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EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

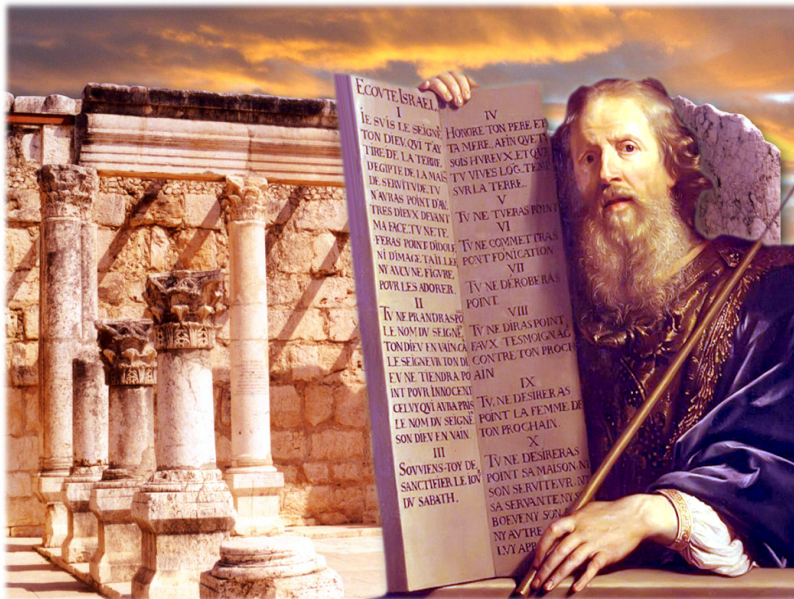
Revelation and the Believer Is God Speaking Today and, If So, How?

by Gary E. Gilley

In an age when there are many voices urging us to travel in many different directions, discernment is invaluable. However, when used by those in the Spiritual Formation Movement, discernment is defined as that which enables one to know when he or she has heard the voice of God. Teachers of spiritual formation believe that because God is speaking to believers apart from Scripture, there has to be a means whereby we can distinguish the voice of God from one's own thoughts. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes in her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, "Discernment opens us up to listen to and recognize the voice and patterns of God's direction in our lives."¹

we develop an intuitive sense of God's heart and purpose in any given moment. We become familiar with God's voice — the

tone, quality and content — just as we become familiar with the voice of a human being we know well."²



Christian psychologist and author Larry Crabb believes he has learned the art of listening to God and proposes to let us in on what he has discovered in his book, *The Papa Prayer*, "Sometimes, though never audibly, I hear the Father speak more clearly than I hear the voice of a human friend."³ Pastor John Ortberg adds, "It is one thing to speak to God. It is another thing to listen. When we listen to God, we receive guidance from the Holy Spirit."⁴

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Ruth Barton further explains:

"The habit of discernment is a quality of attentiveness to God that is so intimate that over time

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Editorials

HAVING ONE'S CAKE AND EATING IT TOO

"Sarah Young may be hard to find, but her books are everywhere." So stated Mark Oppenheimer in his "A First-Person Defense of Writing in Jesus' Voice," an Oct. 25, 2013, *New York Times* article about the author of the popular devotional *Jesus Calling* and three other adult devotionals, the *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, and various spin-off products.

Young has seemed to loathe to grant in-person interviews or to make promotional appearances. Although her reclusive ways tend to add to her mystique, she insisted that her reluctance to grant phone interviews was because "her many ailments, including chronic dizziness, made it hard to predict when she could think clearly. 'With a written interview I can work when I am able and rest when I need to,' she wrote in her e-mail" (ibid.).

The October 2013 issue of *Christianity Today* reported, "Jesus is one of the few calling Young; she is not available for interviews, whether in person or over the phone. After offering CT an exclusive phone interview, Young eventually declined to participate due to additional health setbacks. (She later agreed to answer some of CT's questions for [its] story via e-mail through [Laura] Minchew [at Thomas Nelson Publishing])" ("Sarah Young Still Hears Jesus Calling," pg. 40).

The *CT* article also reports that in spring 2013 the Youngs moved from their missionary assignment in Perth, Australia, back to Sarah's hometown of Nashville, Tennessee, in part for medical reasons. However, she also hopes to spend time with both of her grandchildren, who live in North Carolina. She also is working on another year-long devotional a la *Jesus Calling* (ibid., pg. 41).

The Quarterly Journal examined Sarah Young and her books in its October-December 2013 issue. That article noted some of the problems with Young's methodology of "listening" to Jesus, writing down what she believed He was saying, and then mass-marketing this devotional method and the revelations she thus received. Both the *Christianity Today* and *New York Times* articles also addressed concerns about Young's methods.

It would appear that Young, through the *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, offers contemporary revelations, especially in light of the fact that she herself is its general editor. This Bible includes scenarios crafted by professional writers which then were "answered" by the words Young channeled from Jesus in selections from two of her adult devotional books, *Jesus Calling* and *Jesus Lives* (*Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, pg. vi).

Young, who herself wrote the Introduction to this Bible, refers to her selections therein as, "presenting Jesus' possible 'responses' to those situations in my corresponding devotionals" (ibid.). This is said in all
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PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

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TBN FOUNDER DIES

Paul Franklin Crouch Sr., the man who co-founded the Trinity Broadcasting Network along with his wife, Jan, died Nov. 30, 2013. He was 79. While no cause of death was given, a statement on TBN's website indicated that "His passing followed a decade-long fight with degenerative heart disease." Two years ago, he had been hospitalized for congestive heart failure. In 2012 he had a pacemaker implanted.

In October, Crouch was admitted to a Dallas hospital due to shortness of breath and was placed on a ventilator to assist his breathing. His condition improved and in early November he was released from the hospital, returning home to California amid reports that he was doing better.

Upon announcement of his passing, condolences began pouring into the TBN headquarters from many of those whose television ministries had benefited from the worldwide media platform that Crouch provided. Benny Hinn, Rod Parsley, Creflo Dollar, and John Hagee were just a few of the "Christian" celebrities paying tribute to Crouch.

Yet not all the recognition of Crouch was positive. Sarah Posner, journalist and editor for *Religion Dispatches*, wrote, "Crouch built the network from one station in the 1970s to a global empire featuring a 24-hour menu of health and wealth gospel, preying on the gullible to turn their money over to televangelists to receive God's blessing."

Posner further reported: "Best known for his controversially extravagant spending, with his wife and business partner Jan, Paul Crouch survived many a media exposé. He and his wife built their network, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, using tax-exempt donor funds, frequently, former insiders have charged, for their own enrichment."

One of those "insiders" is the Crouches' granddaughter, Brittany Koper, who has publicly charged family members and the network with the misuse of millions of donation dollars.

Even one thought to be an ardent ally of Crouch used the announcement of his death as an opportunity to call for a revamping of Crouch's empire. J. Lee Grady, former editor of *Charisma*, said on the magazine's website that "It's Time to Reboot Christian Television." Grady's editorial summons suggested numerous ways "to improve Christian television." Included in his reformation agenda were that it should be supported with advertis-

ing, not donations; a prohibition of prosperity preaching; a more careful screening of preachers and their theology; not allowing donors to be manipulated; and that funds should never be misused. Those familiar with the scope and content of *Charisma* magazine will find several of Grady's proposals somewhat hypocritical.

Crouch was born in 1934 in Saint Joseph, Mo., to Assemblies of God missionaries. In 1955, he graduated from the denomination's Central Bible Institute and Seminary in Springfield, Mo., with a degree in theology. In 1973, he and his wife founded the Trinity Broadcasting Network. The following year, TBN purchased its first television station, KLXA-TV (now KTBN-TV 40) in Southern California. TBN has since become the seventh-largest group owner of broadcast television stations in the United States. It is said to reach every major continent via 84 satellite channels and over 18,000 television and cable affiliates.

Crouch is survived by his wife, and two sons, Paul Jr. and Matthew. Reports have stated that Matthew "has since been named as the new president of TBN." According to a CBN News article, "In recent years, Crouch's son Matthew took over day-to-day operations of TBN while Paul Crouch Jr. left for The Word Network, the world's largest African-American religious network." *The Christian Post* also reported on the "question of succession at TBN" saying, "In September 2011, Crouch allegedly wrote a letter saying he wanted his son Matthew Crouch to take over as president of TBN. Paul Crouch Jr., who was presumed the heir of TBN, suddenly announced the following month that he would leave TBN to pursue other ministry opportunities."

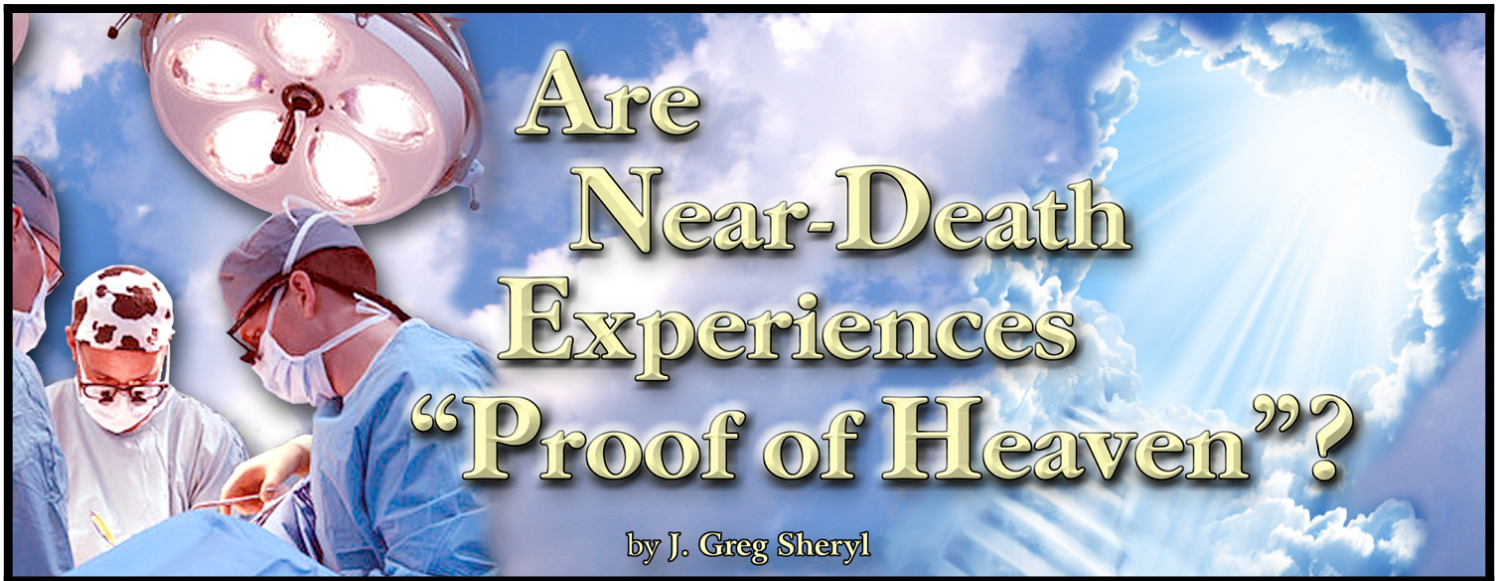
—MKG

DOOMSDAY MINISTER HAROLD CAMPING DIES

Failed end-time prognosticator Harold Camping has died from complications following a fall at his California home. He was 92. Camping was hospitalized as a result of the fall and died two weeks later at his home on Dec. 15.

Camping was a retired civil engineer who attracted worldwide attention as a Bible teacher via Family Radio, a network of stations he and two others founded in 1958. Camping's popularity increased when, in 1961, he began hosting "Open Forum," a live weeknight call-in broadcast where he answered Bible questions from listeners.

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Near-death experiences (NDEs) are big business. Evidence of this can be seen in the number of books, including those aimed at the Christian market, describing the purported experiences of people who have come close to death, taken a trip to the “other side,” and returned with accounts of what they experienced.

