Imprisoned Spirits

Sometimes we hear someone referred to as a “free spirit.” While that may be an apt description of someone who lives life on their own terms, an “imprisoned spirit” may be their destiny after death.

“…that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, (19) by whom also He went and preached to the **spirits in prison**, (20) who formerly were disobedient…while the ark was being prepared….” 1 Peter 3:18-20

Peter refers to people alive during Noah’s time as disobedient. The term “disobedient” would better be translated as “to refuse or to withhold belief” (Thayer). For 120 years Noah preached his heart out with dismal results. Only 8 people believed. Since it had never rained before, the announcement of a looming flood would have seemed absurd. It took Noah a loooong time to build a waterproof box more than 500’ long, 80’ wide, and 50’ tall. His coffee breaks from building included sermons to his world. Currently 4-5 million people each year visit the Ark Encounter in Williamstown, KY; my guess is that far more visited Noah’s theme park.

My interest here is the spirits in prison. “Spirits” refers to dead people, as in Hebrews 12:9 or 12:23. Some understand the reference to be the angels that cohabited with women in Genesis 6, but the larger context is suffering and escaping judgment in this life as believers. It seems best to see “spirits” as people who were alive when Noah was preaching, but having died in the flood, they are now in prison. “Prison” is an appropriate description of Hades. Through the Holy Spirit (the “whom” of vs. 19 is neuter and refers to the spirit; “spirit” in Greek is neuter), Christ through Noah announced to the world an opportunity to be delivered from destruction, but they would not believe. Also, please notice the strong connection between the Spirit of God and the person of Christ; if the Holy Spirit is speaking through Noah, it is the same as if Christ were doing the work.

While it may be an enticing thought to live as a free spirit, failure to believe in Jesus results in a prison sentence. Those in prison are awaiting final sentencing at the Great White Throne Judgment. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world; He rose again to prove His death was all that was needed for Him to give the gift of everlasting life to all who believe in Him. Not believing is why people arrive at the Great White Throne, but the extent of punishment in the Lake of Fire is determined by the deeds they did while alive. I am thankful for the 8 persons who believed Noah’s message. The people and animals of our world today should thank Noah and his family for believing God’s message.