

Whatever Happened to Hell?

What people think about hell?

Barna Research Group, October 2003

A new study from the Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, shows that most people have retained surprisingly traditional views about life after death.

Belief in life after death, like the existence of God, is widely embraced: 8 out of 10 Americans (81%) believe in an afterlife of some sort.

In all, 76% believe that Heaven exists, while nearly the same proportion said that there is such a thing as Hell (71%).

While there is no dominant view of Hell, two particular perspectives are popular. Four out of ten adults believe that Hell is "a state of eternal separation from God's presence" (39%) and one-third (32%) says it is "an actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death." A third perspective that one in eight adults believe is that "Hell is just a symbol of an unknown bad outcome after death" (13%). Other respondents were "not sure" or said they that they do not believe in an afterlife (16%).

Most Americans do not expect to experience Hell first-hand: just one-half of 1% expect to go to Hell upon their death. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) believe they will go to Heaven. One in 20 adults (5%) claim they will come back as another life form, while the same proportion (5%) contend they will simply cease to exist.

Even though most Americans believe in life after death and the existence of the soul, not everyone is clear about their own ultimate destination. One in every four adults (24%) admitted that they have "no idea" what will happen after they die.

Millions of Americans have redefined grace to mean that God is so eager to save people from Hell that He will change His nature and universal principles for their individual benefit."

Definitions

Universalism: In the end, God will save everybody and take them to be with him.

Annihilationism: All lost people will be annihilated, they will quickly be burned up and be consciously destroyed.

Postmortem evangelism: People will die, hear the gospel and be saved from hell after their death.

Reincarnation: people will come back in some other life.

What some theologians say

Origen (185–ca. 254): Early Christian scholar, theologian, and one of the most distinguished of the early fathers of the Christian Church. He believed in a total and ultimate restitution of all things and all persons. He was a pioneer in universalism.

Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (January 27, 1832 – January 14, 1898): Carroll wrote *Alice in Wonderland* and was the son of an Anglican minister, and was one himself. He stated that if the Bible really taught the doctrine of eternal punishment, “I would give up the Bible.”

Frederic William Farrar (1831 - 1903), educated at King William's College in the Isle of Man, London University and University of Cambridge, was for some years a master at Harrow, and from 1871-76 Master (headmaster) of Marlborough College. Farrar didn't want to save people from the punishment of Hell, he wanted to save them from the fear of the idea of hell.

Rudolf Karl Bultmann (August 20, 1884 - July 30, 1976) was a German theologian of Lutheran background, who was for three decades professor of New Testament studies at the University of Marburg. According to Bultmann, the teachings of the Bible were incompatible with a modern scientific worldview.

Karl Barth (May 10, 1886 – December 10, 1968) was an influential Swiss Reformed Christian theologian. He was a universalist, or a neo-universalist.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (February 4, 1906 – April 9, 1945) was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and participant in the German resistance movement against Nazism and founding member of the Confessing Church.

Pope John Paul II redefined hell in 1999 in the General Audience at the Vatican. He said “Hell is not a punishment imposed externally by God, but the condition resulting from the attitudes and actions which people adopt in this life.”

John R. W. Stott, CBE is a British Christian leader and Anglican clergyman who is noted as a leader of the worldwide evangelical movement. He is an annihilationist.

F. F. Bruce (12 October 1910 – 11 September 1990) was a Bible scholar, and one of the founders of the modern evangelical understanding of the Bible. He is an annihilationist.

What we think about hell...

That public opinion polls can determine truth.

Whatever the most people believe, that determines truth.

Hell can't be anymore removed by public opinion than can the law of gravity.

What the Bible says about hell.

The Old Testament

Daniel 12:2

2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt

Jesus Christ

Matthew 5: 29

9If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matthew 18:8, 9

8If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. 9And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Matthew 10:24-28

28Do 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.

Luke 12:5;

5But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

Mark 9:43-45, 48 “the worm and the fire feed forever on the damned”

43If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. 45And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 47And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

Matthew 25:46

45''He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46''Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.''

As long as the life is, that's how long the punishment is.

Paul

2 Thess 1:8-9

8He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

Revelation

Revelation 14:11

11And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

Revelation 19:3

*Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
2for true and just are his judgments.
He has condemned the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.
He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." 3And again they shouted:
"Hallelujah!
The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."*

Revelation 20: 7-8; 10

10And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

13The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Final thoughts about hell

Luke 16:23-31

Hell is a place of torments and agony, 16:23-24

Hell has "flames," 16:24

Hell is a place of conscious thought and memory, 16:25

Hell is a place of no escape, 16:26

Hell is a place where you would not want friends and family to go, 16:28

What you should do about hell.

John 3:16-17; 36

16"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ... 36Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Believe it is as real and eternal as heaven

Believe that you are already under God's wrath and headed for hell.

Believe Jesus died as a substitute.

Turn from your sin to faith in Jesus Christ