NDEs have been reported throughout history. In his book *Life After Life*, Raymond Moody notes some historical “parallels” to NDEs:

“In Book X of *The Republic* ... Plato recounts the myth of Er, a Greek soldier. Er went away to a battle in which many Greeks were killed, and when his countrymen went to collect the bodies of their war dead his body was among them. It was lain, along with all the others, upon a funeral pyre to be burned. After some time his body revived, and Er described what he had seen in his journey to the realms beyond.”¹

According to this story, Er experienced his soul leaving his body, joined some other spirits and went to a location with portals into the afterlife. There the spirits were detained and judged by “divine beings” who could see each spirit’s deeds. Er was not thus judged but was told to return and tell those on earth what this other world was like. Then he returned to

his body and awakened on the funeral pyre.²

Another historical parallel cited by Moody is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.³

A third parallel cited is that of scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who claimed some experiences that bear similarities to NDEs and/or OBEs (out-of-body experiences).⁴

Although not mentioned by Moody, mystical 20th-century Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung claimed to have had NDEs. In a chapter in his autobiography, called “Visions,” Jung relates NDEs he had while recuperating from a broken foot and a subsequent heart attack in 1944.⁵

None of the above historical examples comes from a Christian source, although Moody thinks he sees a parallel in the Bible to NDEs in what the Apostle Paul tells Agrippa in Acts 26:13-26 about his (i.e., Paul’s) conversion to Christ.⁶ However, Moody admits, “There are differences, too, of course [between Paul’s experience and an NDE]. [For instance,] Paul did not come near death in the course of his vision.”⁷

A second biblical parallel Moody sees with NDEs is in Paul’s description of the “spiritual body” in 1 Corinthians 15:35-52.⁸ However, in neither case is Paul speaking of NDEs. In the Acts passage Moody

cites, Paul speaks of a vision he had of the Lord Jesus while on the road to Damascus. In the 1 Corinthians passage, Paul describes the nature of the resurrection of the body — something that hasn’t occurred for anyone except the Lord Jesus.

THE MODERN-DAY FASCINATION WITH NDEs

The origin of modern-day NDE stories is the 1975 publication of Moody’s book, *Life After Life*. Moody coined the term “near-death experience,” as fellow NDE-researcher Melvin Morse states in the Preface to the 25th anniversary edition of the book:

“Prior to the publication of *Life After Life*, the term *near-death experience* did not even exist. Physicians called it ‘the Lazarus Syndrome,’ implying that it was the result of medical pathology. Patients didn’t call near-death experiences anything, often thinking that they were mentally ill or had had hallucinations from drugs or a lack of oxygen to the brain.”⁹

Later, Morse offers another possible reason for the modern awareness of NDEs:

“By the early 1970s medical technology had advanced to the point where successful resuscitation from cardiac arrest was com-

monplace. Although there have always been stories describing a life after death, prior to the modern era it was rare to survive clinical death. Modern intensive-care medicine and rapid-response medic teams have made the cheating of death routine. Dr. Moody was the first to recognize that these same patients could contribute to our understanding of the last few minutes of life."¹⁰

The New York Times called Raymond Moody "the father of the near-death experience."¹¹ It was through Moody meeting psychiatrist George Ritchie and hearing him tell of his own NDE that had occurred in December 1943¹² and then hearing one of his philosophy students recount his own NDE and ask Moody questions about it¹³ that Moody began investigating what he would later term "near-death experiences."

Moody said he wrote *Life After Life* during the summer of 1974,¹⁴ although it was not published until 1975. Near the end of 1975, Moody decided to dedicate the book to Ritchie. However, when Moody mentioned this to Ritchie, the latter responded:

"I appreciate that," said Ritchie. "But I would rather you dedicate it to Jesus Christ because he is the one who gave me this experience."¹⁵

While Ritchie believed he had met Jesus in his NDE, we will later see that it was not the biblical Jesus. Because Moody wanted his book "to stay neutral on the question of religion," they eventually agreed on the following dedication:

"To George Ritchie, MD, and through him to the One whom he suggested."¹⁶

WHAT IS A TYPICAL NDE LIKE?

Moody gives a composite example of an NDE that includes a number of components that commonly occur in NDEs he had examined at the time he wrote *Life After Life*. While he found no single NDE containing all of these components, every NDE contained at

least some of them; and some NDEs he examined contained many of these elements:

"A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval. After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a 'body,' but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before — a being of light — appears before him. This being asks him a question, non-verbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body

and lives. Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life."¹⁷

The fifteen elements of an NDE,¹⁸ many of which are included in the above example, are:

1. "Ineffability"¹⁹ (i.e., indescribability). A number of people who have had NDEs find it impossible to express in words some of what they experienced.

2. "Hearing the News."²⁰ This refers to the person hearing himself or herself pronounced dead by others.

3. "Feelings of Peace and Quiet."²¹

4. "The Noise."²² Sometimes this is an unpleasant sound, such as a buzzing or banging. Other times it is a pleasant sound, such as bells or beautiful music.

5. "The Dark Tunnel."²³ Some people find themselves in a dark tunnel. Sometimes they move through it rapidly.

6. "Out of the Body."²⁴ The person seems to leave his or her body and is able to look at things from outside the body. Moody found that many times those who "left their body" found themselves in another body, which they had difficulty describing.²⁵

7. "Meeting Others."²⁶ This includes meeting deceased people they once knew, but also at times people they didn't know and/or spiritual helpers.

8. "The Being of Light."²⁷ Moody describes this light as being tremendously bright, yet the one seeing it is not hurt by its brightness. He states, "Despite the light's unusual manifestation, however, not one person has expressed any doubt whatsoever that it was a being, a being of light. Not only that, it is a personal being. It has a very definite personality. The love and the warmth which emanate from this being to the dying person are

utterly beyond words, and he feels completely surrounded by it and taken up in it, completely at ease and accepted in the presence of this being. He senses an irresistible magnetic attraction to this light. He is ineluctably drawn to it."²⁸

9. "The Review."²⁹ A person's life — either in its entirety, or just highlights — flashes in front of them vividly and rapidly or even instantaneously. This flashback is sometimes directed by "the being of light." At other times, it occurs when the NDE doesn't feature "the being of light."

10. "The Border or Limit."³⁰ In some NDEs, the person comes up to some sort of a border, such as "a body of water, a gray mist, a door, a fence across a field, or simply a line."³¹ Sometimes, at this point, the person is prevented from crossing the border and sent back into his or her body.

11. "Coming Back."³²

12. "Telling Others."³³ Moody writes, "It must be emphasized that a person who has been through an experience of this type has no doubt whatsoever as to its reality and its importance. Interviews which I have done are usually sprinkled with remarks to precisely that effect."³⁴

13. "Effects on Lives."³⁵ Moody found that people who went through NDEs tended to have a new sense of appreciation and value for what they do with their lives afterward. Most also came back with a sense of the importance of loving others. A few also came back with seeming psychic abilities. No one Moody interviewed returned feeling that they had arrived at perfection as a result of their NDE.

14. "New Views of Death."³⁶ Almost all those Moody interviewed who had NDEs no longer feared dying. However, they weren't seeking death, either. None of those he interviewed considered suicide an acceptable route to return to the state they had been in during their NDE. Not all of their new views of death agreed with Scripture.

15. "Corroboration."³⁷ Moody found that sometimes when patients who had NDEs also had out-of-body

experiences (OBEs) they were able to accurately describe to doctors or others what happened while they were supposedly "dead."

NDEs TODAY

While Moody's book is doubtless responsible for the high degree of public awareness of NDEs today, books written by or about people who have reportedly experienced NDEs have fueled popular interest in the subject. We will now look at several examples, both of non-Christians and Christians:

Betty J. Eadie — *Embraced By The Light*.³⁸ The book's cover calls it "*The Most Profound and Complete Near-Death Experience Ever*."³⁹ In the book's Foreword, NDE researcher Melvin Morse writes:

"This book is really a textbook of the near-death experience, written as a simple and wonderful story that we can all understand. ... Betty Eadie's book illustrates the stages of the experience with superb writing ... she makes the unknowable comprehensible."⁴⁰

Eadie dedicates her book "To The Light, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom I owe all that I have. He is the 'staff' that I lean on; without him I would fall."⁴¹

Eadie writes that on the night of Nov. 19, 1973,⁴² following an operation for a partial hysterectomy, she had an NDE as she lay in her hospital bed. In an out-of-body experience, she saw her own body lying dead on the bed. Three men in brown robes appeared and she engaged in telepathic-like communication with them. In her disembodied state she went to see her husband and children and then returned to the hospital where the three men had remained. She entered blackness and then came upon a figure within the light whom she recognized as Jesus. They embraced.

Eadie and Jesus conversed. He answered her questions about mysteries of the universe. Even though these revelations aren't contained in the Bible and some of them contradict it, Eadie writes that this Jesus shared them with her. Eventually, she was

prodded into returning to her body although she preferred to remain in her other state. Then she had some more supernatural experiences before being discharged from the hospital.

Near the end of her book, she writes:

"More experiences have come to me since November 18, 1973 [the night before her surgery and subsequent NDE], but I am reluctant to share them here; it took nineteen years and countless proddings to get me to share the experiences in this book. Everything has its time; for this book, the time is now."⁴³

With a teaser like that, the reader is left wondering whether there might be an *Embraced By The Light II* published in the future.

The Quarterly Journal reviewed *Embraced by The Light* in 1994.⁴⁴ A number of her revelations contradict Scripture. Among the contradictions:

1. An implicit denial of the full, unique deity of Jesus and an implicit polytheism.⁴⁵ Eadie writes of Jesus, "I understood that he was the Son of God, though he himself was also a God."⁴⁶ Later, she states, "I understood, to my surprise, that Jesus was a separate being from God, with his own divine purpose, and I knew that God was our mutual Father."⁴⁷

2. A modified form of pluralism. Eadie says, "I wanted to know why there were so many churches in the world. Why didn't God give us only one church, one pure religion? The answer came to me with the purest of understanding. Each of us, I was told, is at a different level of spiritual development and understanding. Each person is therefore prepared for a different level of spiritual knowledge. All religions upon the earth are necessary because there are people who need what they teach. People in one religion may not have a complete understanding of the Lord's gospel and never will have while in that religion. But that religion is used as a stepping stone to further knowledge."⁴⁸

And she further maintains, "Having received this knowledge, I knew that

we have no right to criticize any church or religion in any way. They are all precious and important in his sight. ... There *is* a fullness of the gospel, but most people will not attain it here."⁴⁹

3. Pantheism (all is God, and God is all). In seeing a rose in a garden, Eadie writes, "I felt the rose's presence around me, as if I were actually inside and part of the flower. I experienced it as if I *were* the flower. ... I felt God in the plant, in me, his love pouring into us. We were all one! I will never forget the rose that I was. That one experience, just a glimmer of the grander joy that is available in the spirit world, in being one with everything else, was so great that I will cherish it forever."⁵⁰

Christian author and researcher Richard Abanes gives his evaluation of the book:

"In reality, *Embraced By The Light* is a cleverly woven tale spun with threads from Mormonism, Eastern Philosophy, the Mind Sciences/New Thought and the occult."⁵¹

It is now widely known that Eadie is a Mormon and that she was a Mormon at the time of her NDE.⁵² Although Eadie's Mormonism was publicized when the book was released in Utah,⁵³ it was disguised in other states⁵⁴ to such an extent that when Abanes questioned Eadie about it and confronted her with sources who had reported it, she refused to admit it.⁵⁵

However, the final problem with Eadie's NDE is whether or not it ever occurred. Eadie has refused to provide information that would corroborate it. *The Quarterly Journal* article about her book cited an appearance by Eadie on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Jan. 3, 1994) in which she was questioned by Winfrey about skepticism regarding her NDE. Eadie declined to give Winfrey any proof of her experience.⁵⁶

The article continued:

"The television news magazine, *American Journal*, fared no better in their request for information

from Eadie. A segment of its Feb. 15, 1994 program featured a story on the best-selling author and emphasized her unwillingness to disclose even basic details: 'We wanted to talk to Betty's doctor about that night, but she refused to identify either him or the hospital. And when we requested access to her medical records, she had this response: "I would never do that, nor would I be subject to hypnosis, nor would I be subject to a — what is it, a polygram? — whatever, polygraph test. And all of those have been suggested. The answer is simply, *No.*"' The news magazine then queried, 'Why not? That would certainly give your story more credibility.' To which Eadie replied, 'Well, I don't need credibility. I'm not trying to prove my experience, I'm sharing it.' Finally, the program noted, 'Betty says right after her near-death experience, she told some close friends about it, but when we asked to speak with them, once again, she refused.'⁵⁷

Near the end of his book, Abanes wrote:

"What was Eadie really 'told' during her NDE? Was she told anything? Did she even *have* an NDE? The public may never know."⁵⁸

Don Piper — 90 Minutes in Heaven:⁵⁹ If Moody is responsible for raising awareness of NDEs, Don Piper might be the person most responsible for bringing mainstream evangelical Christian experiences of NDEs into larger public awareness. However, he is *not* the first professing evangelical Christian to have reported an NDE.

