



Proof Of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife

by Eben Alexander, M.D.

A Critical Theological Review:

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If sales figures are any indication, Christians have been eager to purchase and promote the reports of those who claim to have been to Heaven and returned to tell us about it. *90 Minutes In Heaven* and *Heaven Is For Real* have proven to be wildly popular in Christian circles.¹ This gullible lack of discernment presents us with an interesting dilemma: what do we do when someone who is clearly not a believer claims to have visited our Heaven and has returned to tell us about it?

Such is the case with *Proof Of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* by Eben Alexander, M.D.²

Why This Review?

Why go through the pain of reading and reviewing yet another book about a trip to Heaven, especially since it was written by someone who makes no profession of orthodox faith in Christ and presents an experience of Heaven that is patently unbiblical?

First, I believe that this account, as unbiblical and counter-Christian as it is, has something to teach us concerning the credibility of those accounts more widely embraced by the Christian community. Understanding and explaining what Eben Alexander experienced from a Christian perspective can teach us some things about other supposed trips to Heaven and those who claim to have gone.

Second, accounts like that of Dr. Alexander point out a glaring inconsistency among Christians who embrace the stories of those more likely to spin a tale of their liking. This highlights the danger of embracing *any* such report of a visit

to the afterlife. Alexander's journey shows that once the Pandora's Box of afterlife visitations is opened, one is hard pressed to reject any spurious truth claim and remain consistent at the same time.

Third, skeptics of the Christian faith are quick to point out that many non-believers have near-death experiences which are in many ways similar to those described by Christians. What are we to make of this? Is there an explanation for it? If the Christian faith is true, then why and how do non-Christians have near-death experiences (NDEs) which include feelings of peace, tranquility, happiness, joy, and reunion with family members?

Alexander's journey into the afterlife is just such an account. What, from an orthodox Christian perspective, can explain a non-believer experiencing "Heaven?"

Fourth, I obviously have too much time on my hands.

This review will be a bit different from my previous reviews of Don Piper's and Todd Burpo's books. Those books were written by professing Christians and have enjoyed widespread acceptance within the Christian community. While *Proof of Heaven* is a *New York Times* bestseller, the book does not seem to have caught on within Christian circles to the extent that the Piper or Burpo books have. It seems this is largely due to the fact that the book does not even attempt to present a Christian view of God, the Bible, the soul, or the afterlife. It is a boldly non-Christian account of time spent in the afterlife.

Therefore, this review will not be as thorough and meticulous as the previous reviews. I wish to deal with some broader issues and I am not as interested in contrasting Dr. Alexander's experience or teaching against Scripture. That is unnecessary, since he does not even claim to be representing biblical theology or to be promoting the Christian message.

1 For lengthy reviews of either of these books, please visit the Resource Library at our website: kootenaichurch.org.

2 You can see some videos and read about the author at his website: <http://www.lifebeyonddeath.net/>.

His Spiritual Credentials

As far as I could tell from reading the book, Dr. Alexander has had no genuine conversion experience. By his own admission he attended “on occasion” his Episcopal church. He admits that,

“. . . for years I'd only been a step above a 'C & E'er' (one who only darkens the door of a church at Christmas and Easter). I encouraged our boys to say their prayers at night, but I was no spiritual leader in our home. I'd never escaped my feelings of doubt at how any of it could really be. As much as I'd grown up wanting to believe in God and Heaven and an afterlife, my decades in the rigorous scientific world of academic neurosurgery had profoundly called into question how such things could exist.”³

Before his visit to the afterlife, Dr. Alexander was certainly no believer in God or Heaven.

“As a neurosurgeon, I'd heard many stories over the years of people who had strange experiences, usually after suffering cardiac arrest: stories of traveling to mysterious, wonderful landscapes; of talking to dead relatives—even of meeting God Himself. Wonderful stuff, no question. But all of it, in my opinion, was pure fantasy. What caused the otherworldly types of experiences that such people so often report? I didn't claim to know, but I did know that they were brain-based. All of consciousness is. If you don't have a working brain, you can't be conscious.”⁴

On December 18, 2012, Dr. Alexander was interviewed on *The Dennis Prager Show*, a radio program. Prager asks, “Were you religiously active prior to the experience?”

