

Confronting the Python Spirit in Today's Charismatic Church

Editor's note: This is Part 1 in a 2-part series.

I had a strange encounter with a false prophetic spirit while preaching my first “revival” meeting at the Assembly of God in Kiowa, Oklahoma, in 1972. It happened one afternoon as two friends and I were going door to door, witnessing and inviting people to the meetings.

We knocked on the door of a small wood-frame house and a strange but very “spiritual” little man invited us into his home. We immediately noticed that his walls were papered with pictures and letters from well-known preachers and healing evangelists with whom he obviously corresponded and listened to on the radio.

Almost immediately he began telling us about his sensational, spiritual experiences. He had experienced, he said, visions and out-of-the-body experiences. He told us that he had been to both heaven and hell. He also said he saw Jesus in hell, whom He said was still there suffering for our sins.

At this point my friend, Ruel, interrupted and said, “Jesus is not in hell; He is in heaven.” This individual angrily retorted, “Don’t you call me a liar; I will kill you. I was there. I saw him.”

From the beginning, our spirits did not witness with the spirit that was in this man. But what clinched it for us was when he said that he saw Jesus in hell suffering for our sins. This was so contradictory to what the New Testament says about Jesus ascending on high and sitting at the right hand of the Father that we immediately knew it was a lie and that he was possessed with a deceiving spirit.

We offered to pray for him, and he accepted our offer. He was now seated in a chair, and as we laid our hands on him, he bowed his head and began jabbering, as if in tongues. Suddenly, he lifted his head and began making strange motions with his hands toward us as if he were casting a spell.

When my friend, Charles, asked what the hand gestures were all about, he replied, "When I put that on someone, they usually die within three days."

We had no fear, for we knew the truth of I John 4:4b, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." We departed realizing he did not really want deliverance and was taken captive by the deceiving spirit to which he had yielded himself.

These same deceiving spirits were at work in biblical times. During his time of ministry in Philippi, Paul encountered a young woman who prophesied through a false prophetic spirit known in the ancient world as the "spirit of python."

Paul Encounters the Spirit of Python

During their time of ministry in the city of Philippi of Macedonia, Paul and Silas encountered a young woman who prophesied through what Luke calls a "spirit of divination" (Acts 16:16). However, the Greek word from which "divination" is translated is *python*, a word associated with prophecy among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Because it was so well known in the ancient Greco-Roman world, the original readers of Acts would have made an immediate association when they read the words "spirit of python."

Prophecy in the Ancient Pagan World

Prophecy was common among the ancient Greeks and Romans. In fact, the noted historian, F.C. Grant, has said that the consultation of prophetic oracles was probably the most universal cult practice in the Greco-Roman world (Hyatt,

Angels of Light, 15).

“Oracle” was a word used by the ancients for a message from the gods, a prophecy. It was also used of the location where the oracles were given. Many regions had their own divinely inspired prophets or prophetesses who gave their oracles (prophecies) to a constant stream of seekers.

Prophecy was also common in the ancient pagan and mystery religions. This is borne out by the Roman historian, Livy (59 B.C. – A.D. 17), who describes followers of the pagan deity, Bacchus, who “as if insane, with fanatical tossings of their bodies, would utter prophecies.” He also describes devotees of the goddess Cybele as “prophesying in their frenzied chants” (Hyatt, *Angels of Light*, 15).

So pronounced was the public’s fascination with the supernatural that Petronius, a first century Roman official and novelist, declared, “It is easier to meet a god than a man.”

That prophecy and the supernatural were so common in the ancient, pagan world is why there are so many admonitions in the New Testament to not be deceived; and is why Paul, every time he mentions prophecy, includes an admonition to judge, test and prove the genuineness of prophecy.

How the ‘Python Spirit’ Got Its Name

The most famous ancient, pagan oracle (prophetic center) was at the city of Delphi in Greece and was known as the “Oracle at Delphi.” According to legend, the Greek god, Apollo, had slain a large female serpent—a python—at that site and the spirit of the python had remained. According to the legend, it now possessed the prophets and prophetesses who functioned there, “taking possession of their organs of speech moving and compelling them to give prophetic utterances” (Hyatt, *Angels of Light*, 16).

This was commonly known as the “pythian spirit” or the “spirit of python.” At the height of its popularity, the oracle at Delphi maintained three prophetesses who offered advice and counsel through the pythian spirit to a continual stream of visitors including generals and government officials.

“Spirit of python” thus became a general designation for pagan prophecy in the ancient Greco-Roman world. This is the association the first readers of Acts would have made to Luke’s mention of a “spirit of python.” {eoa}

This article is derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s latest book, Angels of Light, available from Amazon and his website at .