Piper's NDE account is brief and simple. Only two short chapters — 16 pages total — near the beginning of the book are devoted to his NDE.⁶⁰ Much of the rest of the book describes the aftermath of the car accident that precipitated the NDE. This includes an account of his painful rehabilitation.

On Jan. 18, 1989, Piper, a Baptist pastor, was returning from the annual

state conference of the Baptist General Convention of Texas to the church where he was on staff. He was due to lead the Wednesday night prayer meeting. About 45 minutes into the trip, he was involved in a traffic accident.⁶¹ Piper relates:

"About 11:45 A.M., just before I cleared the east end of the bridge [over the Trinity River], an eighteen-wheeler driven by an inmate, a trusty at the Texas Department of Corrections, weaved across the center line and hit my car head-on. The truck sandwiched my small car between the bridge railing and the driver's side of the truck. All those wheels went right on top of my car and smashed it."⁶²

Due to the truck going about 60 miles per hour, and his 1986 Ford Escort going about 50 miles an hour, "the accident report states that the impact was about 110 miles an hour."⁶³

Piper wrote that he died and went to heaven. He experienced joy and was met in front of a gate by a group of deceased relatives and friends who were smiling and praising the Lord. Piper was happy and felt welcomed by this multitude of people. He experienced vivid colors and felt very much alive. A bright light came from the gate a short distance away and everything seemed bright. He and everyone else began to move toward the light. The closer they got, the brighter the light became.

Piper describes the heavenly music he heard, saying "hundreds of songs were being sung at the same time — all of them worshiping God."⁶⁴

Despite all songs being sung, there was no disharmony and he was able to "clearly distinguish each song."⁶⁵ He heard both ancient and modern songs and experienced great peace and the most joy he had ever felt. Eventually, he found himself part of a great heavenly choir. Piper admits, that of all the people who met him in front of the gate, "I didn't see Jesus"⁶⁶ and later states:

"I did not see God. Although I knew God was there, I never saw

any kind of image or luminous glow to indicate his divine presence. I've heard people talk about going inside and coming back out the gate. That didn't happen to me."⁶⁷

Piper relates going right up to the gate, believing he was about to go in. Then, suddenly, he was back in his body, singing the words to "What a Friend We Have In Jesus," along with a fellow minister, who had stopped his car and gone to pray for him.

Much of the rest of Piper's book has to do with the ordeal of recuperating, lessons he learned, and new ministry opportunities that arose as a result of all he went through — both his NDE and his physical trials after the accident.

In 2008, *The Quarterly Journal* reviewed Piper and *90 Minutes in Heaven*.⁶⁸ Piper's NDE seemed credible partly because it was low-key and occupied a small portion of the book. With the exception of the book's title and its short Prologue,⁶⁹ it lacked sensationalism. Also, the book's title may well have been decided upon by an editor rather than Piper. And because Piper had help in telling his story, the dramatic-sounding Prologue might not have been his doing.

However, there are several observations that are less-than-positive (although only two of them actually relate to the book itself, whereas the others relate to Piper's life after the book):

1. *The Quarterly Journal* review cited above notes:

"Another peculiarity is Piper's insistence that certain songs will not be sung in heaven: 'As I stood before the gate, I didn't think of it, but later I realized that I didn't hear such songs as "The Old Rugged Cross" or "The Nail-Scarred Hand." None of the hymns that filled the air were about Jesus' sacrifice or death. I heard no sad songs and instinctively knew that there are no sad songs in heaven.' Here is where Piper should have trusted the Bible, not his instincts, as his

instincts are clearly in error. The Apostle John, under divine inspiration, was given a glimpse of the songs of heaven. He informs us that, 'they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open the seals; for *you were slain*, and have redeemed us to God *by your blood* out of every tribe and tongue and nation"' (Revelation 5:9, emphasis added). Christ's loving sacrifice will not be forgotten in heaven."⁷⁰

2. The article makes the point that the most powerful part of Piper's story is not his NDE, but the story of his recovery and rehabilitation. Piper's story of triumphing over adversity through the power and grace of Christ can stand on its own without the story of his NDE.⁷¹ Sadly, without the story of the NDE, from which the book's title is derived, the book probably wouldn't have become the bestseller that it did and Piper might not have become the celebrity he has become.

3. Although Piper's original book was low-key he has become a Christian celebrity, and now has a non-profit ministry, Don Piper Ministries,⁷² through which he travels, speaks in various venues, and is billed as "The Minister of Hope."⁷³ He has also published additional books and his wife has written a book. These things are not necessarily negative; however, we simply note that he has clearly become quite famous due to his book. He has also lent his celebrity status by endorsing at least two other books recounting the NDE experiences of Christians who claim to have had them: Todd Burpo's *Heaven Is for Real*⁷⁴ and Ally Breedlove's *When Will the Heaven Begin?*⁷⁵

4. In Hank Hanegraaff's 2013 book, *AfterLife*, he notes that Piper told a television audience that in view of the Scripture stating, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27) — that, because he has already died once, Jesus will return in his lifetime.⁷⁶ But this is misguided thinking on Piper's

part. Regarding the statement in Hebrews 9:27, that men are appointed to die only once, pastor and author Douglas Connelly points out that the Bible itself records "some notable exceptions to that statement," such as Lazarus, and some other people, whom God raised from the dead; all of whom later would die again.⁷⁷

5. Hanegraaff calls "particularly disturbing" Piper's statement in the book that he can "speak authoritatively about heaven from firsthand knowledge."⁷⁸ This statement truly *is* disturbing, because it seems to place Piper's experience above the Scriptures; which, for the believer, should be the ultimate authority. The Bible, not NDEs, is the basis for our theology and beliefs. If our experience contradicts Scripture, we follow Scripture.

Todd Burpo — *Heaven Is For Real*⁷⁹ Todd Burpo is a Wesleyan pastor. Burpo's story is about his nearly 4-year-old son, Colton, and an NDE the boy had in March 2003 when he nearly died from a ruptured appendix. The story is told in piecemeal fashion, because the information Colton relayed to Todd took place in segments over time. Colton had an OBE in the hospital and described what both Todd and his wife were doing in two different rooms while Colton himself was elsewhere.⁸⁰

Colton told Todd, "Jesus had the angels sing to me because I was so scared. They made me feel better."⁸¹ Colton also said that he sat in Jesus' lap.⁸² Todd asked his son many things about heaven. Colton described meeting Todd's grandfather who had died many years before Colton was born.⁸³ Colton also described meeting a sister that his mother had miscarried before Colton was born and whom neither Todd nor his wife had ever told him about, although they had mentioned the miscarriage to Colton's older sister.⁸⁴

The story becomes problematic in that Todd also asked Colton for information about which the Bible is silent, including such things as what people look like in heaven,⁸⁵ what Jesus looks like,⁸⁶ who sits on the left side

of God's throne,⁸⁷ what the Holy Spirit looks like⁸⁸ and what Satan looks like.⁸⁹

We're told that everyone in heaven has wings,⁹⁰ that Gabriel sits on the left-hand side of God's throne,⁹¹ that the Holy Spirit is "kind of blue,"⁹² that Todd will fight monsters in the battle of Armageddon⁹³ using "either ... a sword or a bow and arrow," but Colton doesn't remember which.⁹⁴

Assuming that Burpo's account of his son's NDE is accurate, it also seems that God allowed Colton to encounter certain people and have certain experiences. Where the story becomes problematic is in mining Colton's experience for extrabiblical information. Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that the Lord would convey such details to a not-quite 4-year-old child in order to reveal to the world information He did not previously see fit to provide in Scripture.⁹⁵

OTHER NDE STORIES

Two other recent stories that include Christian-oriented NDE accounts are *To Heaven and Back*⁹⁶ and *When Will the Heaven Begin?*⁹⁷

To Heaven and Back is an account by orthopedic surgeon Mary Neal, who had an NDE while kayaking and was submerged and pinned underneath a waterfall in Chile in January 1999. Her story was interesting, although only a portion of it related to her NDE. Some elements in her book seem Christian while others seem New Age.

When Will the Heaven Begin? is the story of Ben Breedlove. From birth, Breedlove had a heart condition known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. During his 18-year life Breedlove almost died four times. The first time, when he was four, he saw a bright light and felt peace.⁹⁸ The third time that he nearly died he had another NDE. In that NDE, he also felt peace and was standing with his favorite rap artist.⁹⁹ Unlike most NDEs in which the one who has the experience meets those who have died, the musician he "saw" in his NDE was alive at the time and still is at the time of this

writing. Breedlove died on Dec. 25, 2011. Although the back cover of the book calls it a book about Breedlove's near-death experiences, this is clearly a marketing ploy, because his two NDEs were relatively unremarkable and do not account for much of the book's content.

A third volume finding its way onto bookstore shelves is *Proof of Heaven* by Eben Alexander.¹⁰⁰ Raymond Moody, regarded by some as "the father of the near-death experience,"¹⁰¹ claims:

"Dr. Eben Alexander's near-death experience is the most astounding I have heard in more than four decades of studying this phenomenon. [He] is living proof of an afterlife."¹⁰²

Moody is featured prominently on the front cover of neurosurgeon Alexander's book. And on Alexander's website Moody calls it "one of the crown jewels of all near death experiences."¹⁰³

Evidently, Alexander believes the press his book is receiving because he makes a number of statements in the book indicating his feelings of self-importance. For instance, at the end of the book's Prologue, he assures readers:

"What I have to tell you is as important as anything anyone will ever tell you, and it's true."¹⁰⁴

Elsewhere, he boasts:

"At the risk of oversimplifying, I was allowed to die harder, and travel deeper, than almost all NDE subjects before me. As arrogant as that might sound, my intentions are not."¹⁰⁵

Alexander was hospitalized in November 2008 with a case of *E. coli* meningitis, "very rare in adults."¹⁰⁶ He was in a coma for six days and regained consciousness on the seventh day.¹⁰⁷ Alexander writes that during the time he was comatose he first went to a murky place, which he calls "the Realm of the Earthworm's-Eye View," where he saw animals appearing and disappearing into the muck.¹⁰⁸ Later, he came out of the

muck and heard beautiful music. He flew over happy people, trees, and flowers. At some point, he became aware of a beautiful girl beside him, flying on the wing of a butterfly. She wordlessly communicated to him the message:

"You are loved and cherished, dearly, forever. You have nothing to fear. There is nothing you can do wrong."¹⁰⁹

Alexander relates:

"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. 'We will show you many things here,' the girl said — again, without actually using these words but by driving their conceptual essence directly into me. 'But eventually, you will go back.'"¹¹⁰

He entered a completely black place that at the same time was full of light. He became aware of an "orb" that acted as an interpreter between him and "God, the Creator, the Source who is responsible for making the universe and all in it."¹¹¹ Alexander doesn't know the name of this "God," but states:

"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."¹¹²

Alexander also states that in some way the orb-interpreter was both a part of the beautiful girl on the butterfly wing and also was the girl on the butterfly wing.¹¹³

During the time he was in his coma, family and friends rallied around Alexander. Additionally, the pastor and his wife at his Episcopal church prayed for him.¹¹⁴

A friend of Alexander's wife had contacted an occultist so that she could attempt to make contact with

Alexander psychically. The occultist friend obliged and believed she had been able to contact him psychically.¹¹⁵

On the seventh day, Alexander came out of his coma and began his recuperation. Alexander writes that while he was in the coma, he came to understand many things — things that are now part of him, but that will take him years to unpack, now that he is back in his “mortal, material brain.”¹¹⁶

Whatever Alexander may have experienced in his coma did not come from the God of the Bible. It contradicts Scripture. His NDE’s content — including calling God “Om” — and the philosophy he espouses as the result of it are very Hinduistic and New Age.

The August 2013 issue of *Esquire* magazine contains an article on Alexander and *Proof of Heaven*.¹¹⁷ The article’s author interviewed Alexander extensively. He also interviewed the only doctor who treated Alexander, whom Alexander agreed to let the interviewer speak to and who was willing to be interviewed for the article. The article looks at Alexander’s past as a neurosurgeon and also at some of the material in *Proof of Heaven*. It casts a shadow over Alexander’s credibility and integrity.