Dr. Alexander answers by sharing what he records in the book about his atheism and then adds, “So for eight years before my experience, I did not believe at all in a personal, loving God, or in any kind of benefit of prayer.”⁵

In the same interview, he confesses his own belief in reincarnation, saying that such belief makes sense in light of what he has learned.⁶ He says that “reincarnation is important” in our quest to become divine.⁷ He denies that the concept of eternal Hell makes any sense from the perspective of eternal and infinite love. Reincarnation is the way in which, he believes, justice is served.⁸

Alexander even says that Jesus Himself taught and believed in the doctrine of reincarnation. Prager asked, “So you have taken essentially the Buddhist view that, . . . and the Hindu view of karma?”

Alexander responds,

“Well, I would. . . . I think that is certainly part of it. I would also say that I think . . . uh . . . certainly being . . . having grown up a Christian that I'm, uh, quite convinced now, especially having read the gnostic gospels and become much more familiar with the teaching, the Christian teachings in their pure form, you know, not necessarily filtered through the counsels of centuries later, that in fact,

3 Alexander III M.D., Eben (2012-10-23). *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (p. 34). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

4 Ibid., 8.

5 You can see Prager's page on the interview at <http://www.dennisprager.com/alexander-proof-of-heaven/>. For a full audio recording of that interview you can visit the American Conservative University Podcast and listen at <http://acu.libsyn.com/show-proof-of-heaven-a-neurosurgeon-s-journey-into-the-afterlife>. (approx. 14:00 mark)

6 Time mark 22:45-23:10.

7 Time mark 29:35-29:45.

8 Time mark 33:45-34:00.

Jesus knew very well of reincarnation. Of course, He is a prime example of reincarnation.”⁹

That statement is so full of error, bad theology, and other problems that I could write an article on it alone!

As a result of his experience, Dr. Alexander did come to believe that our human consciousness does continue beyond the grave. He writes,

“My experience showed me that the death of the body and the brain are not the end of consciousness, that human experience continues beyond the grave. More important, it continues under the gaze of a God who loves and cares about each one of us and about where the universe itself and all the beings within it are ultimately going.”¹⁰

Such a transformation from atheism to theism does not a Christian make. He called himself a Christian on *The Dennis Prager Show*, but what he actually believes is anything but Christian theology and orthodoxy.

As a former skeptic, he feels uniquely qualified to tell his story to those “who might have heard stories similar to mine before and wanted to believe them, but had not been able to full do so.”¹¹ He wants to tell his story to “these people, more than any other.”¹²

As you will see below, his NDE did not bring him to a knowledge of the one true and living God revealed in Scripture.

An Overview: The Story In A Nutshell

Eben Alexander earned his M.D. from Duke University

Medical School in 1980, where he also did his residency. For fifteen years he worked at Harvard Medical School and Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston. In 2008, while living in Lynchburg, Virginia, he was a neurosurgeon at the Focused Ultrasound Surgery Foundation in Charlottesville.

On November 10, 2008, Dr. Alexander suddenly awoke at 4:30 a.m. with back pain that had been bothering him the previous evening. He thought it was the result of a flu virus that was still hanging on. He tried getting out of bed and easing the pain with a warm bath, but it only intensified. By 6:30 that morning, he was lying in agony and virtually paralyzed. He soon slipped into unconsciousness. Thinking he was napping, his wife left him so he could rest. After two hours, she returned to find his body stiff and jerking violently.

EMTs rushed him to Lynchburg General Hospital Emergency Room. Diagnosing his own episode, he writes, “Had I been conscious, I could have told Holley [his wife] exactly what I was undergoing there on the bed during those terrifying moments she spent waiting for the ambulance: a full grand mal seizure, brought on, no doubt, by some kind of extremely severe shock to my brain.”¹³

As doctors would soon discover, Dr. Alexander had bacterial meningitis. His brain and spinal column were infected with *Escherichia Coli*, commonly called *E-Coli*.

For the next seven days, Dr. Alexander remained unconscious to the world around him. During that week, he claims he visited Heaven and came to understand the profound mysteries of the unseen world and the universe in which we live.

