



Don't Buy the Lie: Discerning Truth in a World of Deception
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CHAPTER 1: IN THE DARK

You were just a little kid, but you knew what you had seen. Something had moved in the corner of your room or you'd glimpsed a shape just on the edge of your vision. Maybe you'd heard what sounded like a voice. Was it a monster? A ghost? A "bad guy"?

Afraid to move and call attention to yourself, you lay perfectly still, eyes squeezed not quite shut, hoping whatever it was wouldn't notice you. Finally, you couldn't take it anymore and called for mom and dad to come and investigate—or ran to their room as fast as you could. By the time they got there, though, the thing was always gone. Or hiding...



A friend reads your horoscope to you out of a magazine. You don't really buy all that stuff, but it does seem to fit your personality. The more you think about it, the more it seems like the horoscope was pretty much right in its predictions about your life. You wonder how someone you've never met can write something that matches your life so closely.

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A guy on TV gathers a studio audience together like he's going to do another *Oprah*-style talk show. Instead, he says that all these spirits are talking to him. Spirits of the dead. He starts repeating to the audience some of the things that one spirit is telling him, looking for the person who would know this spirit. He tells things from the spirit that only that person could know. The person usually ends up crying because they're so glad to have a message from a loved one who has died. And the message is always so hopeful.

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You're riding with friends or your family in a car. Suddenly, you realize that you're about to crash. Even though everything feels like it's moving in slow motion, you can't do anything to prevent the accident from happening. Then, at the last possible second, somehow the accident that should have killed or hurt all of you is miraculously avoided. Everyone is fine. You wonder if an angel has just stepped in and saved you.



At a party, someone brings out a Ouija (pronounced "wee-jee") board. As one or two people hold the pointer, you begin asking the board questions about boyfriends, or relatives who have passed away, or what's going to happen in the future. You hear a noise in the other room, and you all jump and laugh. You know it's just a stupid game, but you can't help feeling a little creeped out.



IN THE DARK

You've learned in Sunday school and church that God's Holy Spirit comes to all who trust in Jesus. And you know you've experienced moments in which you felt God's presence or you sensed a supernatural ability to do something he wanted you to do—like encouraging a friend or telling someone else what you believe.



You laugh when you see a woman on TV telling people what their pets really think about Aunt Millie or the new baby or the Puppy Chow. Still, she seems to know things the people haven't told her. But how could anyone believe a psychic was communicating with pooches and parakeets?

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A friend or a “friend of a friend” or someone on the Internet tells you that he's part of the Wiccan religion. He says that they worship nature, and that they're learning how to get supernatural power through spells or castings or chanting. Maybe he tells you he's going to become a warlock. You wonder if these people have any kind of power at all. And you wonder what it would be like to have power like that.



A popular TV show features witches, vampires, or demons who save the day—or maybe the world—using their special powers. Although once evil, they now use their darkness to fight against *really* evil stuff. Cartoons, books, and movies you've seen describe good witches and wizards who use magic to do the right thing and stop bad witches and wizards. You wonder if maybe witchcraft has been given a bad name.

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A missionary comes to your church and talks about seeing people in a foreign country who were demon-possessed. They talked in strange voices saying awful things and hurting themselves. You remember times when you felt like you were in the presence of some kind of evil, and it made you feel afraid.



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You've just watched a scary movie. Maybe it was the story of an evil videotape that causes people to die seven days after they have watched it. And you keep waiting for the TV to turn on by itself and a wicked little girl to climb out and get you. Or maybe the movie focused on a broken family that is living in a haunted house and slowly realizing that they are the ones doing the haunting. Or it could be the tale of a vampire or some other secretly evil creature that makes friends with people and then destroys them when their defenses are down.

Whatever it was, you can't sleep now, and you feel just like you did when you were a little kid. Except now you can't call mom and dad to come and help you look for the monsters. You're pretty sure it's all in your head, but part of you still wonders about all that supernatural stuff.

Are ghosts real? Do angels and demons really work invisibly to help or hurt us? Can some people talk to the dead? Are witches and wizards just for storytelling, or can they be real?

Spiritual = Cool Again

Over the last couple of decades, interest in the spiritual and supernatural has been growing. For most of the twentieth century, “modern” people ignored that world. After all, everything that existed could be explained by science.

The most popular worldview in academics and media was *naturalism*. People who held this view of the world believed that if you could not taste, touch, smell, hear, or see something, it probably didn’t exist. All that mattered was what you could experience with your senses. Even people who believed in God didn’t have time or interest in “unexplained” phenomenon. Most just considered everything beyond nature and their own religious beliefs to be silly superstition.

But the supernatural is back in a big way. As a society, we got frustrated with the limits of what science could tell us about life, including life after death and life’s deeper meaning. Today, millions are looking for truth—and power—in the spiritual world. Books, TV shows, and movies about supernatural and spiritual things crowd the tops of the bestseller lists and box office reports.

Since I’m all about talking to teenagers about the supernatural world, I wanted to find out exactly what this generation believes. So I commissioned Barna Research Group to conduct a scientific survey of

Do you believe in a spiritual or supernatural world beyond the range of our senses?

WHAT YOUR FRIENDS BELIEVE

73% Yes

27% No

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U.S. teenagers. The results surprised me and the rest of my staff. It turns out that nearly three of every four teenagers believe there is, indeed, a world that exists beyond what our senses can detect. As you might guess, however, there's a ton of disagreement about what goes on in that world. You'll find the responses of teenagers to various questions on our survey throughout this book—and some of the results may surprise you.