There is a lengthy online response seeking to rebut the article¹¹⁸ that can be found via a link on Alexander’s website.¹¹⁹ It appears that while the *Esquire* article is not without problems, the rebuttal is less convincing than the article.

Regardless of whether or not Alexander is accurate in recounting his NDE in *Proof of Heaven*, both the content of his NDE and the lessons he gives are unbiblical and must be rejected by those who believe in the Bible as God’s Word.

A CHRISTIAN EVALUATION OF NDEs

Christian philosophy professor Douglas Groothuis observed:

“I believe that all NDEs cannot be explained away on the basis of natural factors, even if some

NDEs are susceptible to merely physical explanations. ... The near-death experience proves to be a challenge to the materialism of modern science, just as it challenges those who are spiritually inclined to interpret its meaning properly.”¹²⁰

In deciding how to evaluate NDEs, we should keep several things in mind:

First, near-death experiences are just that: *near-death* experiences. The people who have had these experiences were only near death and not actually dead. Mark Hitchcock wrote:

“First, it is critical to note that they are called *near-death* experiences, not *death* or *afterlife* experiences. The fact that people came back from whatever state they were in is proof that they didn’t really die. Why, then, should we put any stock in what they purport to tell us about the afterlife? After all, they were only near death, not dead. It’s as ridiculous as a woman telling another woman about her ‘near-pregnancy experience.’ The idea is laughable. Everyone knows that you either are or you aren’t! Likewise, you’re either dead or you’re not. Experts make a clear distinction between clinical death, which is reversible, and biological death, which without divine intervention is irreversible. By their very nature, NDEs are experienced by people who are clinically, but not biologically, dead. At best, what people in this condition experience is the transition between life and death, not the final destination.”¹²¹

Secondly, contrary to what one might assume, near-death experiences are not rare. When Raymond Moody was doing his initial research into near-death experiences, he was teaching philosophy classes at a university. He stated:

“I began to include readings on the subject of human survival of biological death in my philosophy courses. ... To my amaze-

ment, I found that in almost every class of thirty or so students, at least one student would come to me afterwards and relate a personal near-death experience.”¹²²

Further on, Moody related:

“... after a lecture I recently gave I opened the floor for discussion and a doctor asking the first question said, ‘I have been in medicine for a long time. If these experiences are as common as you say they are, why haven’t I heard of them?’ Knowing that there would probably be someone there who had encountered a case or two, I immediately turned the question back to the audience. I asked, ‘Has anyone else here heard of anything like this?’ At this point, the doctor’s wife raised her hand and related the story of a very close friend of theirs.”¹²³

Rene Jorgensen, an NDE researcher and author of *Behind 90 Minutes in Heaven*, would like us to believe that near-death experiences are happening more often than we think:

“If we look at polls, some polls estimate that up to 13,000,000 Americans have had a near-death experience. That means approximately 800 Americans have a near-death experience each day; so this is really an event, an experience, that occurs very often.”¹²⁴

Although we have only examined *heavenly* NDEs in this article, there are also cases of people who have had NDEs in which they believed they experienced hell. John Ankerberg and John Weldon state:

“Hellish experiences are also reported by Dr. Maurice Rawlings... Rawlings also suggests that positive and negative experiences occur in a roughly 50-50 ratio. He discovered that the positive experiences are easily remembered because they are so blissful. But the negative experiences are so hellish they are repressed deeply enough so they are not remembered at all.”¹²⁵

Ankerberg and Weldon also note:

"... we stress the importance of a critical approach to NDEs. We should not be so gullible as to accept the claim that all NDEs are blissful. Likewise, neither should we assume that such experiences — whether heavenly or hellish — are accurate descriptions of the biblical afterlife."¹²⁶

NDEs AND OBEs

Moody and others have noted the amazing accuracy of instances where the person having an NDE also had an OBE and was able to describe things going on outside of their body, sometimes in different rooms, etc. This viewing of things from outside of one's own body is difficult to dispute, when the person to whom it happened is able to accurately describe things going on which they would have had no natural way of knowing otherwise.

Gary Habermas of Liberty University has written:

"The most interesting near-death accounts are the dozens claiming that the dying person, during his turmoil, actually observed events that were later reported and verified. ... A number of blind persons have also produced accurate descriptions of their surroundings."¹²⁷

He also notes that "internal brain phenomena cannot explain accurate descriptions of events, particularly when they happened a distance away or when the person's heart or brain had failed."¹²⁸

ONE POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR NDEs

One man who has attempted to grapple with the meaning of near-death experiences is Christian cardiologist and NDE-researcher, Dr. Michael Sabom. He states:

"I now believe that the near-death experience occurs *while* the soul is separating from the body. The spiritual mechanism of death seems best understood as a *process* and not as a single definable moment."¹²⁹

Sabom also states:

"Biblical support for this theory is given in the description of the death of Rachel, Jacob's wife, as she gave birth to Benjamin, recorded in Genesis 35:18-19. Here, Rachel's death was said to occur 'as her soul was departing' (NASB), not *when* it departed — suggesting that her soul departed over a period of time and not instantaneously. ... During this dying process, an in-between state may momentarily exist where connection is still maintained with the physical brain (allowing for remembrance of the event if resuscitation is successful) but where the person's spirit or soul is in the process of separation from the body. If the soul continues to depart, death occurs and *physical* memory ceases. If the soul returns, the person revives and may report an out-of-body experience."¹³⁰

Sabom continues:

"There are still mysteries here, as perhaps there always will be with death. How the soul can 'see,' a physical process requiring the optical mechanisms of the eye, from a vantage point distant from the body is not understood. All we can say at this point is that it seems that the soul is not dependent on the body to accomplish functions we normally think of as requiring physical organs and physiological processes. And this is precisely what the Bible says will happen when the dying process is completed and our physical body is gone — the rich man in hell [Hades] 'looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side' (Luke 16:23, emphasis added)."¹³¹

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ABOUT NDEs

Christian apologist Ron Rhodes counsels:

"The map for evaluating near-death experiences is, of course, the Bible. Scripture defines death

as the separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). And true death occurs only once (see Hebrews 9:27)."¹³²

While "true death occurs only once," as earlier noted the Bible records instances of God raising people, such as Lazarus, from the dead.

Additionally, pastor and author Douglas Connelly observed:

"Oddly enough, none of the people who died and then was revived miraculously to life [in the Bible] says one recorded word about the experience of death. Lazarus never tells us what it was like to be dead four days and then called forth by the Lord Jesus."¹³³

Mark Hitchcock states:

"... the only reliable source of information about the afterlife is the Bible. Any experience people claim to have must ultimately be evaluated by the highest authority — the Word of God. And the Bible contains no record of NDEs, nor does it instruct us to seek information concerning the afterlife from them."¹³⁴

While Hitchcock states that the Bible gives us no record of NDEs, he does believe that the Bible gives us an account of what he calls a "deathbed vision." He states:

"These occurrences are commonly called deathbed visions (DBV), sometimes referred to as 'first cousins' of near-death experiences. The key difference is that with deathbed visions the person actually dies not long after the experience, while near-death experiences are just that — near death."¹³⁵

The biblical example he gives for this is the first recorded Christian martyr, Stephen; where Stephen, immediately prior to his martyrdom, gazed into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56).¹³⁶

In post-biblical times, Hitchcock cites the examples of famous 19th-

century evangelist D.L. Moody and Billy Graham's grandmother, both of whom might have had these "deathbed visions."¹³⁷ Connelly also gives examples of three people he knew personally, who had what might be called a deathbed vision.¹³⁸

Contemporary Christian thinkers themselves seem divided over what to make of NDEs. Given the fact that the Bible contains no clear examples of NDEs and only one possible example of a "deathbed vision" experience (Stephen's), how should we view these?

Unless we actually know the person who had the NDE, it is difficult to say with certainty whether a particular person actually had the experience he claims to have had. And, even if we do know (or believe) that the person had such an experience, it is difficult for the person who hasn't had the NDE to know how to correctly interpret it. People who have had NDEs tend to firmly believe that what they experienced was "the truth" and also tend to believe that they have correctly understood and interpreted what they claim to have experienced.

So, although no one currently has a complete understanding and explanation of NDEs, we should keep several things in mind to help us regarding evaluating NDEs:

First, as PFO director G. Richard Fisher has written:

"The doctrine of brief visits to heaven and the idea of a temporary heaven for the purpose of bringing back reports is a modern aberration. Christ spoke of one who, from his torment in *Hades*, pleaded for just such a messenger, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house. ... if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent' (Luke 16:27, 30). The stern answer, Jesus told us, was, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them' (v. 29). Emphatically, the Word of God with all its incredible teaching about heaven and the afterlife is enough."¹³⁹

God has told us in the Bible all He intended for us to know and believe. Therefore, we must judge every experience according to Scripture.

Second, we should not accept from NDEs anything that contradicts Scripture, regardless of the person who had the NDE. And NDEs should never be the basis for accepting new doctrines or new beliefs including but not limited to beliefs about heaven, hell, and the afterlife. Because NDEs are not mentioned in Scripture, they are not a God-ordained basis of revelation about anything. Another person's NDE cannot and should not be used to bind the conscience or form the beliefs of anyone else because an NDE constitutes, at its very best, a purely personal experience, provided it is even true.

OBEs, which sometimes accompany NDEs, seem to be genuine experiences, even though we may not completely understand how they occur. At least one OBE may be attested to in the Scriptures, if the experience of the Apostle Paul, related in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, was an OBE, as the apostle admits the possibility of it having been. Two other *possible* OBEs in Scripture are Jesus seeing Nathanael under the fig tree in John 1:47-50 and the explanation that Elisha gives for being aware of his servant Gehazi's secret activities in 2 Kings 5:25-26. However, we cannot be dogmatic about these things. Their rarity in Scripture — if they are present at all — and lack of detail should cause us not to view them as normal events. Also, OBEs in connection with NDEs are not experiences that the person who had the NDE sought to have. Additionally, OBEs are oftentimes associated with occultic activity.

Ron Rhodes warns that "many accounts of near-death experiences have clear connections with occultism and must be outright rejected. As well, many of the accounts portray a 'Jesus' saying things that go against the biblical Jesus. These too must be outright rejected."¹⁴⁰

George Ritchie, the psychiatrist to whom Raymond Moody dedicated his book, *Life After Life*, evidently experi-

enced "another Jesus" (see 2 Corinthians 11:4), different from the biblical Jesus. Michael Sabom reports:

"Ritchie's 'Jesus' allegedly told him of several errors in the Old and New Testament, including the Christian belief that man is a sinful, fallen creature."¹⁴¹

Ritchie's "Jesus" also reportedly told him, "If God is our Father and Jesus is our brother, then we also have to be gods and not lowly worms."¹⁴²

Betty Eadie is a Mormon and the Mormon "Jesus" is not the biblical Jesus. A number of things she claims to have learned during her NDE contradict Scripture. Eben Alexander's NDE reveals much in common with Hinduism and little in common with the Bible. Even NDEs that Christians relate can be fully or partially misleading.

As Douglas Connelly says:

"I certainly do not have a complete explanation for every near-death experience, nor am I questioning the integrity of those who tell their stories. I do believe, however, that we need to be gently skeptical of the accounts we hear. Such individual experiences do not prove anything about the afterlife."¹⁴³

Experiences, such as near-death experiences, are just that — *experiences*. Experiences can come from a number of sources: God, the devil, an overactive imagination, etc. Additionally, experiences must be interpreted, and this can be done correctly, partially correctly, or incorrectly. Added to these personal factors are the storytelling of those whose consciences are seared and who may seem quite sincere, but who are actively trying to deceive others for their own ends. As a result, one can see how we must return to the objective standard of the Word of God to judge not only near-death experiences but all things. It seems appropriate to close with four relevant Scriptures:

"These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you" (1 John 2:26).

"Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth" (Ephesians 4:14, *NLT*).

"In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories" (2 Peter 2:3a, *NIV*).

"Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

We "test all things," including the content of NDEs, by the sure standard of God's Word, the Bible.