Now he is back to tell you all about it.

The Afterlife of Eben

9 Time mark 30:00-32:00.

10 Ibid., 9.

11 Ibid., 10.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 16.

Eben's description of his trip to "Heaven" is in no way similar to that given by either Colton Burpo or Don Piper.

His first awareness in the afterlife was of a surrounding darkness. He was not aware of having a body. He felt as if he were surrounded by dirty Jell-O. The darkness was almost suffocating. He heard a deep, rhythmic pounding, which sounded distant. He calls this place "Realm of the Earthworm's-Eye View."

He originally felt like he was one with this subterranean world. But gradually this sense gave way to a different feeling. He slowly realized he was trapped in this world he was experiencing. He describes "grotesque animal faces" which "bubbled out of the muck, groaned or screeched, and then were gone again."¹⁴

The more he became aware of his surroundings, the more he began to panic. He realized that he needed to get out.

"The more I began to feel like a *me*—like something separate from the cold and wet and dark around me—the more the faces that bubbled up out of that darkness became ugly and threatening. The rhythmic pounding off in the distance sharpened and intensified as well—became the work-beat for some army of troll-like underground laborers, performing some endless, brutally monotonous task. The movement around me became less visual and more tactile, as if reptilian, wormlike creatures were crowding past, occasionally rubbing up against me with their smooth or spiky skins. Then I became aware of a smell: a little like feces, a little like blood, and a little like vomit."¹⁵

He claims he was delivered from this realm of darkness

by a "white-gold light."¹⁶ With a whooshing sound, he found himself in a completely new world. He saw a countryside and a realm that was very earthlike, complete with dogs, trees, fields, streams, waterfalls, children, and people who sang and danced in circles.

Suddenly he realized he was not alone, but was accompanied by a beautiful girl.¹⁷ They were riding together on an intricately patterned surface, which he realized was the wing of a butterfly. There were millions of butterflies all around them.

The girl finally spoke to him, though without words. "The message went through me like a wind, and I instantly understood that it was true."¹⁸

What did this divine messenger say?

"The message had three parts, and if I had to translate them into earthly language, I'd say they ran something like this:

'You are loved and cherished, dearly, forever.

'You have nothing to fear.

'There is nothing you can do wrong.'

The message flooded me with a vast and crazy sensation of relief. It was like being handed the rules to a game I'd been playing all my life without ever fully understanding it."¹⁹

These three messages are repeated throughout the course of the book (pg. 71). They are central in Dr. Alexander's understanding of the meaning of life and what God would have us to know. Or, as he notes, "The unconditional love and acceptance that I experienced on my

14 Ibid., 31.

15 Ibid., 31.

16 Ibid., 38.

17 On page 102 he refers to this beautiful girl as his "guardian angel."

18 Ibid., 40.

19 Ibid., 41.

journey is the single most important discovery I have ever made, or will ever make”²⁰ Later he writes, “The very fabric of the alternate dimension is love and acceptance, and anything that does not have these qualities appears immediately and obviously out of place there.”²¹

This is the “gospel” (the good news) of Dr. Alexander's experience of the afterlife.

What Of God?

No visit to the afterlife would be complete without some experience of the divine. Alexander's visit is no exception. At one point in his journey, he claims to have entered an immense void, which was pitch-black and yet brimming over with light. (I know, I'm shaking my head, too.)

The light was coming from a brilliant orb that he sensed nearby. He claims,

“My situation was, strangely enough, something akin to that of a fetus in a womb. The fetus floats in the womb with the silent partner of the placenta, which nourishes it and mediates its relationship to the everywhere present, yet at the same time invisible, mother. In this case, the “mother” was God, the Creator, the Source who is responsible for making the universe and all in it. This Being was so close that there seemed to be no distance at all between God and myself. Yet at the same time, I could sense the infinite vastness of the Creator, could see how completely minuscule I was by comparison. I will occasionally use Om as the pronoun for God, because I originally used that name in my writings after my coma. “Om” was the

sound I remembered hearing associated with that omniscient, omnipotent, and unconditionally loving God, but any descriptive word falls short.”²²

