

What Does the Bible Teach About Near Death Experiences?



What Does the Bible Teach About Near Death Experiences?

- In 2010, Todd Burpo wrote a book entitled, “Is Heaven For Real,” in which he detailed his young son’s near death experience. It became a New Times Bestseller; and recently, a movie was made of this book and is in theaters.
- “Embraced by the Light” by Betty Eadie (1992)
- “90 Minutes in Heaven” by Don Piper (2004)
- “Saved by the Light: The True Story of a Man Who Died Twice and the Profound Revelations He Received” by Dannon Brinkley (1995)
- “23 Minutes in Hell” by Bill Wiese (2006)
- Plato’s Republic - The Myth of Er (380 B.C.)

What Does the Bible Teach About Near Death Experiences?

- What are we to make of these emotionally compelling accounts of an afterlife?
 - Either they are lying,
 - Or they are telling the truth,
 - Or they are deluded,
 - Or they had a profound experience, but interpreted it incorrectly.

Are They Lying?

- While we don't know the hearts of those who claim these experiences, we have no reason to think that they are deliberately making it up.
- These experiences frequently have common elements.
- 3% of Americans claim some sort of near death or out of body experience

Common Descriptions of NDEs

- A sense or awareness of being dead
- A sense of peace, well-being and painlessness. Positive emotions. A sense of removal from the world
- An out-of-body experience. A perception of one's body from an outside perspective. Sometimes observing doctors and nurses performing medical resuscitation efforts
- A tunnel experience. A sense of moving up, or through, a passageway or staircase through darkness toward light
- A rapid movement toward and/or sudden immersion in a powerful light. Communication with the light

Common Descriptions of NDEs

- An intense feeling of unconditional love and acceptance.
- Encountering “Beings of Light,” “Beings dressed in white” or similar. Also, the possibility of being reunited with deceased loved ones
- Receiving a life review, commonly referred to as seeing one's life flash before one's eyes
- Receiving knowledge about one's life and the nature of the universe
- Approaching a boundary or a decision by oneself or others to return to the body, often accompanied by a reluctance to return

Common Descriptions of NDEs

- Connection to the cultural beliefs held by the individual, which seem to determine the phenomena experienced in the NDE and the later interpretation thereof (Holden, Janice Miner. Handbook of Near-Death Experiences. Library of Congress, 2009.)

Common Descriptions of NDEs

- NDEs are also associated with changes in personality and outlook on life. Kenneth Ring (professor of psychology) has identified a consistent set of value and belief changes associated with people who have had a near-death experience. Among these changes one finds a greater appreciation for life, higher self-esteem, greater compassion for others, a heightened sense of purpose and self-understanding, desire to learn, elevated spirituality, greater ecological sensitivity and planetary concern, and a feeling of being more intuitive. Changes may also include increased physical sensitivity; diminished tolerance of light, alcohol, and drugs; a feeling that the brain has been "altered" to encompass more; and a feeling that one is now using the "whole brain" rather than a small part. However, not all after-effects are beneficial and Greyson describes circumstances where changes in attitudes and behavior can lead to psychosocial and psycho-spiritual problems. (Wikipedia)

Common Descriptions of NDEs

- Changes in personality, world view, etc., are due to two factors:
 - The psychological trauma engendered by awareness of proximity to death
 - Damage to emotive centers of the brain from anoxia

Are They Experiencing What They Think They Are Experiencing?

- No. We are not questioning their honesty and integrity; we are calling into question their interpretation of the experience
- Why should we arrive at that conclusion?
 - Because these experiences contradict the word of God.
 - Experiences, no matter how compelling they may be, cannot contradict God's word

Are They Experiencing What They Think They Are Experiencing?

- Gal. 1:8-9 - “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”
- It is troubling that so many seem to be more moved by these experiences than they are the word of God.

Are They Experiencing What They Think They Are Experiencing?

- How do these experiences contradict the word of God?
 - John 14:6 - “Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
 - Jesus is the only way to the Father, yet countless people who are not spiritual minded speak of going to Heaven and being enveloped in love and light.
 - Subjectively interpreted experience vs Scripture

Are They Experiencing What They Think They Are Experiencing?

