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The Doctrine of Man: How can near-death experiences (NDEs) be explained?

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THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

ARTICLE TEN

How can near-death experiences (NDEs) be explained?

Researchers have suggested a variety of explanations for near-death experiences. Space forbids a detailed treatment of this. But the more popular theories follow:

- (1) Some say these experiences can be explained as a result of a lack of oxygen to the brain. This is known as *hypoxia*. It is argued that this lack of oxygen to the brain accounts for sensations like going through a tunnel and seeing a bright light. The problem with this view, however, is that people who have gone through near-death experiences have not been found (in medical tests) to have less oxygen in their blood gases than other people.
- (2) Some have suggested that going through a dark tunnel and then seeing a bright light are actually deeply embedded memories of the birth experience. The late astronomer and scientist Carl Sagan held to this view. Critics respond by saying that a memory of birth would be traumatic, not pleasant (like a near-death experience). Further, in the birth experience the baby's face is pressed against the birth canal, conflicting with the rapid transit of going through a dark tunnel. As well, it is argued that the baby's brain is not developed enough to retain such memories.
- (3) Other suggested explanations include trauma or injury to the brain, severe psychological stress that may cause the release of chemicals in the brain that could induce certain experiences, or perhaps hallucinations caused by various medications.

Could it be that many of these experiences are actually caused by the evil one—Satan, the father of lies, who has the ability to perform counterfeit miracles (2 Thess. 2:9)?

Many researchers have noted a clear connection between near-death experiences and occultism. "In large measure the NDE [near-death experience] is merely one form of the occult out-of-body experience (OBE)." As well, "both the NDE and OBE have many other similarities including ... spiritistic contacts, world view changes, and development of psychic powers.

What kinds of psychic powers are we talking about? Some people experience astral travel or out-of-body experiences (that is, the soul leaves the body and travels around the so-called astral realm). Some people develop clairvoyance (the ability to perceive things that are outside the natural range of human senses). Some people develop telepathic abilities (that is, abilities to mystically communicate via thoughts alone). And many people come into contact with spirit guides, who allegedly stay with the person for the rest of his or her life.

Now, here's an important point: Occultism and psychic phenomena are utterly condemned by God in Scripture. Anyone doubting this should meditate on Deut. 18:10-13. In view of this, it is clear that much of what is going on in regard to so-called near-death experiences is in fact not of God. *Reader beware!* (Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Book of Bible Answers*, Harvest House Publishing, Eugene, OR, p. 294, 295)