The “orb” was not God. Alexander claims the pure vastness separating him from Om required that he had the orb to act as an “interpreter.” Through this interpreter, Alexander claims that he was given certain revelations regarding the universe and other dimensions. “While beyond my body, I received knowledge about the nature and structure of the universe that was vastly beyond my comprehension.”²³

Whenever one rejects God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, they will inevitably replace Him with a god of their own creation.²⁴ That god will always be a lot like its creator. The god of Dr. Alexander's experience is shockingly like Dr. Alexander himself. For instance, he says,

“One of the biggest mistakes people make when they think about God is to imagine God as impersonal. Yes, God is behind the numbers, the perfection of the universe that science measures and struggles to understand. But—again, paradoxically—Om is 'human' as well—even more human than you and I are. Om understands and sympathizes with our human situation more profoundly and personally than we can even imagine because Om knows what we have forgotten, and understands the terrible burden it is to live with amnesia of the Divine for even a moment.”²⁵

I'm not *exactly* sure what he means by that, but I am sure that it is utter nonsense!

20 Ibid., 73.

21 Ibid., 83.

22 Ibid., 47. “Om” certainly does!

23 Ibid., 81.

24 This is a violation of the first and second commandments.

25 Ibid., 85-86.

A Theology of Evil

Alexander's understanding of the reality and purpose of moral evil in our world betrays a very New Age and Eastern view of reality.

"Through the Orb, Om told me that there is not one universe but many—in fact, more than I could conceive—but that love lay at the center of them all. Evil was present in all the other universes as well, but only in the tiniest trace amounts. Evil was necessary because without it, free will was impossible, and without free will, there could be no growth—no forward movement, no chance for us to become what God longed for us to be. Horrible and all-powerful as evil sometimes seemed to be in a world like ours, in the larger picture love was overwhelmingly dominant, and it would ultimately be triumphant. I saw the abundance of life throughout the countless universes, including some whose intelligence was advanced far beyond that of humanity. I saw that there are countless higher dimensions, but that the only way to know these dimensions is to enter and experience them directly. They cannot be known, or understood, from lower dimensional space. Cause and effect exist in these higher realms, but outside of our earthly conception of them. The world of time and space in which we move in this terrestrial realm is tightly and intricately meshed within these higher worlds. In other words, these worlds aren't totally apart from us, because all worlds are part of the same overarching divine Reality. From those higher worlds one could access any time or place in our

world."²⁶

As you can see, Alexander says that evil is a necessity in our universe, because without evil, there could be no "free will."²⁷ "That evil could occasionally have the upper hand was known and allowed by the Creator as a necessary consequence of giving the gift of free will to beings like us."²⁸

Apparently this life of making moral choices allows us to gradually acquire salvation and earn rank in the dimension to come. "Free will is of central importance for our function in the earthly realm: a function that, we will all one day discover, serves the much higher role of allowing our ascendance in the timeless alternate dimension."²⁹ By making good moral choices in the presence of so much evil, we "grow toward the Divine."³⁰

This is the closest thing to a doctrine of salvation that Alexander presents: We are evolutionary beings, evolved from the earth, who face moral decisions and live through evil, and manifest love and compassion to earn ascendancy in another dimension. He promises, "In order to return to that realm, we must once again become like that realm,

26 Ibid., 48-49.

27 Obviously he believes that men who do evil are "free." However, the Bible teaches that all men are slaves of sin who love darkness and are at war with God. He never attempts to answer the obvious dilemma that his view presents, namely, if there is no evil in the life to come, will we be truly free? If evil does not exist in Heaven, then does God rob us of our freedom to preserve a perfect Heaven? If God cherished human freedom so much in this life that He would allow evil, why would He not care about human freedom in the life to come? For more on this, see "Answering the Problem of Evil," available at <http://kootenaichurch.org/newsletters/miscellaneous/>.

28 Ibid., 83. Biblically speaking, evil never has "the upper hand." It is always under the sovereign control of a God who uses it to accomplish the good of His people and the glory of His name.