Endnotes:

1. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life*, 25th Anniversary edition. New York: HarperOne, 2001, pp. 110.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-114.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-119.
5. C.G. Jung, translated by Richard and Clara Winston, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989, pp. 289-296.
6. *Life After Life*, op. cit., pp. 105-106.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 106.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.
9. Melvin Morse in *ibid.*, pg. x, italics in original.
10. Melvin Morse in *ibid.*, pg. xiii.
11. Raymond Moody, M.D. and Paul Perry, *Paranormal: My Life In Pursuit of the Afterlife*. New York: HarperOne, 2012, back cover.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-65.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 68-75.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 92.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 94.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 95.
17. *Life After Life*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 15-95; also *Paranormal*, op. cit., pp. 86-90.
19. *Life After Life*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-24.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-45.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-44.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-49.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-55.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-65.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-70.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 65.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-77.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-82.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 77.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-87.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-92.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-95.
38. Betty J. Eadie with Curtis Taylor, *Embraced By The Light*. Placerville, Calif.: Gold Leaf Press, 1992.
39. *Ibid.*, front cover, underneath Eadie's name, italics in original.
40. Melvin Morse in *ibid.*, pg. ix.
41. *Ibid.*, n.p., (if this page had been numbered, it would have been pg. iii).
42. Richard Abanes, *Embraced By The Light and the Bible*. Camp Hill, Pa.: Horizon Books, 1994, pg. 201. This is the date correctly given by Abanes as the night of Eadie's NDE. Eadie begins her story on Nov. 18, 1973, which was the previous night. See *Embraced By The Light*, op. cit., pg. 1.
43. *Embraced By The Light*, op. cit., pp. 146-147.
44. See G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman, "Embraced By The Darkness: Betty Eadie's Old Errors in New Age Dress," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1994, pp. 1, 10-13.
45. *Embraced By The Light and the Bible*, op. cit., pg. 69.
46. *Embraced By The Light*, op. cit., pg. 44.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 47. Not only is Eadie wrong in stating that "Jesus was a separate being from God, with his own divine purpose," but she is mistaken in not recognizing that Jesus is God's Son by nature; whereas, Christians are God's adopted children.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 46, italic in original.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 81, italic in original.
51. *Embraced By The Light and the Bible*, op. cit., pg. 20.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 64.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
56. "Embraced By The Darkness: Betty Eadie's Old Errors in New Age Dress," op. cit., pp. 12-13.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 13, italics in original.
58. *Embraced By The Light and the Bible*, op. cit., pg. 220, italic in original.
59. Don Piper with Cecil Murphey, *90 Minutes in Heaven*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Revell, 2004.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-36.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-20.
62. *Ibid.*, pg. 19.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, pg. 30.
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 31.
66. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.
67. *Ibid.*, pg. 33.
68. See G. Richard Fisher, "How Many Minutes in Heaven? The Celestial Travels of Don Piper," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2008, pp. 1, 15-21.
69. *90 Minutes in Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 13.
70. "How Many Minutes in Heaven?," op. cit., pg. 18, quoting from *90 Minutes in Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 31.

71. "How Many Minutes in Heaven?," op. cit., pg. 20.
72. Information on "Don Piper Ministries" is available on his website (www.donpiperministries.com).
73. "About Don," Don Piper Ministries website. Document accessed at www.donpiperministries.com/about_don_piper.asp.
74. Todd Burpo with Lynn Vincent, *Heaven Is for Real*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010.
75. Ally Breedlove with Ken Abraham, *When Will the Heaven Begin?* New York: New American Library, 2013.
76. Hank Hanegraaff, *AfterLife*. Brentwood, Tenn.: Worthy Publishing, 2013, pg. 97, citing *700 Club* interview "90 Minutes in Heaven," 8:20 timemark. Video accessed at: www.cbn.com/tv/1399047466001.
77. Douglas Connelly, *After Life*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995, pp. 34-35. In addition to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, some other biblical examples of people being raised from the dead include: Elijah raising the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17:17-24); Elisha raising the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37); the unidentified man restored to life by coming into contact with Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:20-21); Jesus raising the synagogue official's daughter (Mark 5:35-43); and Jesus raising the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17); Peter raising Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-42); Paul raising Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12).
78. *AfterLife*, op. cit., pg. 97, citing *90 Minutes in Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 129.
79. *Heaven Is for Real*, op. cit.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40, 61.
81. *Ibid.*, pg. xix.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, pg. 86.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.
85. *Ibid.*, pg. 72.
86. *Ibid.*, pg. 144.
87. *Ibid.*, pg. 101.
88. *Ibid.*, pg. 103.
89. *Ibid.*, pg. 134.
90. *Ibid.*, pg. 72.
91. *Ibid.*, pg. 101.
92. *Ibid.*, pg. 103.
93. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-139.
94. *Ibid.*, pg. 138.
95. For an editorial regarding *Heaven Is for Real* (and NDEs in general), see G. Richard Fisher, "Heaven Is For Real, But The Stories Are Not," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2011, pp. 2, 22.
96. Mary C. Neal, M.D., *To Heaven and Back*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Waterbrook Press, 2012.
97. *When Will the Heaven Begin?*, op. cit.
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.
99. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-185.
100. Eben Alexander, M.D., *Proof of Heaven*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2012.

101. *Paranormal*, op. cit., back cover.
 102. *Proof of Heaven*, op. cit., front cover, brackets in original.
 103. Moody's endorsement is posted on the home page of "Life Beyond Death" (Eben Alexander) website. Document accessed at www.lifebeyonddeath.net.
 104. *Proof of Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 10.
 105. *Ibid.*, pg. 78.
 106. *Ibid.*, pg. 183.
 107. *Ibid.*, pg. 184.
 108. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
 109. *Ibid.*, pg. 41.
 110. *Ibid.*
 111. *Ibid.*, pg. 47.
 112. *Ibid.*, italic in original.
 113. *Ibid.*
 114. *Ibid.*, pg. 103.
 115. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88, 108.
 116. *Ibid.*, pg. 82.
 117. Luke Dittrich, "The Prophet," *Esquire* magazine, August 2013, pp. 88-95, 125-126, 128.
 118. Robert Mays, "Esquire article on Eben Alexander distorts the facts." Article accessed at http://iands.org/images/stories/pdf_downloads/esquire%20article%20on%20eben%20alexander%20distorts%20the%20facts.pdf.
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120. Doug Groothuis cited in Michael Sabom, M.D., *Light & Death*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, pg. 192, ellipsis in original.
 121. Mark Hitchcock, *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, 2005, pg. 54, italics in original.
 122. *Life After Life*, op. cit., pg. 7.
 123. *Ibid.*, pg. 123.
 124. Rene Jorgensen, "Expert explains Ben Breedlove's NDE," 1:13 timemark. Video accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPFhOZ7U4Bo.
 125. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Life After Death*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1992, pg. 28.
 126. *Ibid.*, pg. 29.
 127. Gary R. Habermas, "What Should a Christian Think About Near-death Experiences?" in Ted Cabal, General Editor, *The Apologetics Study Bible*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007, pg. 1675.
 128. *Ibid.*
 129. *Light & Death*, op. cit., pg. 202, italics in original.
 130. *Ibid.*, pg. 203, italics in original.
 131. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
 132. Ron Rhodes, *The Wonder of Heaven*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2009, pg. 242.
 133. *After Life*, op. cit., pg. 36.
 134. *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death*, op. cit., pg. 55. Some people believe that when the Apostle Paul speaks of being caught up to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, that this might refer to a possible NDE that occurred to Paul during his first missionary journey, when he was stoned, apparently to death, in Lystra in Acts 14:19-20. However, the time frame that Paul gives of "fourteen years ago" in 2 Corinthians 12:2 places this vision before his first missionary journey. So Hitchcock correctly states that the Bible records no NDEs.
 135. *Ibid.*, pg. 57.
 136. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.
 137. *Ibid.*, pg. 59.
 138. *After Life*, pp. 38-39.
 139. "How Many Minutes in Heaven?," op. cit., pg. 19, italics and ellipsis in original.
 140. *The Wonder of Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 242.
 141. *Light & Death*, op. cit., pg. 216.
 142. George Ritchie cited in *ibid.*
 143. *After Life*, op. cit., pg. 35.



REVELATION AND THE BELIEVER

(continued from page 1)

It is important that we determine whether or not God does speak to Christians today outside of Scripture. The existence — or lack thereof — of modern-day revelations from God is one of the most hotly debated topics within evangelicalism today.

Despite the fact that the majority of conservative evangelical Christians since the Reformation have held a cessationist position on divine revelation, the number of true cessationists — those who believe that revelations from God no longer occur — is dwindling. Taking the position that God is speaking to His people today exclusively through Scripture is certain to evoke criticism and anger from some corners. Because of the influence of a multitude of popular authors, theologians, and conference speakers, cessationism is barely treading water even within the most biblically solid churches and organizations.

Among those who claim to be Evangelicals, there are five identifi-

able views prevalent today on the matter of revelation.

IDENTIFIABLE VIEWS

Pentecostal/Charismatic/Third-wave: All miraculous gifts exist today, including the gift of prophecy. God speaks through prophets and to His people both audibly (through dreams, visions, words of knowledge) and inwardly (inaudibly in the mind or heart). Representatives of this position are Jack Deere, the late John Wimber, the Kansas City Prophets, the Assemblies of God, and the Word-Faith movement.

Charismatic author Tommy Tenney, in his popular book *The God Chasers*, writes:

"God chasers ... are not interested in camping out on some dusty truth known to everyone. They are after the fresh presence of the Almighty. ... A true God chaser is not happy with just past truth; he must have *present* truth. God chasers don't want to just study the moldy pages of what

God has done; they're anxious to see what God is doing."⁵

Classical Mysticism/Spiritual Formation: Through the use of various disciplines and spiritual exercises, God will speak to us both audibly and inaudibly. Dallas Willard and Richard Foster are two such examples. Willard, a leader within the Spiritual Formation Movement, recently updated a book and renamed it *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*. The thesis of his book is that Christians can live "the kind of life where hearing God is not an uncommon occurrence. ... *Hearing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship, and obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God.*"⁶ In other words, the maturing Christian should expect to hear the voice of God regularly, independent from Scripture, and that voice will reveal God's individual, specific will for his life. Such personal communication from the Lord, we are told, is essential to an intimate walk with God.⁷ And it is those who are hearing from God today, in this way, who

will redefine “Christian spirituality for our times.”⁸

Evangelical Mysticism: God is speaking to Christians regularly, mostly inaudibly through inner voices, hunches, promptings, feelings, and circumstances (examples: Henry Blackaby, Beth Moore, and Sarah Young). Southern Baptist ministers Henry and Richard Blackaby wrote *Hearing God’s Voice* to “teach God’s people not only to recognize his voice but also immediately to obey his voice when they heard it.”⁹ They promise that “as you spend time with Jesus, you will gradually come to recognize his voice more readily than you did at first. ... You won’t be fooled by other voices because you know your Lord’s voice so well.”¹⁰ And, once you have figured out when God is speaking to you, “write it down in a journal so you can refer back to it as you follow him.”¹¹

This category could contain the “New Calvinists” or “Calvinistic Charismatics” such as John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Mark Driscoll, C.J. Mahaney, and others. Their followers are sometimes called the young, restless, and Reformed. Mark Driscoll, who often claims extrabiblical revelation, dreams, and visions from the Lord, documented four such events in his recent book, *Real Marriage*. He writes:

“I was basically just walking along a river in the Idaho woods, talking aloud to God, when He spoke to me. I had never experienced anything like that moment. God told me to devote my life to four things. He told me to marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men, and plant churches. Since that day in 1990, that’s what I have been pursuing by God’s grace.”¹²

Matt Chandler would be on page with this idea. In his book, *The Explicit Gospel*, Chandler writes, “He [God] speaks to us in dreams and in visions and in words of knowledge — but in no way that runs contrary to Scripture.”¹³ Longtime Southern Baptist pastor Charles Stanley is of the same opinion. In a recent interview with

Christianity Today, he was asked about his frequent references to God speaking to Him. He responded by mentioning a time that very week when God said to him, “Don’t do that.” He claims that he does not hear an audible voice, “but it’s so crystal sharp and clear to me, I know not to disobey that.”¹⁴

Cessationist: The fundamental position of cessationists is that the apostolic sign gifts and direct unmediated revelation ceased with the completion of the Bible and the death of the last apostle. In regard to “sign gifts,” certainly God works miracles today and He often uses the prayers of His people in doing so, but no one today has the New Testament gift of miracles or healing.

