



## GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

Subject: Hell

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### HAS HELL LOST ITS SIZZLE?

*Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Revelation 20:14*

Has hell lost its sizzle? Or has it? It all depends on whom you listen to, and accordingly, fewer and fewer people believe it really exists. Years ago, the Puritan preacher by the name of Jonathan Edwards held a manuscript before his weakened eyes and preached his famous sermon known as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Many of those who heard him fell to their knees and cried out in anguish and fear, asking God to save them from hell. But hell has lost its dread for many people. Frankly, hell has about entirely lost its sizzle.

Muslims disagree as to whether hell is a location or a state of mind, but, regardless of which they opt for, most Muslims believe it is not a permanent state. While Orthodox Jews believe in a literal, short-term hell, their conservative brothers disbelieve that hell is a reality. They simply talk of a world to come which you merit by good behavior or else forfeit by wrongdoing.

Christians are divided. While liberals may sprinkle the word in their vocabulary (especially when they hit their thumb with a hammer), few of them actually believe in a place as hell. Evangelical Christians hold to a hell as being the antithesis of heaven, but they are sharply divided on what hell really is. And few of them have much to say about it. Preaching on hell just doesn't win friends and influence donors.

Understanding that hell isn't a concept which people like to hear about, most ministers focus on felt needs--how to be happy and peaceful, how to be successful in life, how to get along with your neighbors and get the pay increase which you have been coveting. Keeping people happy is never a threat to a minister's retirement pension--something not lost on more than a few professionals today.

Is there really a hell? Regardless of what people may think or say, if there is one and it is anything like that which Jesus described, those who have failed to inform us of that fact have done humanity a great disservice. On the other hand, if Christians over a period of 2000 years have been misled and eventually discover there is no literal hell, they shouldn't mind greatly since most of them seem rather happy in life anyway.

Anyone who picks up a New Testament and candidly reads it, has to agree that Jesus spoke of hell as a real place, one which ought to be avoided at all cost. The language he used was neither figurative nor allegorical.

When Jesus spoke of hell, one of the words he used was *Gehenna*, from the valley of Hinnom, which was the garbage dump of Jerusalem. In this spot, the fires of burning refuse and garbage were never fully extinguished. He told his disciples, "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" (Matthew 10:28).

In the last reference to both heaven and hell which came from Jesus before the cross, he used the same Greek word *aión* in describing them both as eternal (See Matthew 25:46).

Of one thing we can be relatively certain. No matter what hell is, it means eternal separation from the loving God who sent His son that men might have life. As John wrote, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). Undoubtedly this is God's intent and purpose.

Resource reading: Revelation 20:11-15