

Heaven Is For Real

But Are Near Death Experiences?

- Introduction:
1. In 2010, Todd Burpo wrote a book entitled, "Is Heaven For Real," in which he detailed his young son's near death experience.
 - a. The book became a New Times Bestseller.
 - b. And just last week, a movie was made of this book and hit theaters just this past week.
 2. While this particular story is in our minds at this time, this is not the first book written on this topic.
 - a. "Embraced by the Light" by Betty Eadie (1992).
 - b. "90 Minutes in Heaven" by Don Piper (2004).
 - c. "Saved by the Light: The True Story of a Man Who Died Twice and the Profound Revelations He Received" by Dannon Brinkley (1995).
 - d. "23 Minutes in Hell" by Bill Wiese (2006).
 - e. Plato's Republic - The Myth of Er (380 B.C.).
 3. What are we to make of these amazing and compelling accounts of the afterlife?
 - a. Either they are lying.
 - b. Or they are telling the truth and things happened exactly as they stated.
 - c. Or they are having an experience but interpreting it incorrectly.
 4. In this lesson, I want to briefly explain why I believe the third option is the correct one.

I. Are They Lying?

- A. While I don't know the heart of those who say they have experienced these afterlife experiences, I have no reason to think that they are deliberately lying and making the whole thing up.
- B. These experiences frequently have common components.
 1. A bright light, a tunnel, overwhelming feeling of peace, or dread, talking with people, seeing one's life played back, reuniting with relatives.
- C. Personally, I don't doubt the experience because I had one myself.
 1. After being "over gassed" at a dentist office, I too found myself in a tunnel, I saw a bright light at the end of the tunnel, and I could hear voices talking.

II. Are They Experiencing What They Think They Are Experiencing?

- A. My answer to that would be "no."
 1. Please note that I am not calling into question their integrity, but I am

- calling into question their interpretation of the experiences they had.
- B. Why would I arrive at that conclusion?
1. Because the vast majority of these experiences contradict the word of God.
 2. Let me remind you that our experiences, no matter how compelling they may be, cannot be allowed to contradict God's word (Galatians 1:8-9).
 - a. I must admit that I find it more than a little disturbing that so many people seem to be more moved by these experiences than they are the word of God, itself.
 3. How do these experiences contradict the word of God?
 - a. (John 14:6) Jesus is the only way to the Father yet countless people who are not religious speak of going to Heaven and being enveloped in love and light.
 - 1) Ian McCormick was stung by a box jelly fish. On the way to the hospital, his life flashed before him. He saw his mother praying for him. However, soon he found himself in Hell, but a bright light lifted him out and he traveled through a tunnel until he met God. God gave him the option of entering Heaven or going back to earth. He chose to go back to earth to help his mother. He was an atheist.
 - b. (John 3:5; Matthew 7:21) Not all religious people will be saved, yet people who haven't obeyed the gospel speak of going to Heaven and being enveloped in love and light.
 - 1) "In His Arms" - by Denise Mendenhall, (2006). Written by a 16 year old Mormon girl who slipped into a diabetic coma, and suffered a stroke that destroyed most of the left side of her brain. She met Jesus, and he introduced her to our Heavenly Father and Mother. She met the prophets, and even saw Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon.

III. Are The Experiences Real, But Incorrectly Interpreted?

- A. The Bible does describe times when men were given a glimpse into the heavenly realm.
1. Stephen (Acts 7:55-60).
 2. Paul (2 Corinthians 12:1-9).
 3. John (Revelation 1:9-20).
 4. But these are not "Near Death Experiences," but rather they are visions given to men who were prophets, and very much alive."
- B. What I believe is happening is that there is a common physiological event that gets interpreted by our own unique backgrounds, philosophies, and values.

1. How else would we account for...
 - a. Christians seeing Jesus.
 - b. Hinduism seeing Yama (the god of Death).
 - c. Buddhism experiencing reincarnation.
 - d. Atheists seeing a library and cross the river Styx.
 - e. Muslims seeing a bridge to Jannah.
 2. Also, why don't all people have these experiences? Is the afterlife only for certain ones, and for the rest there is nothingness?
- C. There are physiological explanations offered for such experiences.
1. Researchers say that when the heart stops, there is a flurry of electrical activity in the brain (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America - PNAS).
 2. Furthermore, the overwhelming sense of peace and love can be accounted for by the release of endorphins due to the stress the body is undergoing.
- Conclusion:
1. In closing, let me summarize by saying that I have no doubts that people under anesthesia, in great physical stress, or whose heart has stopped for a period of time have some experiences. However the interpretations of these experiences which place them in the presence of God actually contradict the word of God.
 2. Consider this fact. The Bible records many people who died and were raised again. They genuinely had an "afterlife" experience.
 - a. (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:31-37; 2 Kings 13:20-21; Matthew 27:52-53; Luke 7:11-17; Luke 8:49-56; John 11:41-44; Acts 9:36-43; Acts 20:9-12).
 - b. In not a single case did God see fit to use their testimony of what they saw, heard, or experienced as a motivation to obey him.
 - c. Friends, we have something better than the whimsical testimony of man; we have the inspired word of God!
 3. May we be moved by its testimony to obey God while we can so that we will be prepared for the afterlife.