

THE END TIMES

Hell

Hell! For many people today, that word has become a part of their daily vocabulary. Sometimes they use it to describe the weather. Sometimes they wish that those they don't like would go there. And sometimes they just use it to describe a bad experience. Sadly, few of these people seem to have any respect for the word or the place. That word used in jest today may one day take on significance far greater than they might even begin to imagine.

On a survey Web site, there was posed the question, "Is there a hell and a heaven?" Some of the responses included: "Hell and heaven have no purpose." "They are terms used to scare people." "I don't think anybody can confirm it because present-day science can neither accept nor reject it." "Heaven and hell are only in our hearts." "Hell is the common grave of mankind, quiet and nothing goes on there."

In 2003 the Barna Research Group (www.barna.org) also conducted a survey about life after death.

76% believe that heaven exists, and 71% said there is such a thing as hell.

64% believe they will go to heaven while only .5% (half of one percent) expect they will go to hell.

And . . . the more wealthy and better educated the responders, the less likely they were to believe in a heaven and hell.

These are man's statistics, not God's. Yet they reveal the startling facts that over one-fourth of Americans (over 80 million) believe Satan's lie that there is no hell and less than 1% of all who claim there is a hell expect that it might be in their future. Perhaps that is because most people would rather not think of hell at all. They desperately try to block that horrible place from their minds.

So, what is this place called hell?

DISCUSS: At Halloween many children and adults dress up as Satan. How do you feel about taking the idea of Satan and hell as lighthearted fun?

THE TERM *hell*

Study of this horrible place is not something the Christian cherishes. Yet the Bible makes it very clear that hell is a reality and not something that can simply be denied. Scripture is filled with names and descriptions of hell and the pain and torment that takes place there. There is not enough space to cover all the descriptions of hell, but they include:

A place of

Wrath and anger (Romans 2:8)

Agony (Luke 16:24)

Torment (Luke 16:23)

Unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43)

Darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12)

Eternal fire (Matthew 25:41)

Burning sulfur (Revelation 14:10)

No rest (Revelation 14:11)

For ever and ever (Revelation 20:10)

Lake of fire (Revelation 20:15)

Where the worm will not die (Isaiah 66:24)

Everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

Eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46)

Fiery furnace (Matthew 13:42)

Shame, everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2)

No escape (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

The very term *hell* has an interesting background. Would it surprise you to know that the word *hell* is never mentioned in the Old Testament? In fact, the exact terminology used in the Old Testament to depict hell is somewhat unclear. The Old Testament Hebrew term used to describe the pit, hell, or the grave is *Sheol*, a word difficult to define. The Old Testament writers used the word *Sheol* 65 times. In nearly every instance, the word is synonymous with the New Testament term *hades*, thus we might consider them for the most part to have the same meaning.

- Deuteronomy 32:22 "For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death (*Sheol*) below."
- Psalm 49:14 "Like sheep they are destined for the grave (*Sheol*), and death will feed on them."
- Proverbs 15:24 "The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave (*Sheol*)."

The Greek New Testament uses three terms for the concept of hell: *Hades*, *Gehenna*, and *Tartarus*. *Hades* is the Greek term for *Sheol* in the Hebrew. Again the meaning is the place for the condemned.

- Luke 10:15 "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths (*Hades*)."
- Luke 16:22,23 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In *hell* (*Hades*), where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side."

The word *Gehenna* is also used about a dozen times in the New Testament. It literally means "The Valley of Hinnom." This valley, or ravine, was wellknown to those living in Jerusalem at the time of Christ. It was located just southwest of the city and was considered a most cursed place due to its unbelievable history. We find this valley mentioned several times in the Old Testament as the place where children were sacrificed as part of the worship for the heathen god Molech.

- Josiah destroyed this despicable place in 2 Kings 23:10: "He desecrated Topheth (a place within the valley), which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so that no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech." (Cross reference Jeremiah 7:31-33.)

At the time of Jesus, the valley was the garbage dump for the city. Here the refuse, waste parts of butchered animals, dead animals, and even the bodies of criminals were dumped and set on fire. The stench from this place was horrendous, and the fires burned without stopping. Thus the term *Gehenna* became a synonym for hell, a place of unquenchable fire.

- Matthew 5:22 "But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of *hell* (*Gehenna*)."
- Matthew 10:28 "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in *hell* (*Gehenna*)."
- Matthew 23:33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to *hell* (*Gehenna*)?"

Tartarus is mentioned only once in Scripture by the apostle Peter. *Tartarus* was considered the lowest part of the underworld, or hell, and it was reserved especially for the rebellious angels.

- 2 Peter 2:4 "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to *hell* (*Tartarus*), putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment..."

Regardless of the terms used in Scripture, it is an undisputed fact that there truly is a real place set aside for everyone, both people and fallen angels, who rejected the love and life offered by our good and gracious God. We call it hell.

DISCUSS: Why do people try to deny the existence of hell?