29 Ibid., 84.

30 Ibid. In this same location, Alexander asserts that we currently inhabit "evolutionarily developed mortal brains and bodies, the product of the earth and the exigencies of the earth."

even while we are stuck in, and plodding through, this one.”³¹

There is a clear inconsistency between Dr. Alexander's understanding of moral evil and human sinfulness. You may remember that the “guardian angel”³² on the butterfly wing told him that he could do no wrong. He later recalled this to mind:

“... When I was in the Core, there was never any worry or guilt about letting anyone down. That had, of course, been one of the first things that I'd learned when I was with the Girl on the Butterfly Wing and she'd told me: 'There is nothing you can do that is wrong.'”³³

He seems to think that this is true of all people, since he holds this out as a great lesson, a truth, to be learned from his time in the afterlife. But if there is **nothing** that he can do that is wrong, and therefore guilt is an illegitimate fabrication of human conscience, then what is evil? If nobody can do anything wrong, then nobody can do evil. If evil is not possible for anyone to do, then in what sense are they “free” by his own definition of “freedom?” How does one wrestle through making “right” choices to gain ascendancy in other dimensions if there is no possibility of one making a “wrong” choice? Ultimately, EVERY unbiblical worldview will die the death of self-contradiction. This one certainly does.

To be fair, Dr. Alexander seems to be aware of the moral inconsistency in his own presentation. In the interview with Dennis Prager, he recalled the three things that the angelic messenger had told him, but the third one he stated as, “There is nothing you can do wrong *in this realm*.”³⁴

Prager immediately sensed a moral problem and

quickly jumped in with, “What does that mean? You can do nothing wrong in *which* realm?”

Alexander said, “Well, what it meant at the time was that you could do nothing wrong in that spiritual realm, because . . . the issue though is in fact, though . . . strictly speaking, her words apply to earth, too, if you realize that we are here to manifest that unconditional and infinite love of the creator for fellow beings, in spite of the injustice and imperfections of this realm, and realize we can either do that in our free will and choices and follow very directly towards that deification in the outer realm, or we can not do that, and we can dish out evil and pain and mayhem.”³⁵

It is still unclear to me what he means. The book gives no such qualification or explanation, nor does it limit the angel's words to “that realm.” Even his explanation on the radio program admits that this applies to Earth. Though he tried to avoid this moral contradiction, in the end he is back where he started.

This betrays his Eastern and New Age theology. He believes that evil is not something done by humans, for which we are accountable. Evil is something outside of us, some force, some power. According to his theology, evil is not something we are; it is something outside us that afflicts us.

And So Much More!

What you have just read is only a sampling, and a very selective one at that, of the horrible theology and unbiblical worldview promoted by *Proof of Heaven*. We could analyze his statements about meditation, prayer, universalism, and the soul, but what we have examined is sufficient to show that Dr. Alexander is certainly no Christian believer. His theology is not Christian theology, his worldview is not a

31 Ibid., 85.

32 Ibid., 102.

33 Ibid., 109.

34 Emphasis added. See the link for the interview in footnote 5. This statement is at the 17:30 mark and following.

35 Mark 18:00-19:00.

Christian worldview, and his experience of “Heaven” is nothing like that described in Scripture.

The book mentions Jesus only three times: once in the title of a book contained in the bibliography, once as the subject of a painting in his church, and once in a description of someone else’s NDE.

Clearly this is a decidedly non-Christian account of a NDE and journey to the afterlife.

What They All Have In Common

Dr. Eben Alexander claims to have had an experience out of his body in another dimension which is indicative of the actual afterlife that all of us will one day experience.

Like Burpo and Piper³⁶, Dr. Alexander seems convinced that his experience is real. However, the experience that he is convinced he had and the “Heaven” he describes is nothing like those of Burpo or Piper. However, these three experiences do have a number of things in common:

First, they are all untestable. They are merely experiences. We can't measure the light they describe, or validate the experiences by some scientific method.

