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hell  (hĕl)

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n.

1. Christianity

a. often **Hell** The place of eternal punishment for the wicked after death, often imagined as being presided over by Satan and his devils.

b. A state of separation from God; exclusion from God's presence.

2. The abode of the dead in any of various religious traditions, such as the Hebrew Sheol or the Greek Hades; the underworld.

3.

a. A situation or place of evil, misery, discord, or destruction: "*War is hell*" (*William Tecumseh Sherman*).

b. An extremely difficult experience; torment or anguish: *went through hell on the job*.

4.

a. The spirits in hell or the powers of evil: *All hell could not stop him*.

b. Informal One that causes trouble, agony, or annoyance: *The boss is hell when a job is poorly done*.

5. A sharp scolding: *gave the student hell for cheating*.

6.

a. A tailor's receptacle for discarded material.

b. Printing A hellbox.

7. Informal

a. An outstanding or noteworthy example: *You are one hell of a good cook*.

b. Used as an intensive: *How the hell should I know?*

c. Used for intensive effect in idioms such as *beat the hell out of (someone)* for *beat (someone) very badly*.

8. Archaic A gambling house.

intr.v. **helled, hell-ing, hells**

Informal

To behave riotously; carouse: *out all night helling around*.

interj.

Used to express anger, disgust, or impatience.

Idioms:

for the hell of it

For no particular reason; on a whim: *walked home by the old school for the hell of it*.

hell on Informal

1. Damaging or destructive to: *Driving in a hilly town is hell on the brakes*.

2. Unpleasant to or painful for.

hell or/and high water

Troubles or difficulties of whatever magnitude: *We're staying, come hell or high water*.

hell to pay

Great trouble: *If we're wrong, there'll be hell to pay*.

like hell Informal

1. Used as an intensive: *He ran like hell to catch the bus*.

2. Used to express strong contradiction or refusal: *He says he's going along with us—Like hell he is!*

to hell and gone

1. A long distance away: *drove to hell and gone and still couldn't find a diner*.

2. Far and wide: *friends scattered to hell and gone*.

3. Into the next world: *The bomb blew the truck to hell and gone*.

to hell with

Used to express contempt for or dismissal of someone or something.

[Middle English *helle*, from Old English; see **kel**-¹ in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

Word History: When the Anglo-Saxons became Christian in early medieval times, the Old English word *hel* was used to translate the Latin word *infernus*, "the lower region, hell," and designate the fiery place of eternal punishment for the damned. But what did *hel* designate before the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons? We can discover some indication of the original pagan meaning of *hel* by examining its Old Norse equivalent, *hel*. The medieval Scandinavians and Icelanders were converted from paganism much later than the Anglo-Saxons, and they preserved a good deal of pagan poetry revealing the ancient Scandinavian vision of the afterworld. The medieval Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson, a Christian, also paints a vivid picture of *hel* for us in his accounts of Norse myth (although his description may have been influenced by his own Christian conception of hell). The Old Norse *hel* is the abode of oathbreakers, other evil persons, and those unlucky enough to have died of old age or sickness rather than in the glory of the battlefield. Unlike the typical Christian conception of Hell, the Old Norse *hel* is very cold. It contrasts sharply with *Valhalla*, the hall in Asgard where heroes slain in battle carouse with the gods after death. In Old Norse, *Hel* is also the name of the goddess or giantess who presides in *hel*. She is the daughter of the god Loki and sister of the enormous wolf that will attack the gods at the end of the world. One half of Hel's body is blue-black, while the other is white. The Indo-European root behind Old English *hel* and Old Norse *hel*, as well as their Germanic relatives like German *Hölle*, "hell," is **kel-*, "to cover, conceal." In origin, *hell* is thus the "concealed place." The root **kel-*, also gives us other words for things that cover, conceal, or contain, such as *hall*, *hole*, *hollow*, *helmet*, and even *Valhalla*, from Old Norse *Valhöll*, literally the "Hall (*höll*) of the Slain (*Valr*)."

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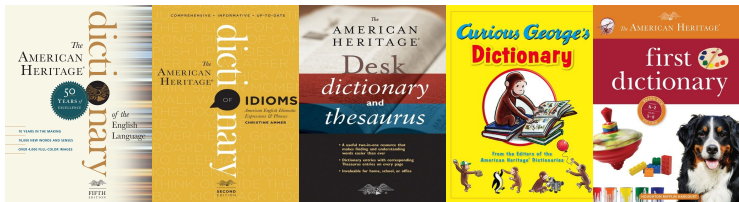
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