

Falling Backwards for Jesus: The Phenomenon of Being Slain in the Spirit

The practice of “slaying people in the Spirit” has been with us for quite some time now; so long in fact that most have come to view it as a normal part of the Christian experience. But it really isn’t anything new because non-Christians have been practicing it for years – just watch any ritualistic voodoo video and you’ll see the similarities. This alone should be cause for alarm.

But as it often happens, God’s people have the tendency to interpret Scripture based on their experiences instead of interpreting their experiences in light of God’s Word; and so what we have here is an instance where objective truth has been replaced with subjective experience. Some turn to Scripture. But when they do, it’s only to find verses that’ll satisfy their preconceived notions. In other words, they’re going to read into Scripture what they want it to say rather than what it teaches.

But many see this as a legitimate outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and because of this, anyone expressing doubt or hesitation is often ostracized. Valid and legitimate questions are often viewed as personal insults and an attack on their ministry. And so what we have here are people who don’t want to be questioned about a belief of which they have no biblical evidence and in turn accuse and malign those who do. This is further complicated by those who’d testify of its benefits. But ironically, the verses used to justify this practice are the very ones that condemn it – those, and many more. Yes, the Holy Spirit can do unusual things. But as we’ll soon see, this practice isn’t so unusual that it’s escaped the mind of God. And so what follows is a biblical study of slaying, or being slain, in the Spirit. It’s a common practice heralded by many as a sign of the presence of God. But in reality, it’s nothing more than a lie and a deception. But let’s have a closer look.

Their Proofs

Gen. 15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

The whole of Genesis 15 was a prophetic event designed to teach Abram (and us) about the coming Messiah. The smoking furnace walking between the animal halves was God while the torch was Jesus Christ – the Light of the world (cf. Ex. 19:18; Jn. 1:1-14).

Now, covenants are established by blood. But God is a Spirit, and so God was showing Abram that one day he was going to become a man in the personage of Jesus Christ!

But the fowls (Satan) came and attempted to take away the sacrifice. Seeing this, Abram jumps up and begins to shoo them away. This displeased the Lord because had he allowed it to continue, it would have left man with the impression that God needs man’s help in securing his

salvation (i.e. salvation by works). And not wanting this, God puts Abram to sleep, but allows him to witness the ceremony in a vision. All throughout the Bible God deals with people in dreams and visions, and so this shouldn't seem unusual.

But as it pertains to the subject at hand, did you notice that Abram was put to sleep for disciplinary reasons? So if you want to use this as an example of people being slain in the Spirit, then you *must* teach that it's done for disciplinary reasons. And unlike those slain in the Spirit can testify, Abram actually (later) received something tangible from the Lord: a son and promises of a great nation!

Gen. 17:1-3 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,...

The LORD has again appeared to Abram. And when he does, Abram falls *on his face*; i.e., he fell *forward*. Not backward! Later, he again fell on his face in v. 17. And he didn't fall because of the overwhelming presence of God, but in laughter due to the humor he saw in such an old couple being able to produce a child. And as opposed to those who are slain, Abram *never lost consciousness*. He in fact held a conversation.

Josh. 5:13-15 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

Joshua has met the captain of the LORD's host: Jesus (this Angel received worship!). And when he realized to whom he was speaking, he reacted in a manner befitting any good Christian: he fell *face-forward* in worship! And after prostrating himself, he spoke, and there's no indication that he ever lost consciousness – as those who are slain do.

2 Chr. 5:13-14 It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Solomon has completed the Temple and God has descended and filled it with his glory – so much so that the priests couldn't "stand to minister" due to the intensity of the cloud.¹ But just because the priests couldn't "stand to minister" doesn't mean they were slain. The verse itself

¹ Cf. 1 Ki. 8:10-12; 2 Chr. 7:1-3. These corroborate this view.

tells you why they couldn't minister: it was because of the cloud and darkness (2 Chr. 6:1). In addition, the Hebrew word for "stand" could just have as equally been translated as "serve," which makes perfect sense because *you can't serve when you can't see!*

Also, the priests were the Bible teachers of their day. So if you want to use this as an example of people being slain in the Spirit, then not only should you be teaching that a cloud and darkness must appear, but that it's the ministers who should be falling down and not those in the congregation! And in reading the rest of the passage, you'll discover that others were also present with no indication that any of them ever fell down.

Eze. 1:28-2:2 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. ^{2:1}And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. ^{2:2}And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.

Having seen the glory of the LORD, Ezekiel falls *forward* on his face in worship. He's then told to stand up. And as he does, the Spirit of the Lord enters into him and sets him up on his feet *so that he could hear better*. So from this example we're reminded that God's people fall forward, that the Spirit lifts rather than knocks down, and that God is desirous to engage in a real-life conversation as opposed to us lying comatose on the ground. Simply put, the Spirit of God lifts God's people up, it doesn't knock them down – quite the contrast to being slain. Many of these same examples occur later in Ezekiel Chapters 43 and 44.