Cessationists hold to direct revelation in biblical times — inspiration of Scripture and true inspiration applying only to that 1400-year period in which it was written. They affirm that the Holy Spirit is working today in the *illumination* of Scripture. He opens our minds to receive and apply God’s Word. A knowledgeable cessationist would never confuse revelation, inspiration, and illumination. The Westminster Confession states well the historical cessationist position:

“The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”¹⁵

Cessationists do not deny God’s immutability, but would say that this attribute does not preclude God working in a different way in each dispensation. They acknowledge that He worked one way with Adam, another with Noah, another completely different way with Moses, and so forth. His immutability and His working pattern are two different issues. Jesus is always the same in His essence and character (Hebrews 13:8). God’s will for different people in

different ages should not be confused with His unchanging character.

Neither do cessationists deny God’s direction, guidance, or operation in a believer’s life, such as giving a desire to some for church leadership, as Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 3:1. But they would be reluctant to say, “God told me” or “God said.” Consistent cessationists place these things under the umbrella of the doctrine of providence.¹⁶ Cessationists stress that God has been gracious and allows us a wide range of good personal choices in which there is freedom and enjoyment to express individuality and creativity. He allows believers much freedom and enjoyment in the good and neutral areas of life (1 Timothy 6:17).

Many of the distinctions held by cessationists along with any measure of precise theology are being lost in the maze of mysticism and the ecumenical climate of our day. For example, dispensationalism is being lost in the craze of sensationalism and newspaper exegesis.

Cautious, but Open: Those holding this position are skeptical of prophetic claims and the majority of inaudible experiences. But they do not want to “put God in a box” and therefore are cautiously open to the possibility of additional revelation from the Lord today, although they are not certain how this works or how to identify God’s voice. Nevertheless, they are afraid to limit the power of God and fear that they might be missing out on a close personal relationship with the Lord if they do not allow for the possibility of God speaking today apart from Scripture (examples: most Christians).

MODERN REVELATIONS

Continuationists — those who believe that the miraculous sign gifts, including prophecy, are still available to believers today — define their supposed revelations in different ways. There are two broad categories that could be acknowledged. The first claims prophetic messages from the Lord. Such messages would be direct, clear words from God or angels,

perhaps in dreams or visions or through audible voices. Such claims have long been common in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles and are increasing among non-charismatic Evangelicals. Popular speaker and author Beth Moore is known for her claims of hearing from God. In her DVD series, *Believing God*, she states:

“Boy, this is the heart of our study. This is the heart of our study. Listen carefully. What God began to say to me about five years ago, and I’m telling you it sent me on such a trek with Him, that my head is still whirling over it. He began to say to me, ‘I’m going to tell you something right now, Beth, and boy you write this one down and you say it as often as I give you utterance to say it.’”¹⁷

Moore is claiming a direct word from the Lord that sets the future agenda for her ministry. The authority comes from her own experience.

From a more doctrinal base we turn to theologian Wayne Grudem, who has had a great impact on the evangelical world concerning modern prophecies. Grudem has written the definitive book on the subject, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, in which he claims that Church Age prophecy is different than Old Testament prophecy. While the Old Testament prophet was held to the standard of infallibility when speaking a word from the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:20-24), prophecies beginning with Pentecost are fallible and imperfect. He writes:

“I am asking those in the cessationist camp to give serious thought to the possibility that prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human — and sometimes partially mistaken — report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind.”¹⁸

Modern prophecy then is impure and imperfect. By way of example and documentation, Grudem quotes

the Anglican charismatic leaders Dennis and Rita Bennett, who maintain:

“We are not expected to accept every word spoken through the gifts of utterance. But we are only to accept what is quickened to us by the Holy Spirit and is in agreement with the Bible. ... one manifestation may be 75% God, but 25% the person’s own thoughts. We must discern between the two.”¹⁹

One of the most disconcerting aspects of Grudem’s position is his uncertainty as to how we can distinguish between our own thoughts and those supposedly from God.

Grudem writes:

“But how would a person know if what came to mind was a ‘revelation’ from the Holy Spirit? Paul did not write specific instructions; nonetheless, we may suppose that in practice such a decision would include both an objective and a subjective element. Objectively, did the revelation conform with what the prophet knew of the Old Testament Scriptures and with apostolic teaching?”²⁰

With this quote cessationists partially agree. The Holy Spirit cannot contradict Himself and anything supposedly spoken by the Holy Spirit that is in disagreement with Scripture is naturally spurious. The continuationists, however, rarely claim new doctrines that supplement Scripture; they claim specific, personal words that guide them in decision-making or knowledge of the future. Contrary to what is often stated by continuationists, many espousing modern prophecies do add doctrines not found or taught in the Bible, such as specific demonic-warfare techniques, insights on heaven or hell, “word of faith” authority that releases the power of God, dominion theology, and novel views on the atonement, inspiration, and ecclesiology. While more conservative continuationists such as Grudem, Piper, and Mahaney would not be guilty of such theological additions, many others are.

Turning back to Grudem, we read of his subjective element of prophecy:

“But there was no doubt also a subjective element of personal judgement: did the revelation ‘seem like’ something from the Holy Spirit; did it *seem* to be similar to other experiences of the Holy Spirit which he had known previously in worship? ... Beyond this it is difficult to specify much further, except to say that *over time* a congregation would *probably* become more adept at making evaluations of prophecies, and individual prophets would also benefit from those evaluations and become *more adept* at recognizing a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit and distinguishing it from their own thoughts.”²¹

When we compare Grudem’s view of prophecy with Scripture’s view we find no resemblance. Nowhere in the Bible did someone receive a message from God and wonder if God was speaking to him, with the temporary exception of the young boy Samuel. No one had to ask if what he was hearing “seemed like” the Holy Spirit or matched previous subjective experiences that also “seemed like” the Holy Spirit. He or she knew without question when God was speaking.

Dallas Willard presents essentially the same teaching as Grudem in his book, *Hearing God*:

“How can you be sure God is speaking to you? The answer is that we learn *by experience*.”²²

Therefore, subjective experience becomes the test of authority concerning revelation from God. This is a far cry from what we find in Scripture.

The second half of Grudem’s quote moves into the realm of the incredible. After 2000 years of Church history, the best this world-class theologian can offer is that “over time a congregation would probably become more adept at making evaluations of prophecies.” This is a statement of speculation and hope that at some point the church will begin to figure out when a word of revelation is

actually coming from the Holy Spirit and when it is the imagination of the speaker.

Let's put Grudem's hypothesis to a test. Sister Sally stands up in church and says the Holy Spirit has just revealed to her that an earthquake will flatten much of the city sometime within the next eight weeks. The congregation needs to add earthquake insurance to their properties, pack all their belongings, leave their jobs behind, and head to the countryside. Given Grudem's theory, the congregation knows that at best this prophecy is impure and most likely contains elements that are not from God. The people are then left to evaluate the validity of the revelation just received based on their own experience or other purely subjective means. In the Bible, if a true prophet of God warned of an impending earthquake, there would be no doubt about what to do, but Grudem's New Testament prophet is unreliable. We have to ask: Of what value is such a prophecy? It has no authority or certainty, and may actually lead to bad and even disastrous decisions. These modern prophecies do not have the ring of "thus says the Lord."

When the different views on modern revelation and prophecies collide, continuationists attempt to pacify cessationists by assuring them that their messages from the Lord are not on par with Scripture. Grudem quotes George Mallone saying:

"Prophecy today, although it may be very helpful and on occasion overwhelmingly specific, is not in the category of the revelation given to us in Holy Scripture. ... A person may hear the voice of the Lord and be compelled to speak, but there is no assurance that it is pollutant-free. There will be a mixture of flesh and spirit."²³

Because almost no one within Christianity is claiming revelation that is equivalent to the Bible, we are left wondering if God can speak in a non-authoritative, less-than-inspired fashion. The continuationists seem to have invented a novel type of revela-

tion: one that contradicts Scripture and defies reason. In the Bible, either God is speaking or He is not. There is no such thing as partially inspired revelation or the true words from the Lord polluted by the misunderstanding or imagination of the prophet. This is not to say that all of God's divine words are found in Scripture. John is careful to inform us that Jesus did many things — and certainly said many things — that are not recorded in his Gospel (John 20:30) or the other New Testament books. Yet all that Jesus said were the words of God. He never expressed an impure or untruthful thought. He spoke with authority. It is likely that the Spirit also spoke through various men and women in biblical times whose words were not recorded in the Bible. The point, however, is that while the Holy Spirit has not included every prophecy that He spoke through humans in Scripture, everything that He caused people to say carries with it the infallible authority of the Word of God. Nothing that He said through people is less than God's Word. A polluted or partial revelation from the Holy Spirit has never been uttered.

This means that modern prophecies, words of knowledge, and other claims of hearing the voice of the Lord, if they are truly from the Holy Spirit, must be equal to the Scriptures in both inspiration and authority. God cannot speak with anything other than purity and inerrancy. Modern claims of the Lord speaking, but with a "mixture of flesh and spirit," are never attested to in Scripture. Those who claim divine revelation today must wrestle with the fact that what they are supposedly hearing must carry the same authority as the divinely inspired, infallible Scripture.

THE CASE FOR CESSATIONISM

With all of this as a backdrop, the question is whether or not God is giving authoritative revelation on par with that which He has given in the past, much of which is in Scripture. If He is, then the Church of Christ needs to take note and come into compliance with the modern prophecy

movement, following its revelations as it would Scripture. But if the Lord is not revealing His inspired Word today, then we need to reject the claims of the modern prophets and expose these supposed revelations for what they are. This means that the position taken by most on prophecy — cautious, but open — is untenable. The cautious, but open crowd is skeptical of the claims coming from the prophetic movement and is suspicious of the many "words from God" that so many Evangelicals are claiming. Still, its members hesitate to embrace cessationism. They are concerned about limiting God or "putting God in a box."

It is okay to put God in a box if God put Himself in that box. God can do anything He wants to do, but we expect God to do what He says He will do. If God has put Himself in the cessationist box, we can embrace and proclaim it.

Taking the cautious, but open view does not hold up. Either God is speaking today apart from His Word or He is not. If He is speaking, we must distinguish the real messages from the bogus ones. If, like Grudem, we eliminate the tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, we must find a new way to evaluate all these revelations.

We should expect that the Scriptures themselves would lay out the guidelines for us to determine if divine, authoritative, inspired revelation is being given today. We can be confident, from the witness of Scripture itself, that God has ceased speaking to mankind during this age apart from the Bible. Let's take a quick look at what the Word has to say.

A cessationist view begins with a careful look at what God actually did in Scripture. We find that God did not speak to everyone all the time. His revelation, even in biblical times, was rare and when He did speak it was always supernaturally with an audible voice, never through inner voices or impressions. The assumption held by many that God spoke to most of His children in biblical times is false. The average believer in either Testament never received a personal

word from God and even the majority of key players never heard the voice of God personally. When God did speak in Scripture, it almost always dealt with the big picture of what He was doing in the outworking of His redemptive program or the life of His people in general. One will search in vain to find God instructing someone to take a job, purchase a number of donkeys, or buy a house — except as it related to the bigger issue of God's dealings with His people. Beyond a few individuals, finding a non-prophetic person in Scripture who heard directly from God becomes a difficult task. The contention that God spoke to almost everyone all the time, leading, guiding, and directing, does not stand the test of careful examination of the Scriptures. Even those to whom God spoke in the Old Testament, to only Noah, Abraham, Moses (considered to be a prophet), Jacob, Aaron, Joshua, David, and Solomon, did He speak more than twice in their lifetimes.

In the New Testament, we find that most records of God speaking to individuals after Pentecost are found in the book of Acts. But even here we find only 13 distinct times in which God spoke directly to individuals — two of these through angels: Acts 8:26-29; 9:4, 10; 10:3, 11-16; 12:7-8; 13:2-4; 16:6, 9-10; 18:9; 21:4, 11; 22:17-21; 23:11. Eight of these occasions involved Paul or Peter, leaving a total of five other individuals or groups to whom God spoke directly in the first 30 years of Church history.

So far, we have examined what might be called negative evidence. That is, if we are looking for a pattern of how God spoke to individuals in scriptural times, that pattern reveals a scarcity of individual revelations. The Lord chose to speak primarily through His prophets and the apostles. Following that pattern we should expect the same today. Let's now move to more positive evidence that the Lord has ceased speaking today apart from Scripture.