Second, they cannot be verified. Each of these experiences was the singular experience of one person. Nobody went to Heaven with Don Piper. Nobody accompanied Dr. Alexander. There are no witnesses for these experiences. We are expected to take these men at

36 Don Piper wrote *90 Minutes In Heaven*, and Todd Burpo wrote *Heaven Is For Real*, based on the testimony of his son, Colton. You can read in-depth critical theological reviews of both of those books at our website: kootenaichurch.org. Interestingly, Alexander lists Piper's book, *90 Minutes In Heaven*, on his Reading List at the end of his book. I have no doubt that he would have included *Heaven Is For Real* on that list, if it has been published at the time Alexander published his book. Alexander seems not the least bit disturbed by the fact that the “Heaven” described by Piper is radically different than that which he experienced.

their word and nothing more.

Third, all of these supposed accounts **contradict** Scripture at a number of points.³⁷ This only serves to undermine the authority of Scripture, its credibility, and the reader's belief in its sufficiency. Not only do they all contradict Scripture, but they all contradict one another. We are forced to choose between believing either Piper or Burpo or Alexander or the Bible. They cannot all be giving us the truth!

Fourth, all three of them appear equally convinced that their experience was real and that it presents an accurate picture of Heaven. Dr. Alexander offers a very picturesque, vivid, and colorful description of what he saw and experienced. It seems that it is as “real” as anything he has experienced on this earth, in his body.³⁸ There can be no doubt that those who promote these experiences appear convinced that they have undergone real experiences that accurately reflect reality.

Christians would be far less likely to embrace the testimony of Dr. Alexander than they would those of either Piper or Burpo. If Dr. Alexander's experience is a true and accurate account of reality, then the Bible is clearly wrong. The Christian doctrines of sin, salvation, Heaven, Hell, eternal punishment, the soul of man, evil, Jesus, and Trinitarianism could not be true if Dr. Alexander's experience were true.

Thinking Through Some Possibilities

I am forced to conclude that the testimony of Dr. Alexander must be rejected. But on what grounds? I cannot reject his account simply because he is not “one of us”

37 For specific details I would point you to the respective reviews.

38 Burpo titled his book *Heaven Is For Real* and Don Piper describes his experience as “the most real thing that has ever happened to me.”

(meaning “evangelical Christian”). I have to reject it because it disagrees with Scripture.³⁹ If Scripture is my standard, then Scripture ALONE gives me the truth concerning spiritual realities, including the afterlife. Experience is no sure measure of spiritual truth.

The question still remains, “How do we explain the experience of Dr. Alexander from a biblical perspective?”⁴⁰ There are a few different possible explanations:

Explanation #1: Dr. Alexander is lying. It is entirely possible that Eben Alexander has fabricated the entire experience.⁴¹ It is possible that he doesn't actually believe that any of this happened and knows full well that every word he wrote concerning his “experience” was a well crafted lie.

For the record, I do believe that Alexander had some sort of experience, and that he is absolutely convinced that he had that experience. I don't believe he has fabricated this entire account. Though I do not believe that he is lying, we must admit this as a possibility.

Unlike either Burpo or Piper, Dr. Alexander entirely lacked a financial motivation for fabricating the account. Alexander is a very intelligent neurosurgeon with a well paying job in a nice part of the country. There is nothing from his story that makes me think that there existed any substantial drive to profit from his story, though I do not

39 The same standard forces me to reject the accounts of Burpo and Piper as well. Their contradictions to Scripture are numerous and documented. Yet Christians embrace the stories of Piper and Burpo while rejecting those similar to Alexander. I ask, “On what grounds?” Piper and Burpo are just as egotistical in their story telling, dismissive of and careless with Scripture, and contradictory to the Bible as Alexander.

40 The following would apply not just to Dr. Alexander's account, but also all others who have had NDEs.

41 I am not speaking here of his bacterial meningitis or seven-day coma, but only his NDE.

doubt that he has.

It is also worth noting that to promote this lie, Alexander would be forced to abandon his formerly materialistic worldview and admit that he had been wrong. He is a medical doctor who did not believe that God exists or that there is an afterlife. He denied the supernatural and the immortality of the soul. He believed and taught that everything could be explained in terms of chemical reactions within the brain and neurological processes. He did not believe that soul and body were separate and distinct from one another.

Dr. Alexander has publicly abandoned and repudiated that former worldview.⁴² I would suggest that only an experience that he genuinely believes to be true could cause him to do this, and to suffer whatever consequences might come his way.

