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Christian clerics from northeast India are traveling to foreign countries to help revive the faith and fill shortages within Baptist and Presbyterian churches, the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) reported. The demand for these leaders comes as a result of a sharp decline in ordained ministers to perform traditional ministry duties such as marriages and funerals. “We have about 150 pastors from the northeast preaching the gospel and assisting dying churches in countries like the

U.S., China, Thailand, Cambodia and other countries," said the Rev. Ngul Khan Pau, general secretary of the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India. According to IANS, many of India's clerics believe the influx of ministers to foreign nations such as the U.S. is a "thanksgiving gesture," acknowledging Americans' missions work in India. "It is an irony that our Christian ministers are now spreading the message of Jesus Christ in a country whose missionaries sowed the seeds of Christianity in the northeast [of India]," Pau said.

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# European Church Fuses Faith, Politics

**Ukraine-based pastor Sunday Adelaja says the church should help change cultures, politics and economics**

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# Buzz

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# To Hell and Back

**When Bill Wiese says he's been to hell, he isn't using a metaphor. He says he saw and felt its horrors for 23 minutes.**

At exactly 3:23 a.m. on November 22, 1998, Annette Wiese awoke

to her husband's screams. Rushing down the hall of their Santa Ana, California, home to the living room, she found him lying on the floor in a fetal position, his hands grasping at the sides of his head, begging her to pray for him. After he drank several glasses of water, Bill Wiese explained in gasps to his wife that God had taken him into hell.

Wiese had spent 23 minutes in a fiery pit that many people, including some Christians, don't believe exists.

"It was terrible," he says. "I was thinking: This has to end—I can't endure this, I have to get out.

"Only, in hell, you understand you're never going to get out. You're going to spend eternity here."

The visit, chronicled in Wiese's recent book, 23 Minutes in Hell, started an evangelistic journey for the couple that is growing each day. It began with Wiese's speaking about hell first in home Bible studies, then in churches, and now includes radio and TV appearances by the author.

After Charisma House released his book in February, speaking offers poured in from around the world. Wiese says readers are distributing the book "like tracts" to unsaved loved ones. Each day several people e-mail him to say it has brought them or a friend to Christ.

Today the Wieses are getting their newly founded Soul Choice Ministries under way and say they are "transitioning" out of their comfortable jobs in Southern California's cushy Orange County to deliver the eye-opening message full time. "It's not an easy transition to make," Bill Wiese says. "It's a little bit scary, but we know this is the year we are called to make it."

## An 'Unlikely' Choice

Sitting in a hotel restaurant a few blocks from Disneyland in

Anaheim, California, the polished, poised and dressed-to-preach couple explain their new direction.

“Our heart is that we want to be in ministry full time,” Annette Wiese says. “We know we’ve reached the point where we have to put together a formal ministry and move forward with that.”

That the Wieses see themselves as chosen by God to deliver a message about hell—a hotly debated topic among Christians—is paradoxical. It’s not the kind of calling you might expect for this couple.

Both are longtime Christians from highly functional middle-class families. Both have an uncommon normalcy about them. Neither had a prophetic inkling of the event Bill would go through or their subsequent call to evangelism.

Annette grew up in Seattle and Southern California, and Bill, son of an insurance salesman, grew up in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Each is the second oldest of five siblings and was previously married with no children.

They met nine years ago in the Irvine, California, church they still attend. They’ve been married eight years. Both work in real estate—Bill as owner of a real estate brokerage firm that resells homes and Annette with a company that builds new homes.

Annette is polite, perky and quick to laugh. Bill is soft-spoken, methodical, studious and nicknamed “Mr. Starch” by the youth drawn to his message. Before that frightful night in 1998, he taught a Bible class and led worship at his church but says he “never liked the microphone and being in the front.”

“I’ve always been one to gravitate toward the scholastic and conservative end,” Bill says. “Then, what happened grouped me into another class and maybe made me into something that was

not so conservative, even a little bit wild."

He has become something of a spiritual Superman. He's changed from a mild-mannered, retiring, faithful-but-not-on-fire Christian version of Clark Kent into a fearless champion of the truth he believes in. He's willing to take on the villains of skepticism, false doctrine and modern Christianity's distaste for the subject of hell.

It's not like him.

"That's opposite of my nature," he notes. "It's a bit contrary to who I am to talk about a vision [of hell]. If I were given my choices, I would have chosen heaven and not hell."

