Disembodied Spirits

Little in our culture addresses existence after death. The Bible, however, has a lot to say on the subject. It tracks the deaths and resurrections of the righteous in enough detail that we are able to layout when and where these resurrections take place. The Bible also provides significant information about heaven and the new heavens and earth. Great things, biblically speaking, are in store for believers! The Bible even provides information about our condition during the time between death and the bodily resurrection. 2 Corinthians 5 is the central passage and it assures us that we will not be disembodied spirits.

But what about the unbelieving dead? The information that the Bible provides is a bit sketchy and at the same time quite terrifying. Luke 16 provides a picture of suffering and torment, as do other passages. But are the unbelieving dead disembodied spirits, or do they have a temporary body that is replaced with a permanent body at the “resurrection” of the unjust at the Great White Throne judgment in Rev. 20? I came across an interesting passage in Proverbs 2:18. The context is warning a young man about immorality; verse 18 says “Her house leads to death, and her paths are to the spirits of the departed.” The term I’ve translated “spirits of the departed” is “Rephaim.” The Hebrew dictionaries agree that the term refers to a shadowy, ghost-like entity, not having material substance. Not counting the Rephaites (giants in the land) or the valley by the same name, there are just 8 places in the OT where this term is used to refer to the unbelieving dead. Isaiah 14:9 is interesting, referring to the King of Babylon, who is the coming Anti-Christ; the shadowy, disembodied spirits are stirred up at his arrival in Sheol. The Scriptures seem to indicate the unbelieving dead will be disembodied spirits in torment until the Great White Throne.

Looking at the penalties for failing to believe in Jesus, I’d say God takes the option of salvation through faith in Jesus quite seriously. “Whoever believes in me, has everlasting life,” John 6:47. That seems like a great choice!

My love to you all,

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