If my publisher agrees that my next book can/should be “The Invention of the Afterlife” (or whatever we call it) I will, as you might suspect, be thinking a lot about heaven and hell over the next couple of years. I’ve already been thinking a lot about them over the past six months as I’ve been reading broadly on the topic. I’m NOT, of course, mainly reading about what REALLY happens to us when we die. No one knows that.

Or maybe I should rephrase that. There are a lot of people who *think* they know that, but in my opinion no one does. Most of the books I’ve been reading are about what people have *thought* about heaven and hell over the past three thousand years. I’m interested in knowing where current thinking came from – since what is now “common sense” in some circles was never dreamed of for most of human history.

There are some people, of course, who argue that their views are not simply common sense – that is, views handed to them by their environment and upbringing – but are based on actual authorities who can be trusted to know the truth. That is what most conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Bible-believing scholars think. They maintain that their views are what the Bible teaches, and therefore that they are based on an impeccable source, God himself.

What is interesting is that even people within that camp...

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