Further, he has lived and worked among peers who, generally speaking, shared that same worldview. Speaking out about this experience would make him something of a pariah among his colleagues. He could not expect that sharing his story would make him a celebrity among those in his field.⁴³

42 This is not the case with Piper or Burpo. Claiming that they made a trip to Heaven did not require that they abandon anything that they had previously believed. Both of them already believed in Heaven, in God, and in the immortality of the soul. In fact, their descriptions of “Heaven” are amazingly similar to that which they had already believed about Heaven. They learned nothing new during their trips which required a radical rewrite of their previously held beliefs. (In the case of the Burpos, Todd, who wrote the book, learned nothing about Heaven from Colton, who visited Heaven, that he did not already believe.)

43 Just the opposite is the case with Piper and Burpo. Their “trips to Heaven” have been very lucrative endeavors, catapulting both of them to celebrity status in the Christian community. They have appeared on countless radio and TV programs, their calendars have been booked with speaking engagements and interviews, and they have been greeted with **anything but** skepticism and rejection by the Christian community.

Explanation #2: It was a vivid hallucination. It seems that, given the toxicity of the infection of his brain and spine, and given the medications with which he was treated, that the possibility that this was all a very elaborate and vivid hallucination should at least be on the table.

Alexander entertains this as a possibility in *Appendix B: Neuroscientific Hypotheses I Considered to Explain My Experiences*. In the fourth of the nine suggested explanations, Dr. Alexander says that the area of his brain required to produce hallucinations was shut down and badly damaged by the bacterial meningitis.⁴⁴

This may be true, and it might be enough to rule out a vivid hallucination, but Dr. Alexander's rejection of that hypothesis assumes that the brain is necessary for hallucinations. It assumes that our soul/mind cannot experience anything apart from the accompanying chemical reactions within the brain. His book admits the opposite: that there is a higher or different reality, not connected to our brain, which he claims to have visited and experienced.

So while he may be right to say that there is no physical, neurological cause for an hallucination, he cannot dismiss a spiritual explanation for an hallucination. We can only know for sure that a chemical reaction did not cause it in the particular area of the brain (the neocortex) that we currently believe to be responsible for hallucinations. However, we must admit that it might still be an hallucination caused by something else which we may not know anything about at this time.

We should not assume that every hallucination requires a chemical reaction within the physical brain, or even the brain itself. We are conscious, immaterial beings who exist independent of our physical brains.

If man is only a material being, then of course there is no spirit/mind part of man that can experience anything without an accompanying physical or chemical process. But man is not merely a material being. We have an eternal soul/mind which can certainly experience things not connected to our physical body. Dr. Alexander admits this in arguing that he saw and experienced the afterlife outside of and apart from His body. If Dr. Alexander admits that there is a reality that is not merely physical and that we can experience that apart from our body, then he dismisses the possibility of an hallucination by saying that it cannot happen apart from the body.

That brings us to a third possible explanation:

Explanation #3: Dr. Alexander's experience was a demonic deception. This is what I believe happened.

Alexander admits that we are spiritual beings. He talks in the book about the mistake of assuming that there is no greater spiritual reality. The Heaven he claims to visit is one populated with spirit beings, one of which he calls his "guardian angel." Given just the experiences that he has had, he would have to admit that it is a possibility that these spiritual beings were evil and that they have grandly deceived him concerning the afterlife.

From a Christian perspective, this is not at all difficult to admit. The Bible teaches that there are a host of demonic beings, fallen angels who war against God, His people, and His truth. These demonic beings are intent on deceiving people and blinding them to the truth. Their chief is a fallen angel named Satan who "disguises himself as an angel of light" (**2 Cor. 11:14**). He is the father of lies and a liar from the beginning (**John 8:44**).

Satan delights in deceiving people concerning the truth about sin, salvation, God, Heaven, and Hell.

It is not at all difficult to believe that Satan could create

an experience in the conscious mind of a unbeliever (who is his child) and use the infection, the drugs, his memories, and demons to do so. Such an experience could be vivid, memorable, and very real.