Dan. 8:15-18 And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright.

Dan. 10:8-11 Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.

Under the weight of the presence of God's Word, Daniel falls *forward* and into a deep sleep. He's then brought to his knees and stood upright so that he could engage in conversation – he's brought to "understand." Again, vastly different from what we're being led to believe today.

Mt. 17:5-8² While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

Repeating the pattern of the Old Testament, Jesus' disciples reacted much the same as their brethren before them. This makes sense because God has always been consistent in his dealings with man, and so the response of God's people to him throughout the ages is also the same (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). When Peter and John heard God's voice, they too fell *forward* and there's absolutely no evidence that they ever lost consciousness. They could hear God speak. They could hear Jesus speak. And just as it was in the days of Old, they were quickly told to rise. When Jesus touched them, did they fall out "under the power?" No they didn't. Rather, along with his words, it brought peace and comfort. So as you can see, there just isn't any place for this practice.

Rev. 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Again, no evidence of falling backwards. John fell *forward* in worship at Jesus' feet. He could hear and so that would rule out any thought of him being unconscious. And falling at the feet of Jesus as though dead isn't the same thing as being unconscious. Many become paralyzed with fear or emotionally overwhelmed in certain circumstances, and so this shouldn't come as a surprise. One day we too will react much the same, and so there's no reason to read into this any more than what's stated (Php. 2:5-11).

Remember, these are the verses that *they* offer as proof of people being slain the spirit. But upon closer examination, it's easy to see that there's a vast difference between what they say and what the Bible teaches. So when they approach Scripture, it isn't to test their experiences, but to prove their point by twisting them into saying what they want them to say, thus deceiving themselves as they attempt to deceive others.

But What of Those Who DO Fall Backwards?

Jn. 18:4-7 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

When asked who he was, Jesus answered "I Am" (Ex. 3:14). By this he was identifying himself as God (come in the flesh), and the authority of that statement caused these unregenerate men

² Cf. Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-10; Lu. 9:28-36 for greater detail.

to fall *backwards*. But in this mixed crowd, note that it was only the unregenerate who fell backward and NOT Jesus' disciples. Also note that there's no evidence of them ever losing consciousness (they began to question him after getting back up) nor was there a change of heart (they got right back up and promptly arrested him; vv. 12-13). So despite the claims that the Spirit is doing a mighty work in you while you're lying flat on the floor unconscious, this and other examples prove otherwise.

Acts 9:3-9 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

If this is to be accepted as an example of people being slain in the spirit, then you must also teach that it equally affects lost people with no requirement for a change of heart once they've revived. Scripture doesn't say which direction Saul (Paul) fell. No one touched him to cause him to fall, and there's no indication that he lost consciousness. And when Jesus gave a command, it was to "arise" and not fall down.

But there's more. You must also teach that a bright light revealing the glory of Jesus will appear, that you'll go blind, and that the unsaved around you can hear God's voice but are under no conviction to repent (Saul was travelling with a bunch of Christians of whom he was actively persecuting!). This sounds absurd, and it is – because it is! But this is being taught and practiced as truth. And unfortunately, many are succumbed by it.

But there were those who did fall *backwards* in the Bible, but it was always in judgment or as a testimony against them. Consult the following.

Gen. 49:17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

1 Sam. 4:18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he [Eli] fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Ps. 40:13-14 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me. Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil.

Is. 1:4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

Is. 28:13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

Jer. 7:24 But they [Israel] hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.

Jer. 15:6 Thou [Jerusalem] hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.

Jn. 18:6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they [those who came to arrest Jesus] went backward, and fell to the ground.

As you can see, falling backward in the Bible is reserved for those under some form of judgment or involved in some sort of sin. There are many false prophets and teachers operating freely in the church today and there are many Christians who've been caught up in their dissimulation. Fortunately, God's Word provides us with the answers we need to live a spirit-filled life full of obedience – if we choose to believe it.

The Laying On of Hands

People who “slay” often do so by the laying on of hands. Sometimes they wave their hand or blow on people. But no matter how it's done, the end result is the same. Listed below is virtually every instance in which Jesus or his disciples laid their hands on people and the subsequent result. In contrast to what we see today, the Bible doesn't reveal anything even remotely resembling slaying. And in *stark* contrast to what we see today, the Bible provides ample evidence that those who had hands laid on them actually received something.

