

What About Near-Death Experiences

By Dave DeWitt

I will use the representation NDE, like most people do, to refer to a Near-Death Experience that reveals something about the afterlife or the nature of the human soul.

The European Academy of Neurology claims they have analyzed participants from 35 countries who reported something like a near-death experience. They reported that 1-in-10 people have had a near-death experience.

- Eben Alexander, M.D., wrote “Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife.” Dr. Alexander told about his near-death experiences after coming out of a seven-day coma [2012 “New York Times #1 Best Seller”]
- In 2010, Kevin and Alex Malarkey wrote, “The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven.” Five years after it was published, Alex said he made it up to get attention.
- The 2014 movie, “Heaven Is for Real,” was about a young boy who slipped into unconsciousness during emergency surgery, supposedly visited heaven, and met deceased loved ones along with Jesus. The movie grossed over 100 million dollars.

Not all NDEs are uplifting. A 2016 article for the National Institutes of Health, entitled “Distressing Near-Death Experiences: The Basics,” reported, “Some are deeply disturbing. Few people are forthcoming about such an event; they hide; they disappear when asked for information.” [The above information from answersingensis.org, October 24, 2020]

April 17, 2022, Dr. Bruce Greyson, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia Medical School, came out with a book called “After: A Doctor Explores What Near-Death Experiences Reveal.” Dr. Greyson claims,

I collected about a thousand cases that people had sent to me about their own near-death experiences...they talk about their senses being so much more vivid in the NDE and that gives the experience being more real than real, more real than this world. Most near-death experiences are the same around the world and through the centuries...However, how they describe these phenomena is influenced by their cultural background. For example, people all around the world will talk about encountering a warm loving being of light that radiates unconditional love toward them. And if you are talking to someone who is raised in the United States, they may identify this as God or sometimes Jesus, whereas someone who is in a Hindu or Buddhist culture will not use those terms...what they find makes life meaningful and fulfilling for them.

[youtube.com/watch?v=J5n2dzN1joU]

The University of Virginia (UVA) School of Medicine includes the following descriptions of NDEs: “comfortable feelings without pain, an intense light, sensations of peace, encounters with deceased family, friends or religious figures, well-being, or complete love.” [The above information not otherwise noted is from answersingensis.org, October 24, 2020]

There Are a Few Things We Should Observe about Reported Near-Death Experiences

There have been various medical reasons given for these experiences: hallucinations, drugs, the body releasing pain-killing endorphins, and reduced oxygen to the brain (cerebral hypoxia). That does not mean these are sufficient explanations, but these things may indeed cause mind alterations. Most people (at least 90%), who come close to death and survive, do not report any such experiences. The reason for the interest in NDEs (\$100 million dollar movies and best-seller books) is a supposed connection between them, life after death, and the nature of the soul. [Note the title of Dr. Greyson’s book on NDEs is “After,” and Dr. Alexander calls NDEs a “Journey into the Afterlife.”] No such

connection exists. The reality is the people telling of the experience did not, in fact, die at that time. No one who has died has come back to tell us of the experience (except Jesus).

The Bible Never Validates Near-Death Experiences

NDEs Are In Opposition to the Teaching of Jesus

The most basic thing to notice about NDEs is that they are contrary to the Bible. If the Bible is true, they are a false depiction of the nature of the soul and the afterlife.

NDEs are not about Christianity. They do not proclaim the biblical gospel. They are experiences anyone might have. Dr. Greyson [who I quoted earlier in the article] includes Hindus and Buddhists. But seven times Jesus said all unbelievers after death are going to a place where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28), not a place where there are “sensations of peace, well-being, or complete love.” Jesus often included the description that this place was the *outer darkness*, not “an intense light.” Jesus was talking about their ultimate after-death experience, but the implication of the NDE is that after death, all is well, for everybody.

Jesus told the story about the deaths of two men, a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31—whether it was a parable or a historical event, the point is the same). Neither had an NDE, but immediately after death, Lazarus was *carried away by the angels* and the rich man was *in Hades [where] he lifted up his eyes being in torment*. Although this was not a near-death experience, it was an immediately-after-death experience. And it was nothing like the majority of the NDEs.

The Human Soul Is Never Disconnected from a Bodily form

In the Bible, the only time human souls are disconnected from their earthly bodies is at death (Genesis 35:18). At that time, they are immediately connected to another bodily form (Matthew 17:3; Luke 16:20-23; 1 Corinthians 15:40, 44). After this life, people are in a bodily form (awaiting a resurrected body), either in the presence of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8) or in Hades (Matthew 10:28). Their spirit does not float around looking back at their bodies. There are no such things as ghosts, disembodied human spirits.

People Raised from the Dead Never Reported an NDE

In the Bible, there are some people raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-22; 2 Kings 13:20-21; Matthew 9:18-30; Luke 7:12-15; John 11:39-44; Acts 9:36-41; 20:9-12). There was at least some period of time when the Bible says they were not alive, yet none of them ever reported having an NDE.

Visions Were Not NDEs

Ezekiel was given a vision of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:3). The Apostle Paul, or someone he knew, was given a vision of the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-2). The Apostle John was given a vision *in the spirit* to the area of the throne of God (Revelation 4:1-2). But none of these men almost died. Their life was not in danger, and their soul did not leave their body. They were given a vision from God. They were not experiencing an NDE. These were apostles and prophets given revelation from God. There is no suggestion in Scripture that believers were to look for visions from heaven.

Ezekiel 13:2-3, “*Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, ‘Listen to the word of the LORD! ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.’*”

Stephen Did Not Have an NDE

Stephen said, “*Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*” (Acts 7:56). Stephen did not report floating out of his body, having comfortable feelings without pain, an intense light, sensations of peace, encounters with deceased family, [or] friends. Stephen did not come back from a near-death experience. Stephen died. What he saw was where he was going after he died. This is something other Christians might also experience as they die, but it is not a near-death experience. It is a death experience.

Conclusion

If a Christian has an NDE, he or she should treat it as something that happens to some people, as an unusual dream, and attach no spiritual significance to it. If NDEs are real (and they seem to be real), there are four things to understand about them:

- (1) They are not death experiences, people who report having NDEs did not die from the experience. Therefore, they are not a connection to the afterlife, or the nature of the human soul.
- (2) They are spiritually irrelevant because the Bible does not mention them.
- (3) Truth should never be determined from our experience—ever. Remember Satan is an angel of light waiting to deceive us (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). But Jesus prayed, “*Sanctify them in the truth, Your word is truth*” (John 17:17).
- (4) The result of NDEs is to deny the message of the Bible. For example, they deny the biblical gospel. I have never heard an NDE where someone is told that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and they need to repent and receive Christ’s payment for sin. It seems to be another attack on the Bible.