“To what end?” we might ask. To promote lies concerning God, evil, sin, salvation and Heaven. The Devil blasphemes God, Heaven and the people of God (**Revelation 13:6**). Dr. Alexander's account, however real it seems to him, is but lies concerning the eternal realities of Heaven, Hell, God, and salvation.

People who believe Dr. Alexander's account of Heaven must at the same time reject what Scripture says about it. He presents a new age, unbiblical view of evil, sin, and moral responsibility. The god he describes is not the God of the Bible. He offers a salvation apart from Jesus Christ and an afterlife absent any divine justice. This can only serve to undermine the credibility of Scripture and any belief in its infallibility or sufficiency.

Alexander's experience is a tool used by the prince of darkness to deceive people about the true Heaven. What he teaches about God is a lie. What he teaches about sin is a lie. What he teaches about the afterlife is a lie. Therefore, by implication, what he teaches about Scripture is a lie. If Alexander is to be believed, the Bible is not.

The father of lies is the devil himself. The result of this deception has been the peddling and telling of lies to millions about life's ultimate realities. Satan has a vested interest in that.

I believe that this third explanation fits all the details of this account. It explains how this experience could be perceived as so real, vivid, and memorable. It explains why Dr. Alexander would reverse his worldview and come to an understanding of reality completely contrary to his former thinking. It explains how he could have an experience so

filled with error, but one he is so convinced is truth. This explanation is consistent with a biblical worldview.

A Christian Inconsistency

Stories like the one told by Dr. Alexander expose the inconsistent thinking of the undiscerning Christian community. The Christian who believes the testimony of Don Piper or of Todd or Colton Burpo has no grounds for rejecting the testimony of Eben Alexander.

If you believe that God allows people to visit the afterlife and then return to tell the rest of us about it, how can you say that Eben Alexander did not experience such a visit?

“Well,” one may argue, “Dr. Alexander's story is so **clearly** unbiblical and filled with lies.” How do you know the same is not true of Burpo and Piper? They also relate things which we are not told in Scripture, and other things which clearly contradict it. If fidelity to Scripture is the standard, then all three accounts must be rejected.

If we are willing to entertain the possibility that Dr. Alexander is lying and/or deceived, then why shouldn't we consider that the same might be true of both Don Piper and Colton/Todd Burpo? If it is likely that Alexander was deceived by the devil through his experience, why shouldn't we consider that the same might be true of the others?

A More Excellent Way

Is there a better way for Christians to view these supposed trips to Heaven that is consistent and true to Scripture? Yes.

First, we affirm that there is a Heaven and a Hell, because that is what Scripture teaches.

Second, we believe this based upon the testimony of Scripture and not the experiences of people who claim to

have had visions, dreams, or trips to Heaven. We believe in these realities because Jesus Christ spoke of them, not because Don Piper visited there.

Third, we can reject the spurious, anecdotal, and unbiblical testimonies of all these men with complete consistency. The fact that they tell a story which seems to match the teaching of Scripture more closely is no reason to believe what they say while rejecting others.

I don't need Don Piper, Colton or Todd Burpo, or Eben Alexander to tell me that Heaven is real. I know it is real because Jesus Christ has told me so in Scripture. I don't doubt His word one bit. Their testimony is completely unnecessary. Don Piper can add nothing to the truthfulness of Jesus Christ. Colton Burpo sheds no light or understanding on the truth of God's Word. The Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ do not need to be authenticated by these men's fanciful tales. They lend no credibility to the Lord of Glory and Truth—Jesus Christ.

Summary

Eben Alexander presents an account of the afterlife completely at odds with the biblical teaching of God, sin, salvation, and Heaven. It is an account filled with lies about these eternal realities. The most viable explanation for Dr. Alexander's experience is that he is genuinely convinced what he saw is true because he has been successfully deceived by the father of lies.

Dr. Alexander's account, which would be rightly rejected by Bible-believing Christians, presents an interesting dilemma for those same Christians who would accept the testimony of Don Piper or Colton Burpo. Consistency and biblical fidelity require that we reject the testimony of all three men. Such accounts are neither true to the biblical text nor necessary for faith. They only serve to undermine belief in Scripture as the sole rule for life and godliness.



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