mysticism.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that mysticism is all about the mystic. Unlike the Bible, where the focus is on the glory of God, for Christian mystics the focus is on themselves. “God led **me** ...,” “God told **me** ...,” or “God called **me** ...”

In Chapter 2, I discussed mysticism as subjectivism. Mystical messages do not have, nor are they intended to have objective verification. When mystics say, “God told me ...” a certain message, they do not mean that I could have heard God tell them that message, if I was with them when they received it.

In Chapter 3, I looked at the Bible to show that everything revealed by God was open to public verification. Mysticism is never open to public verification.

In Chapter 4, I pointed out that mysticism, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is a form of experientialism, where the meaning is brought to the experience, not derived from it.

In Chapter 5, I pointed out that biblical revelation was never mystical.

In Chapter 6, I illustrated the fact that God's revelation came to certain people, prophets whom God selected. It did not come to His saints in general. Two million Israelites had to get their revelation from Moses. The church had to get its revelation from the New Testament apostles and prophets.

In Chapter 7, I set forth the case that audible verbal revelation from God today challenges the canon of Scripture.

In Chapter 8, I clarified two questions:

- (1) Could God give revelation to individual believers today if He chose to? Answer: of course, He could. It is just that there is no biblical example of it.
- (2) Is it okay to say, "I believe God gave me a personal message." Answer: yes, because that is just your personal belief. But if you say, "God gave me a personal message," there is no biblical basis for that.

In Chapter 9, I demonstrated the biblically-described areas where God is involved in our lives, positionally and experientially.

In Chapter 10, I contrasted mystical claims with the biblical claims for the involvement of God in a believer's life.

In Chapter 11, I used Job and Jonah to demonstrate that what God is doing, through the circumstances of our lives, is none of our business.

In Chapters 12-18, I dealt with some specific issues related to mysticism.

Chapter 12 is about the false application of the “still small voice,” of the Elijah story, to mysticism.

Chapter 13 is a biblical analysis of the dreams from God.

Chapter 14 is about decision-making by casting lots.

Chapter 15 is an analysis of Gideon’s private revelation.

Chapter 16 is about the New Testament gift of prophecy.

Chapter 17 is about the specific example of the prayer of Abraham’s servant in Genesis 24.

Chapter 18 is about the priest’s use of the Urim and Thummim.

A Conclusion

God is positionally and experientially involved in the lives of believers in Jesus Christ. But it is as described in Scripture, not by using some form of mental telepathy or experiential clues we are supposed to figure out.

In the Bible, God never spoke to anyone with the subjective experience known to us as mysticism. When God initiated revelation to man, it was always ultimately (if not immediately) in real words with real subjects, verbs, and objects that could be understood rationally using real languages. It was objective, not subjective. It was

verifiable, not artificial. Its meaning came from the words that explained it, not a meaning brought to it.

I have three pieces of advice I would like to give you, when a person tells you that God told them something (led them or called them):

1. Never comment on their experience. You are not an expert on experience. Do not say it came from God or Satan or their imagination, or anything. Only observe, interpret, and apply what the Bible says.
2. Always ask, “If I was with you when God spoke to you, would I have heard the same message?”
3. Make sure they understand there is nothing in the Bible, not one single passage from Genesis to Revelation, that confirms their mystical experience.