Our survey also told us that people *really* care about this stuff. Part of the attraction is that we want to know what's "out there." We *want* to believe. We're hungry to confirm what our hearts tell us—that power exists beyond what our limited human bodies can experience or produce.

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As Bible-believing Christians, we *are* convinced something specific is out there. We know that a supernatural world *does* exist. We believe in an invisible Creator God who raised his own son from the dead and will give us an eternal life after death through that son.

But what about all this other supernatural stuff? What about ghosts and horoscopes and angels and demons and Satan and vampires? How are Christians who take the Bible as God's Word supposed to sort all that out and decide what's true and what's just really creative imagination or—worse—really powerful deception?

That's what this book is all about. We're going to dig into the supernatural world and figure out how to think logically about the unseen. We're going to look at exactly what the Bible teaches about the supernatural. And we're going to pick up a few skills to keep from being deceived by people who lie about supernatural power.

Why does it matter? Because when people go looking for truth in a world of the supernatural, they open themselves up to being deceived. They put themselves right in the crosshairs of the great liar who wants to confuse them about the truth. They're ready to put more value in their "experience" of the supernatural than in the truth behind their experience. I should know. I've spent much of my life using the power of illusion to make it seem as if I had supernatural power.

Art of Deception

My own interest in the supernatural—or at least in *faking* the supernatural—started when I was just a kid. Fascinated by magicians and magic tricks, I spent hours and hours practicing illusions I could show to my friends and family. I loved being able to impress them with my "power." That's why I became a junior member of the prestigious Magic Castle in Southern California at the age of 17. Many famous magicians (as well as folks who work with David Copperfield and David Blaine) belong to this club, along with actors and other celebrities.

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Through that association, I met many other illusionists. These men and women could use sleight of hand, diversion, and the power of suggestion to convince people they had powers beyond the natural. As I got older, I made friends who specialized in using "psychic abilities."

How much time do you spend thinking about the supernatural world?

WHAT YOUR FRIENDS BELIEVE

- 18%** **A lot of time**
- 36%** **Some, but not a lot of time**
- 47%** **Very little or no time**

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I was amazed by their ability to convince audiences they could read minds or move objects with their mental energy.

In this group, I got to know two types of illusionists. One group used their skills to entertain audiences—but everyone understood they were being “tricked.” The other group of illusionists used their well-practiced abilities to convince people they really could tell the future or read minds or talk to the dead. Either for money or just out of a perverse idea of fun, they would dupe overly trusting people into paying them for information that wasn't real.

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In other words, they lied about the supernatural world.

One time, one of these mentalists asked if he could show me something. I sat down across the table from him, and he told me to make a fist with one hand. Then, on a piece of paper, he drew a picture of a hand. Next, he took his cigarette and touched it to the middle of the hand he'd drawn. Of course, the paper caught fire and burned up.

Finally, this guy told me to open my fist. When I did, I found ash right in the spot where he had touched his cigarette to the hand on the paper. Even though I'd been studying illusion for a while, this shocked and startled me. It took me quite a while to figure out exactly how the trick was done—and, yes, it was a trick. But it helped me see how powerful illusion can be in convincing people to believe lies about the supernatural.

Like Fox Mulder on *The X-Files*, people *want* to believe so badly that they'll buy just about anything. They want to experience talking to lost loved ones or knowing the future before it happens. They want to be convinced that the supernatural really

Do you believe that these spiritual beings exist?

WHAT YOUR FRIENDS BELIEVE

Ghosts:

57% **Yes**
 40% **No**
 2% **Don't know**

Witches:

37% **Yes**
 63% **No**
 1% **Don't know**

Vampires:

11% **Yes**
 88% **No**
 1% **Don't know**

exists. So my “psychic friends” gladly took their money and—worse—warped their understanding of reality.

The goal of this book is to help you avoid making the same mistake. Sometimes, it’s actually easier to fool Christians about the supernatural because we already believe some supernatural things exist, don’t we? We believe in God and Satan and

demons and angels. So why not just add ghosts and vampires and talking with the dead to the list? Our supernatural worldview opens us up to deception.

Of course, those with a naturalist view of the world are less likely to get caught believing in supernatural lies. Atheists, agnostics, and pure evolutionists who refuse to believe in any kind of supernatural world are not likely to waste time with spiritual lies. Instead, they’ll end up being deceived about what really is true, right? They’ll miss out on the true supernatural God and the real supernatural world he controls.

Obviously, it’s no good to be deceived about supernatural

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things that don't exist. But it's no better to refuse to believe in supernatural things that can save your soul—or put it in danger. We can't just say, "Believe it all." And we certainly can't go back to, "Don't believe any of it." One way or another, we have to figure out what's true and what's a lie when it comes to the supernatural.

20 We're going to kick this book off with a quick overview of how to think about supernatural stuff. Then we'll dig into exactly what the Bible says (and doesn't say) about God and his angels. We'll look at truths, lies, and strange ideas about Satan, demons, hell, and heaven. Along the way, we'll turn the spotlight of God's Word on ghosts, vampires, talking to the dead, and even a young wizard named Harry.

I hope you're ready to do more than just experience the supernatural. I hope you're ready to let God teach you the truth about what goes on behind the veil of the natural world—what's real, what's fake, and how you can live every day "supernaturally."