- Not all religious people will be saved, yet people who haven't obeyed the gospel speak of going to Heaven
 - John 3:5 - "Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."
 - Matt. 7:21 - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Are The Experiences Real, But Incorrectly Interpreted?

- The Bible speaks of men who were given a glimpse into the heavenly realm
 - Stephen - Acts 7:55-56 - “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

Are The Experiences Real, But Incorrectly Interpreted?

- Paul - 2Cor. 12:1-4, 7 - “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter... 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”

Are The Experiences Real, But Incorrectly Interpreted?

- John - Rev. 1:9-11 - “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia”
- But these are not “Near Death Experiences,” but rather they are visions given to prophets very much alive.

Are The Experiences Real, But Incorrectly Interpreted?

- What is happening is a common physiological event that gets re-interpreted by the individuals' own unique backgrounds, philosophies, and values.
- How else to account for:
 - Christians seeing Jesus,
 - Hindus seeing Yama (the god of Death),
 - Buddhists experiencing reincarnation,
 - Atheists seeing a library or crossing the river Styx,
 - Muslims seeing a bridge to Jannah (Garden; Paradise)?
- Are we going to concede, based on someone's subjective interpretation of their experience, that all world religions end in heaven?

Are The Experiences Real, But Incorrectly Interpreted?

- In addition, why don't all people have these experiences?
- Is the afterlife only for certain ones, and for the rest there is nothing?

There Are Physiological And Psychological Explanations For These Experiences

- Researchers say that when the heart stops, there is a flurry of electrical activity in the brain. Neural noise, or an overload of information sent to the brain's visual cortex, creates an image of a bright light that gradually grows larger. The brain may interpret this as moving down a dark tunnel toward light. The body's spatial sense is prone to malfunction during a near-death experience as well. Again, the brain interprets faulty information about where the body is in relation to the space around it. The result is the sensation of leaving the body and flying around the room. Combined with other effects of trauma and anoxia (oxygen deprivation in the brain, a symptom in many near-death situations), this leads to the overall experience of floating into space while looking down at your own body, and then leaving to float down a tunnel.

There Are Physiological And Psychological Explanations For These Experiences

- The peaceful, calm sensation felt during NDEs is a coping mechanism triggered by increased levels of endorphins produced in the brain during trauma. Many people experience a strange sense of detachment and a lack of emotional response during traumatic events (whether or not they were related to a near-death experience). This is the same effect. NDEs that include visits to Heaven or meetings with God involve a combination of several factors. Faulty sensory input, oxygen deprivation and endorphin-induced euphoria create a surreal, though realistic-feeling, experience. When the subject recalls the encounter later, it has passed through the filter of his conscious mind. Bizarre sensory input that seems unexplainable becomes spirit beings, other dimensions and conversations with God. (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America - PNAS)

What Does The Bible Say?

- No doubt people under anesthesia, in great physical stress, or whose heart has stopped for a period of time have had some remarkable experiences. However, interpretations of the experiences contradict the word of God.

What Does The Bible Say?

- The Bible lists many people who died and were raised again. They had genuine afterlife experiences.
 - The son of the widow of Zarephath - 1Kings 17:17-24
 - The son of the Shunammite woman - 2Kings 4:31-37
 - Elisha - 2Kings 13:20-21
 - The dead saints at Jesus death - Matt. 27:52-53
 - The son of the widow of Nain - Luke 7:11-17
 - Jairus' daughter - Luke 8:49-56
 - Lazarus - John 11:41-44
 - Dorcas - Acts 9:36-43
 - Eutychus - Acts 20:9-12

What Does The Bible Say?

- In not a single case did God use testimony of what they saw, heard, or experienced as a motivation for them to obey Him.
- The scriptures are silent on what they said about the “other side.”
- We have something better than the subjective, whimsical testimony of man; we have the inspired word of God.
- May we be moved by its testimony to obey God while we can so that we will be well prepared for the afterlife.