Beginning with Ephesians 2:20, we find that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and proph-

ets." Because Christ is the cornerstone of the Church, this verse has to be speaking of the witness concerning Christ that the apostles and prophets provided to the Church. It is only to be expected that this witness would be passed along to the future generations of believers via the instrument of inspired Scriptures that those men were moved to write. As Ephesians 3:4-5 tells us, the "mystery of Christ," "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets." In the next chapter, Paul teaches that the Lord has provided gifted men to the Church for its perfection or maturity. The apostles' and prophets' role in that process was laying the foundation of the Church, as we have seen (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). They did this through the teaching of New Testament truth, the apostles' doctrine. The early Church gathered together to devote themselves to the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), for it was the apostles who would provide New Testament revelation.

The book of Hebrews enhances our understanding by detailing two periods in human history in which the Lord has spoken to mankind. Hebrews 1:1 proclaims that the first period was "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets." This is an obvious reference to the revelations given during the time of the Old Testament. In verse 2, the author of Hebrews cites the second period of divine revelation by saying God "has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." But as we know Jesus Himself did not write down anything that He said. That was left to His followers and so, the author of Hebrews adds, "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Hebrews 2:3; i.e., the apostles).

This, however, raises a practical problem. How did the people know that the communication they were receiving from the apostles was true? After all, many individuals made claim to being an apostle during the

first century. The Lord would authenticate His true apostles by giving them the ability to perform "signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews 2:4). When the Corinthians challenged Paul's apostleship and authority, he pointed them to the "signs of [a true] apostle ... [which were] signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12), just as the author of Hebrews confirmed. The book of Acts verifies repeatedly that miraculous signs were taking place through the apostles for this very reason (see Acts 2:43; 5:12, 13; 9:38-41; 14:3, 8-9; 15:12; 19:11; 20:10; 28:8, 9). The only exceptions were Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6-7), and possibly Barnabas (Acts 15:12), all of whom were closely associated with the apostles. We find no examples of the average Christian in the New Testament either performing miracles or receiving authoritative revelation. Miracles were for the purpose of authenticating the office of the men who would lay the foundation of the Church. Once the foundation of the Church was in place, the role of the apostles was no longer needed. With the death of John, the last of the apostles, gifts authenticating the apostles ceased.

And Scripture indicates, that revelation ceased as well. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, told his readers that the day would come when prophecy and supernatural knowledge would be done away and tongues would cease. Paul wrote, "But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" (v. 10). All Bible believers are ultimately cessationists, for this passage is clear that revelatory knowledge would cease when the perfect came. Many believe that the "perfect" refers to the coming of Christ or the eternal kingdom. That is a possible interpretation but the context is contrasting partial knowledge and revelatory gifts with that which is perfect. The best explanation in such a context would be that the perfect (or complete) would be the completion of Scripture. In other words, when the revelation for this dispensation as recorded in the New Testament is completed, the

need for partial words of knowledge and prophecies would cease. That is, because the final, full revelation of the Lord for this dispensation has arrived, there is no need for additional messages from God.

This understanding of the perfect is reinforced later in the New Testament by Peter, Jude, Paul, and John. In Second Peter, the apostle desires to remind them of many things, especially that they “be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (3:2). Peter did not point his readers to new or fresh revelation, but to the words spoken previously by the prophets and apostles. Jude offers similar understanding when in verse 3 he urges his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” A message had been given, a foundation laid once for all that had to be defended. How did they know what that message was? In verse 17 Jude provides the answer: “But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The faith in verse 3 that was handed down to them, the faith that was to be defended and proclaimed, had been given to them by none other than the apostles.

As the Apostle Paul writes virtually his last inspired words to his friend Timothy, he points him to the Scriptures that are able to make the people of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17). In light of this lofty claim for the God-breathed Scriptures, Paul gives Timothy a final charge: “Preach the word!” (2 Timothy 4:2). There is no hint in Paul’s charge that Timothy is to seek additional revelation, listen to the prophecies or words of knowledge of fellow believers, or preach his own dreams or visions. He is to preach the Word handed down to the saints through the apostles. As the New Testament canon nears its close, the men who penned the divinely inspired Scriptures unite in pointing their readers to

the apostles as the human source of inspired New Testament truth.

The Apostle John joins the chorus as he closes the New Testament with a warning against adding to or subtracting from this final revelation from God. He writes, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19). Because this is the last chapter in the last book of the last Testament, it is only reasonable to deduce that from that point on any addition of any prophecy would be adding to Scripture. With the death of John shortly thereafter, the last of the apostles had faded from the scene and with him the final word of revelation for this age. In addition, there is no indication that either the 12 apostles or the New Testament prophets were ever replaced (Revelation 21:14).

The witness emerging from the Scriptures themselves is that God has chosen to communicate with mankind throughout history in specific and unique ways. He has chosen certain men at certain times to be prophets and apostles to speak and record divine revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3-4). When God’s revelation was complete for this age, the ministry of the prophets and apostles was finished and we would expect no further communication at this time. This expectation is verified through the statements found in the Bible itself. What we are seeing today is not new revelation from God, but subjective experiences and, at times, deception. Let us cling tenaciously to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) rather than chasing the inferior, inadequate imaginations of those who claim a new word from the Lord today.

SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Perhaps the most important issue facing the Church today is the matter

of authority. In the past, the Word of God was the final authority over all areas of faith and practice. One of the battle cries of the Reformation was *sola Scriptura* — Scripture alone. This meant that the basis of authority and truth was Scripture. Scripture had the final say over all we believed and how we lived those beliefs. The Bible was seen as sufficient. What the Word had to say was adequate to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). No one claimed that Scripture exhausted every subject — or even addressed some, like mathematics. But where it did not give direct teaching it gave principles by which we could examine and evaluate all things “that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). That Scripture claims for itself such authority and sufficiency was widely accepted based upon numerous passages (e.g., John 17:17; Mark 12:24; Luke 11:25; 16:27-31; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:25; 1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:20-32; Psalm 19; 119; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Matthew 5:17-20; 12:18-27; 26:52-54; Luke 10:25-26; 16:17). But many in the evangelical Church today do not believe this. The authority and sufficiency of God’s Word are being supplanted at every turn. However, before we observe the modern Church, let’s look at the recent past.

EPISTEMOLOGY

The issue of authority largely deals with epistemology, the study of how we discover and determine truth. Our knowledge of truth must come from a source. There are three basic possible sources of truth:

Human: If one believes that humans are the final source of truth, we are still left with the epistemological question of how we discover this truth. James Draper and Kenneth Keathley write:

“The person holding to human reason (or rationalism) believes he is his own final authority. The question then is which method that individual will use in testing truth claims. The options available to him can be grouped under three headings: *rationalism*,

empiricism, and *mysticism*. The rationalist believes he or she can determine what is true by reason alone, because of innate or natural abilities within the human mind. The empiricist places confidence in experimentation and in the observation of sense phenomena, affirming as true only that which can be physically demonstrated. Finally, there is the mystic, who rejects rationalism and empiricism because he recognizes that the individual is not capable of arriving at ultimate truth either by reason or observation. The mystic, however, believes that the individual does possess irrational abilities that enable him to intuit truth. Truth, the mystic contends, cannot be known objectively; it can be encountered only subjectively. No matter which of the three approaches are employed by human reason, they all have this in common: They make the individual the final arbiter of truth."²⁴

Religion: Within the Christian tradition this is best represented by the Roman Catholic Church. According to Catholic theology, it is the Church that has given us the Bible. Therefore, final authority rests with the Church. The Roman Church would technically not claim to hold views contrary to Scripture, but it is the Church that interprets Scripture and is free to add to it. Therefore, any apparent contradiction — praying to Mary or the saints, for example — is resolved by Rome's claim to authority.

Revelation: If God exists, it is not difficult to believe that He has communicated to mankind. The Bible claims to be that revelation. Conservative Christians throughout the ages, and especially since the Reformation, have recognized the exclusive claim of Scripture to be the complete and final Word of God for this age. This is not to say that there have not been many challenges to this claim.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

One of the great challenges faced by Christians in the not-too-distant past

drew from a number of sources: German rationalism, higher criticism, Enlightenment thought, etc. These ultimately evolved today into what we call Christian liberalism. The father of liberalism is usually recognized as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), professor of theology at the University of Berlin. Schleiermacher joined many popular philosophical systems with Christianity and came to distrust any form of authority. However, he did not want to reject Christianity because he believed that mankind needed religion. He reasoned that propositional revelation about God may be faulty or even nonexistent, but because man needs religious experience, the outer shell of Christianity must be retained. The Bible may be untrustworthy, shot through with error, unreliable for developing a living framework, but it is still possible to experience God through religious expressions. The foundation may be gone, but somehow the walls are still standing. Such people are convinced that they encounter God as they connect with the "divine spark" found in every human, or through mystical practices, or through subjective experiences. They are unconcerned with the authority of Scripture. To them the Bible is riddled with errors, but that does not matter as long as they can have an existential relationship with God — or at least, so they think. William James, certainly no evangelical Christian, made an astute observation over 100 years ago about the encroachment of liberal thought within Christianity:

"The advance of liberalism, so-called, in Christianity, during the past fifty years, may fairly be called a victory of healthy-mindedness within the church over the morbidness with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related. We have now whole congregations whose preachers, far from magnifying our consciousness of sin, seem devoted rather to making little of it. They ignore, or even deny, eternal punishment, and insist on the dignity rather than on the depravity of man. They look at the continual preoccupation of

the old-fashioned Christian with the salvation of his soul as something sickly and reprehensible rather than admirable; and a sanguine and 'muscular' attitude, which to our forefathers would have seemed purely heathen, has become in their eyes an ideal element of Christian character. I am not asking whether or not they are right, I am only pointing out the change."²⁵

James' assessment has a modern ring to it. Old liberalism has been waning in the last few decades, but certainly has not gone away. Rather, it has combined with other errant theological threads and morphed into a number of forms.

Indeed, the rantings of old-fashioned liberalism are like leaven which has fermented in and adulterated the evangelical Church. Many within evangelicalism are now echoing the same tune. Taking a stand for the truth has long since gone out of vogue. John MacArthur writes, "It is no longer deemed necessary to fight for the truth. In fact, many evangelicals now consider it ill-mannered and uncharitable to argue about *any* point of doctrine."²⁶

Liberalism has joined forces with post-modernism to challenge the teachings of the Bible. Meanwhile, many in evangelicalism are sitting on the sidelines, wanting to be tolerant and attempting to bully and intimidate any who advocate discernment. It is little wonder then that a new wave of liberalism is sweeping over Christianity. The seeker-sensitive church has been seen by many as just old liberalism in disguise, but that is not altogether true. The seeker-sensitive church has fudged on many biblical truths,²⁷ but it still embraces most of the cardinal doctrines and still seeks to proclaim the Gospel, even if its message is often out of balance with the New Testament. But the seeker-sensitive church has given birth to a new movement called the emergent church. The emergent church is taking to logical conclusion what the seeker-sensitive church began. All dressed up in post-modern religious garb, the emergent church is

rapidly rejecting and undermining almost all biblical theology. In other words, the emergent church is the new liberalism. Evangelicalism is reaping what it has sown.

On the surface, it appears that spiritual interest is high. Christian books and music top the charts. Megachurches are bursting at the seams. Some proclaim that we may be in the midst of the greatest revival since Pentecost. Yet a Gallup poll evaluation from a few years ago reported, "We are having a revival of feelings but not of the knowledge of God. The church today is more guided by feelings than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment."²⁸

Here are three possible explanations for this replacement of knowledge with feelings:

1. The marketers of this approach to Christianity have become adept at giving people what they want. Michael Horton writes, "Throughout the prophetic literature, we notice a common theme: the false prophets tell the people what they want to hear, baptize it with God's name, and serve it up as God's latest word to His people."²⁹

2. The centrality of the Word of God has been subtly replaced with inferior but pleasing substitutes. Systematic preaching and teaching of the Bible have been displaced in many churches with entertainment, drama, concerts, comic acts, and the like. For a number of decades psychological theory has been usurping the authority of Scripture. The purpose of many churches is no longer salvation and sanctification, but therapy. And, increasingly, mysticism and extrabiblical revelations are superseding the Bible.