Why God selected him remains a mystery to him. He offers the thought that God often chooses the most unlikely person for the job—from Moses to Gideon to the apostle Paul.

"I asked, and He never gave me an answer," Wiese says of why he received the experience. "I'm no Billy Graham or Mother Teresa. I hate disorder and filth, and hell is filthy, disorderly and chaotic. It's loud from the screams, and I hate noise.

"The only possible reason I can think of is that God knew I would draw attention to His Word and point people to what the Word has to say and not just me."

Wiese says God made the reality more horrible by not letting him realize he was a Christian while he was in hell, though he's been a believer for many years. Afterward he was reluctant to even mention his experience to friends.

He was much more eager to research the Bible and other books on the subject by Christian authors to make sure the hell he experienced wasn't contrary to Scripture or widely accepted doctrine.

"To tell someone you've been to hell is pretty amazing," he

says. “I thought people were either going to think I’m crazy or had a bad dream. It wasn’t that I didn’t believe in visions. I just never thought one could happen to me.”

## Hell to Pay

Wiese allowed time for God to open the door for him to write a book about his experience. He used the time to conduct extensive research about his topic. A portion of his book is a study on the theology of hell.

Hell, he discovered, is under fire.

“The doctrine of hell has disappeared this century,” he says. “A lot of people seem to think, Well, I confessed the Lord and I can live my life anyway I want and I’m still saved.

“The fear of the Lord has left the church, and I think God wants to bring that back. He wants me to draw attention to His Word that says hell is real—not allegorical, but [a] literal burning hell—and people will go there if they don’t know Jesus as Lord and Savior.”

When Christ arrived and removed Wiese from hell, He commanded him to tell the world about the place. God, Wiese believes, wants the message delivered to the unsaved for salvation and to the church to invoke witnessing.

The description of Wiese’s 23-minute visit to hell is sobering enough to do both. “Here on earth, it’s impossible to know the hopelessness of hell,” he says. “Here on earth, even if things are terrible, you think you can die and get out.

“But there you can’t die. You have a body, but somehow it holds up under all the torment, and somehow you keep going. And you know you’re never, never going to get out.

“That’s the part that’s most tormenting. Hell is more horrific than anyone could ever imagine.”

His message stirs an adverse reaction in many people because it stems from his claim that hell is not a biblical metaphor but an actual place. The backlash is strong enough to make the Wieses prefer not to give the name of the church they attend or even talk in detail about what they say are some of the "over the top" e-mails they receive.

Bill was surprised when, during radio shows, some Christians called and said that although they are born again they don't believe there is a hell.

Other Christian callers quoted Matthew 25:41, saying hell is reserved for the devil and his demons and not for people. Many, he says, consider his message "highly offensive."

"Hell is reserved for the devil and his demons, but people go there if they don't accept Christ," he explains. "There are false doctrines out there."

**'Believe the Word'**

When Jesus arrived in hell and ascended with Wiese in tow from the center of the Earth into space, He gave him a vision—one in which people were dropping one by one into the pit he had just escaped. Wiese says he was allowed to feel Jesus' pain.

"I couldn't believe how sad it was for Him," he says. "I finally had to ask Him to stop allowing me to feel it. It was overwhelming.

"He loves us so much that when one person falls into hell, it saddens Him beyond belief," he explains. "It was terrible to feel what He felt but also wonderful to know that He loves us that much."

To those who say a loving God wouldn't send anyone to hell, Wiese says that God sent His only Son, His Word and even a person such as him to keep people out.

He points out that the hellfire and brimstone message

delivered by New England preacher Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” marked America’s First Great Awakening in the 18th century. Such preaching continued with Charles Finney and others in the Second Great Awakening a century later, he notes.

Wiese believes his message for the postmodern world is to be the same. He speaks it with passion, emphasizing each point with a biblical quote, complete with chapter and verse.

More than anything, he is motivated by his experience to continue telling people about the reality of hell.

“It’s not important they believe me,” he says of those who hear him preach. “It’s important they believe what the Word says.

“Just like [the apostle] Paul saw heaven, I saw hell,” he adds. “Hell is real, and I don’t want anyone to go there. I’ve got to do whatever my part is to help.”

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**Ed Donnally**, a former Dallas Morning News writer, is a Foursquare minister and chaplain. He serves as an associate pastor and works as the development director for an international chaplaincy ministry. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Sandi.

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