

To Hell and Back Again

Bill and Annette Wiese have been changed forever by 23 minutes of unthinkable horror.

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

At exactly 3:23 a.m. on Nov. 22, 1998, Annette Wiese awoke to her husband's screams. Rushing down the hall of their Santa Ana, Calif., 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.

Wiese explained in gasps to his wife that God had taken him into hell, a place that many people don't believe exists.

"I knew that most people on the surface of the earth did not believe or even know that there was a whole world going on down here," Wiese says. "This place was so terrifying, so intense and so hostile that it would be impossible for me to exaggerate the horror."

Wiese described being mauled by four enormous fiends and feeling complete terror. He had insatiable thirst, he breathed putrid air, heard endless screaming and was aware of intense flames and a gigantic pit.

"It was terrible," he says. "I was thinking, *I have to get out*. Only, in hell, you understand you're never going to get out."

Although Wiese had been a Christian many years, he says God blocked his awareness of that so he would experience the hopelessness of hell. "The fact that I *knew God* was kept from my mind," he says.

When suddenly Christ removed Wiese from his torment, He told

him he was to preach the message that hell exists and assure unbelievers it is not God's desire for them to suffer for eternity.

The visit, chronicled in Wiese's book, *23 Minutes in Hell*, started the Wieses' evangelistic journey. They founded Soul Choice Ministries and since 2007 have transitioned from successful real estate careers in Southern California into full-time ministry.

Both are longtime Christians and neither had a prophetic inkling of the event Wiese would go through or their call to evangelism. Wiese does not know why God chose him to carry this message.

"The only possible reason I can think of," he says, "is that God knew I would draw attention to His Word and point people to what the Word has to say [about hell]."

He believes God wants the message delivered to the unsaved for salvation and to Christians to invoke witnessing. His description of his visit is sobering enough to do both.

"It's impossible to know the hopelessness of hell," he says. "Here, even if things are terrible, you think you can die and get out. But there you can't die. And you know you're never going to get out."

His message stirs an adverse reaction in many people because Wiese claims hell is not a biblical metaphor but an actual place. Hell, he has discovered, is under fire by some Christians.

"The doctrine of hell has disappeared this century," he says. "God 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.

"It's not important that [people] believe me," he says. "It's

important they believe what the Bible says. Hell is real, and I don't want anyone to go there."