- After Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law, she then *stood* and began to minister unto them (cp., Mt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:29-31; Lu. 4:38-39).
- Shortly after the above, Jesus laid his hands on those who were sick and healed every one (cp., Mt. 8:16-17; Mk. 1:32-34; Lu. 4:40-41).
- When Jesus healed a leper, he told him to go and offer a gift as a testimony to those who wouldn't believe (cp., Mt. 8:1-4; Mk. 1:40-44; Lu. 5:12-14). Perhaps those who are healed by the laying on of hands without being slain should go and offer a gift to those who are slaying people as a testimony against them and their inflated reports of those they've healed, or claimed to have healed as a result of their “ministry.”
- When Jesus laid hands on Jairus' daughter (cp., Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:21-43; Lu. 8:40-56), she came back to life and then stood and began to walk around. How often does this happen today when people are slain?

- In Matthew 9:27-31, Jesus touches the eyes of two blind men and they receive their sight. They then depart – conscious.
- At the time of Jesus’ second rejection in Nazareth, he again lays his hands on the people and heals them (cp., Mt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:1-6). No mention of any one being slain.
- When Jesus was asked to lay his hands on the children and to pray for them (cp., Mt. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-16; Lu. 18:15-17). None were slain.
- In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals the woman who had had an infirmity for 18 years. She then stood upright!
- In Matthew 15:29-31 (cf. Mk. 7:31-37), Jesus heals one who was deaf and had a speech impediment. He begins to speak and tell others of Christ. When we see people being slain, do they have such a testimony? Does it encourage them to testify of the true gospel or to speak of the signs and wonders performed by some minister?
- In Mark 8:22-26, Jesus heals a blind man by putting his hands on his eyes. People who are slain pass-out with their eyes closed. They can’t see half as well as this man can.
- On another occasion, Jesus once again heals two blind men – one of them being Bartimaeus (cp., Mt. 20:29-34; Mk. 10:46-52; Lu. 18:35-43). He touches their eyes and they begin to see. Their faith was in Jesus and it was that faith which caused them to see. Their faith wasn’t in signs and wonders, but in Jesus.
- In Luke 22:49-51, Jesus heals the man whose ear Peter had cut off.
- In Acts 6:1-6, deacons were chosen and the elders laid their hands upon them to commend them and their service to the Lord. They didn’t “fall out under the power.”
- In Acts 8:14-17, Peter and John lay hands on the people and they receive the Holy Ghost. No one “fell out under the power.”
- When Paul and Barnabus were separated by the Holy Spirit in Antioch (Acts 13:1-4), the elders laid their hands on them and commended them on their journey. No one fell.
- In Acts 19:1-7, Paul lays his hands on those who are desirous to receive the Holy Spirit and they do. No one fell. In fact, they began to speak in tongues and prophesy. So when those who lay their hands on others to be slain, how come they don’t begin to speak in tongues or prophesy, but rather fall down unconscious? The answer is obvious.
- On the island of Melita (Acts 28:7-10), Paul laid his hands on the sick and they recovered. No one “slain.”
- In issuing the Great Commission (cp., Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15-18), Jesus taught that we’d lay hands on the sick and they’d recover – not fall down risking personal injury.
- In calling for the elders of the church to pray for those who are sick, there is no mention of this (Ja. 5:13-15).

So as you can see, the laying on of hands has nothing to do with slaying people in or by the Holy Spirit. It’s just that simple.

But How Do They Do This?

People have the tendency to conform to the thoughts and actions of those around them, especially those new to a group or area. So when exposed to something like this for any length

of time, the tendency is to conform. Everyone wants to be liked, and there exists the real fear of being accused of “making waves” or “causing division.” Or even worse, being accused of “interfering with the work of the Holy Spirit.” And so the tendency is to say nothing. I mean, how can so many people be so wrong about something for so long!? The answer is, easily. And so while it begins with peer pressure, it’s only the start.

Peer pressure is closely followed by the need to place people into a hyper-suggestible state of mind: a point at which their minds are so open to all that’s around them that they’ll accept the mere suggestion of anything. This is where both anticipation and expectation have become fever-pitched. For those who believe in this, they’ve already predisposed themselves to “falling for it” (pun intended) because they see it as a legitimate move of the Holy Spirit and don’t want to be left out. For those more doubtful, they need to be convinced. So they’re told to come to church “expecting,” to “stay until they get something from God;” that God wants to do “something special” and that *you* “don’t want to miss it,” etc.

This is closely followed by “atmospherics.” Large crowds produce their own energy and enhance peer pressure and the service itself helps bring people into a hyper-suggestible state of mind. Low lighting and long services accompanied by protracted mantra-like singing helps to dull the senses and numb the mind. So when someone’s brought on stage, whether through the excitement of expectancy or exhaustion from the dull droning, they just faint. Of course many have been slain in less than ideal conditions, and there are many who’d still testify of its benefits. But this is all moot because the Word of God teaches that it’s a work of the flesh and not of the Spirit – *if* you believe the Bible, that is. And so the simple question is, Are we going to interpret God’s Word by our experiences or are we going to let our experiences be interpreted by God’s Word?

