**Ghosts**

Ghost stories provide the basis for a lot of popular novels and Hollywood films, and some folks are convinced that there are dead people wandering around, haunting places of some special significance during their lives on earth. What do the Scriptures say?

**The General Rule:** Perhaps the clearest picture God has granted us of the fate of spirits after they leave these mortal bodies is found in Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. A destitute, righteous man named Lazarus died and his spirit went to a place of comfort. The rich man who uncaringly stepped over Lazarus every day also died and lifted up his eyes, being in torment. The Greek words behind Hades and Hell are not the same and the two places are totally different. Hades is the abode of departed spirits and Hell is the place of eternal punishment to which wicked souls will be sentenced at Judgment. As it turns out in Jesus’ lesson, there is a great gulf fixed between the place of comfort and the place of torment in Hades; no crossing over. Further, God seemed to have no inclination to send anyone back to earth. Their fate appears fixed.

**The Exceptions:** There are two occasions in Scripture on which God chose to allow departed souls to communicate with those still living on the earth. One was on the mount of transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared to discuss with Jesus His impending death. The other was in the days of Saul. Samuel had already died and God had deserted Saul because of his rebellion. Saul became so desperate as to seek out a medium who could conjure up the spirit of Samuel so he could inquire about the immediate Philistine threat (1 Samuel 28). It is important to note that the medium seemed shocked when Samuel actually appeared.

**So What About Mediums?** It’s true that mediums and spiritists were condemned in the Law of Moses and those folks were to be eliminated from among the Israelite people (Leviticus 19:31). I can’t tell you definitively what a medium 3,000 years ago was capable of, but simply *claiming* to conjure up the dead was enough to incur the wrath of God whether or not there was any power behind the claims. I believe Samuel appeared to Saul to pronounce judgment on him because God allowed him to. Luke 16 makes it clear that God is in control of our spirits after we die and any exception to our remaining in the abode He created for us would have to be according to His will.

I like a good ghost story as much as the next guy, but when I’m wandering through a dark room, the least of my worries is that God has somehow lost track of one of His spirits.

**It’s the Living Who Should Concern Us** There are lots of folks around us who are in the same condition as the rich man before he died: stumbling through lives of rebellion against the God who created them and oblivious to the destruction that awaits them at the end of this life if they don’t change the road they are on (Mt. 7:13-14). We may not be able to convince them of the danger, but we have to try. Luke 16 presents a terrifying scene and every individual deserves the opportunity to avoid the rich man’s fate. Jacob Marley won’t appear to them; the task is up to us.

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