Needless to say there’s all kinds of problems with this. To begin, there’s an assumption that God is going to show up and perform the miraculous. This is presumptuous. Second, it gives the impression that God is there and that if you’re slain, then you’re spiritual. Third, it gives the impression that God is there and that if you’re not slain, then God isn’t pleased with you and that you’re not very spiritual. Fourth, it encourages an unhealthy loyalty to the preacher or a particular body of believers because it appears that “they’ve got the Holy Ghost.” But the focus here is on man and not God. Many religious leaders have set themselves up as the religious equivalent of Hollywood movie stars. And just like them, they have their groupies and devotees that will follow and defend them no matter what they do – just like what the secular world does. Don’t believe me? Try and get them to open their Bibles and consider the information provided in this study. We *should* go to church expecting, but not like this.

Other Observations

- There is no sort or type of “slain in the Spirit” phraseology found in the Bible.
- There’s no biblical cases showing that being “slain” was sought or expected.
- No hand contact was ever made which caused men to fall.

- There' no biblical account of anyone being "slain" repeatedly on the same occasion much less more than once at separate times.
- There's no biblical evidence given to show that this ever occurred in the NT church.
- Nowhere in Scripture does anyone ever serve as a "catcher." Are we to conclude that the Holy Spirit has the power to knock people down but no power to "catch" them?
- The only people who fell to the ground in the NT were demon possessed.³
- When Jesus was baptized and the Spirit descended upon him, it lifted him up out of the water and not the other way around (cf. Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lu. 3:21-22). And if there was anyone in the Bible who would have been slain, it would have been Jesus and it would have been on this occasion.
- Jesus performed all of his miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 5:19-20; 14:10 etc); and yet, not once did he or any others line people up and have them fall out "under the power" nor did Jesus himself ever "fall out" to "receive an anointing."
- Being found in the presence of God or an angel, the response was that of godly fear and awe, not laughter. Hence, God's opinion of "holy laughter."
- Joel 2:28-32 cannot be used as justification for this practice because the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all flesh is defined as the indwelling and baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).
- Practitioners of voodoo have been documented producing this same affect. Duh!?

Conclusion

From the verses used to justify this practice, note that on every occasion they occur in the literal presence of God, Jesus Christ, or an angel; but nowhere at any time was such power given to men to cause another to be slain. Nowhere. Hence, from *their* own examples, practitioners of this are subtly claiming to be God because they're claiming to issue forth a power of which they themselves are not subject: they're claiming to issue forth a power that's been solely reserved for God while in his presence and not the presence of other men, and so these evildoers are claiming to be "gods," even if they don't realize it. The Bible speaks of them and their work(s).

Gal. 5:19-23 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Based on the above, Scripture teaches that we should be temperate and sober and not drunk.⁴ To be drunk is to be incorrigible, without inhibition, and lacking motor skills. To be full of the

³ See the demon-possessed boy (cf. Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14-29; Lu. 9:37-43) and the man at the Gadarenes (cf. Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20; Lu. 8:26-39).

⁴ E.g. 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 5:4-9; Tit. 2:1-6; 1 Pet. 1:13, 4:7, 5:8 cp. Eph. 5:18

Spirit is to be temperate and under the authority and control of the Holy Spirit. Being drunk and being filled with the Spirit are two completely separate thoughts that should never be confused with one another. And yet, many would have us believe that we're to be "drunk" in the Spirit, willing to lower our inhibitions to "receive" all that God would give us as we lay on the floor, passed out in a drunken stupor – all under the guise of being "slain in the spirit."

But other excesses have been reported. They range from the usual episodes of fainting and falling backward to the more grotesque including uncontrollable spasmodic movements, lewd behavior, animalistic noises, yelling, and crying out. This would be funny if it wasn't so serious. The joy of the Lord is our strength, not our weakness (Neh. 8:10). But we've given ourselves over to following signs and wonders instead of allowing them to follow us as a sign to the unbelieving thus bringing shame to our Lord and hurt to our testimony. Signs and wonders should follow the believer (Mk. 16:15-20), but it's also true that we are to test the spirits (1 Jn. 4:1), lay hands on no man suddenly (1 Tim. 5:22), and to know those who labor among us (1 Thess. 5:12). But given the popularity of being "slain," it will no doubt remain for quite some time. And to our detriment, the admonition above will go unheeded. Simply put: slaying people in the Spirit is a work of the flesh and not a work of God. Not so much of a phenomena, is it? Selah.