3. So many within evangelicalism are drifting with the tide of worldly thought and opinion. Blaise Pascal wrote, "When everything is moving at once, nothing appears to be moving, as on board ship. When everyone is moving towards depravity, no one seems to be moving, but if someone stops, he shows up the others who are

rushing on by acting as a fixed point."³⁰ Douglas Groothuis wrote, "The fixed point in a shifting world is biblical truth and all that agrees with it."³¹ Preceding Pascal's quote, Groothuis had this to say, "We are told that Christians must shift their emphasis from objective truth to communal experience, from rational argument to subjective appeal, from doctrinal orthodoxy to 'relevant' practices. I have reasoned ... that this move is nothing less than fatal to Christian integrity and biblical witness. It is also illogical philosophically. We have something far better to offer."³²

The Apostle Peter wrote, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3a). How is this life and godliness found? It is "through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (1:3b). This knowledge of Christ is found in the precious Word of God. No wonder Peter encouraged us to be "as newborn babes, [who] desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). We need not feed at the trough of worldly wisdom or mystical experience when we have the final, complete, infallible revelation from God that is able to make us wise for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15) and which will empower us to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

Endnotes:

1. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005, pg. 99, emphasis added.
2. Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pg. 111.
3. Larry Crabb, *The Papa Prayer*. Brentwood, Tenn.: Integrity Publishers, 2006, pg. 8.
4. John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002, pg. 140.
5. Tommy Tenney, *The God Chasers*. Shipensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image, 2000, unnumbered pages in Introduction, italic in original.
6. Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012, pp. 12, 13, italics in original.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 31, 67.

8. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.
9. Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Hearing God's Voice*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002, pg. 234.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 235.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 236.
12. Mark and Grace Driscoll, *Real Marriage*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012, pg. 8. For additional claims by Mark Driscoll of extrabiblical revelations, see his book *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006, pp. 39, 74-75, 97, 99, 128, 130.
13. Matt Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012, pg. 30.
14. Mark Galli, "The Mystic Baptist," *Christianity Today*, November 2012, pg. 54.
15. G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964, pg. 9, quote rendered in italics in original.
16. See further, Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 575-616.
17. Beth Moore, *Believing God* DVD Series. Nashville: LifeWay Church Resources, 2002, Session 1, "Believing God for Your Promised Land," 44:00 timemark.
18. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988, pg. 14.
19. Dennis and Rita Bennett cited in *ibid.*, pg. 110, ellipsis in original.
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 120.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121, emphasis added.
22. *Hearing God*, op. cit., pg. 9, emphasis added.
23. George Mallone cited in *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, op. cit., pg. 111, ellipsis in original.
24. James T. Draper Jr. and Kenneth Keathley, *Biblical Authority*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, pp. 2-3, italics in original.
25. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1922, pg. 91.
26. John MacArthur, *Why One Way?* Dallas: W Publishing Group, 2002, pp. 47-48, italic in original.
27. See further, Gary Gilley, *This Little Church Went to Market*. Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press USA, 2005.
28. 1980 Gallup Poll on Religion cited in J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1997, pg. 19, quotation rendered in italics in original.
29. Michael Horton in Don Kistler, General Editor, *Sola Scriptura!* Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000, pg. xv.
30. Blaise Pascal quoted by Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000, pg. 265.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*

seriousness, even though her devotional selections were written well before the writers fit their work to the content she had already written.

She writes, "Since my writings are rooted in the infallible, unchanging Word of God, having them appear alongside the biblical text would seem to be a natural place for them" (ibid.). Because *Jesus Calling* was first published in 2004, perhaps Young is unaware of the current criticisms of her practices. Regardless, she has not addressed them.

In the Introduction to *Jesus Calling*, Young states that the model for her method of "listening" to Jesus is found in the book *God Calling*, which was written in the 1930s by two anonymous women. Young explained, "I had been writing in prayer journals for years, but that was one-way communication: I did all the talking. I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day. I decided to listen to God with pen in hand, writing down whatever I believed He was saying" (*Jesus Calling*, pg. XI).

Young judged her initial effort at this to be successful, and noted, "My journaling had changed from monologue to dialogue" (ibid., pg. XI).

She also wrote, "I have continued to receive personal messages from God as I meditate on Him" (*Jesus Calling*, pg. XI). And later, she says, "This practice of listening to God has increased my intimacy with Him more than any other spiritual discipline, so I want to share some of the messages I have received" (ibid., pg. XII).

Young also recommends that her readers imitate her method of receiving their own contemporary personal words from Jesus: "I invite you to keep a journal to record any thoughts or impressions you receive as you wait in His Presence" (ibid., pg. XIII).

Young *does* qualify her statements about hearing words from the Lord, by writing things such as, "I knew these writings were not inspired as Scripture is, but they were helping me grow closer to God" (ibid., pg. XI). Later, she writes, "The Bible is, of course, the only inerrant Word of God; my writings must be consistent with that unchanging standard" (ibid., pp. XII-XIII). Yet in the next sentence she writes, "I have written them [i.e., the devotionals] from Jesus' point of view; i.e., the first person singular (I, Me, Mine) always refers to Christ. 'You' refers to you, the reader, so the perspective is that of Jesus speaking to you" (ibid., pg. XIII).

If readers are left scratching their heads by all this, the confusion is understandable.

In her Introduction to the *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, Young wrote that she has discovered "the joy of listening to Jesus 'with pen in hand'" (pg. v). She also writes

about, "The practice of listening to Jesus and letting Him speak to me. This practice has done more to increase my intimacy with Him than any other spiritual discipline. And the words of assurance and instruction that He has 'spoken' to me over the years are what I have shared in my devotional books" (ibid.).

In light of Young's conflicting claims about her writings, it is amazing to read the following from *The New York Times* article:

"Kris Bearss, who edits Ms. Young's books for the publisher Thomas Nelson, said she had met her reclusive author several times and considered her a friend. And she defended Ms. Young against heresy charges. 'First of all, she doesn't say that Jesus speaks to her,' Ms. Bearss said. 'I feel like she's tried to be pretty clear about that in her book introductions. In no way does she believe her own writing is sacred or that she has new revelations.' Ms. Young's critics just do not understand the nuances of her project, Ms. Bearss said. 'It's one thing for a person to relay what they feel that they have learned or gained through reading Scripture and prayer, and through time with the Holy Spirit,' Ms. Bearss said. 'It's another thing for people to turn that into her saying that she is writing a new version of Scripture or that she is speaking for the Lord. That's not the case'" ("A First-Person Defense of Writing in Jesus' Voice").

Yet Young's best-selling book is advertised under the pretense that "Young's prayers were a 'monologue' until she learned to listen and record God's words" (Christian-book Distributors catalog entry for *Jesus Calling*). And if the reader will look at the citations from the Introductions of *Jesus Calling* and the *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, Young indeed *clearly* claims that these *are* the words of Jesus to her. And how Jesus can speak words that aren't "inspired as Scripture is," as Young states, raises the question of whether words that God gives can *ever* be errant. If not, then Young's statement that her words aren't "inspired as Scripture is," seems irrelevant. For if God inspires words at all, they would *have* to be true; or else, we would be asserting that God can inspire words that are partly true and partly erroneous, which is absurd; because God, Whose very nature is truth (Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16; John 14:6; John 15:26) cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).

The same *New York Times* article, quoting Young, says:

"I agree that revelation has ceased in the sense that the Bible is complete,' Ms. Young wrote. 'However, what I am doing is devotional writing, and I do so by asking Jesus to guide my mind as I spend time with Him — to help me think His thoughts.' Ms. Young said that before writing, she spends time in prayer to protect her mind 'from distractions, distortions, and deception.' Then she prays and waits, and takes notes" (ibid.).

The article states that, as far as devotional books go, “Ms. Young’s work is unusual for using the first-person voice of Jesus,” although it goes on to note instances of what it believes are examples of phraseology that do not sound the way Jesus would have phrased something in the Bible (ibid.).

While Young wants to claim that she has received words from Jesus Himself to the extent of even having Jesus address the reader in the first person, instead of herself, she also wants to distance herself from the conclusion that she has in this way added to God’s revelation in the Bible.

By publishing the personal words she believes the Lord has given her and by putting the words she believes she has received from Jesus in the first person, Young has set herself up as a modern-day prophet, for a prophet is one who hears and proclaims God’s words to people.

Professor David Crump of Calvin College, quoted in the *Christianity Today* article, said that Young “puts her thoughts into the first person and then presents that ‘person’ as the resurrected Lord. Frankly, I find this to be outrageous ... I’m sure she is a very devout, pious woman, but I’m tempted to call this blasphemy” (pg. 42).

—JGS

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

However, he captured the attention of the secular media — and became the target of critics — with his many bogus end-of-the-world predictions.

Camping’s journey into aberrant end-time speculation began over 25 years ago when he stated that May 21, 1988, was the start of the Tribulation and that Jesus would return and the world would end 2,300 days later on Sept. 6, 1994. When the 1994 date failed, Camping conceded inaccurate interpretations and stayed restrained until 2008 when he expanded the Tribulation to a 23-year period and publicly announced that the Rapture was to occur on May 21, 2011. Millions of dollars were invested in promoting the 2011 date in a variety of ways, including more than 5,000 billboards around the world proclaiming “Judgment Day May 21, 2011.”

When May 21 passed without the promised outcome, Camping took immediate refuge, but then later emerged with new calculations and a new date: Oct. 21, 2011. As with his other dates, no significant biblical event took place on Oct. 21, and finally in March 2012 Camping issued a feeble apology which admitted failure but acclaimed the May 21 campaign as “an astounding event” that had “impact upon this world.”

Camping is survived by Shirley, his wife of 71 years.

—MKG

MORMONS TO OWN 2 PERCENT OF FLORIDA REAL ESTATE

According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, “The Mormon church stands to own nearly 2 percent of Florida by completing a deal to buy most of the real estate of the St. Joe Co. for more than a half-billion dollars.”

The news article revealed that AgReserves Inc., seeks to buy 382,834 acres for \$565 million. The land is being sought for ranching, agricultural, and timber operations.

“Completion of the deal will leave the Utah-based church with 678,000 acres, an area larger than any other private holding in Florida, according to widely shared but unconfirmed rankings of top landowners,” the *Sentinel* reported.

—MKG

RENOWNED PSYCHIC SYLVIA BROWNE DIES

Popular medium Sylvia Browne died Nov. 20, 2013, in a San Jose, Calif., hospital. No cause of death was given. She was 77.

Browne gained celebrity as a psychic by her frequent appearances on *The Montel Williams Show*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, and *Larry King Live*. She published more than 50 books and, according to her biography, nearly half of those landed on to *The New York Times* Best Seller list. In 1974, she founded The Nirvana Foundation for Psychic Research.

While Browne was hailed as a “renowned psychic” who was able to communicate with the dead and see into the future, she was less than credible in some of her high profile “psychic readings.” According to a CNN report, Browne said on a 2004 episode of *The Montel Williams Show* that then-missing Amanda Berry was dead. Browne told Berry’s mother “she would next see her daughter ‘in heaven, on the other side.’” In May 2013 Berry was rescued, along with her daughter and two other women, in the Cleveland home of Ariel Castro. In 2003, Browne, again appearing on *The Montel Williams Show*, told the parents of Shawn Hornbeck that the 11-year-old boy had been abducted by a dark-skinned, Hispanic looking man with dreadlocks. Browne told the parents that Shawn was no longer alive. Four years later, in January 2007, police in a Saint Louis suburb found Hornbeck alive and arrested his abductor, a white male who bore no resemblance to the man that Browne described.

Browne is said to have conducted thousands of hypnotic regressions and hundreds of trance sessions. She was an ardent believer in reincarnation.

—MKG



Books in Review

THE POPULAR HANDBOOK OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

by Joseph M. Holden & Norman Geisler
Harvest House Publishers, 417 pages, \$26.99

This hardback volume will stretch the thinking of enthusiastic and serious students of the Bible. It is not just about archaeology, but includes many foundational and fundamental apologetic issues. One could say it is a number of Bible college courses in one book. It is a great refresher course for pastors and a great introductory course for any interested in evidence for Christianity.

Joseph Holden has a Master of Divinity and has a Ph.D. from the University of Wales. He has traveled in Bible lands and has participated in archaeological digs. Norman Geisler has his name on more than 80 books and has wide knowledge of the apologetics issues of our times.

Major topics covered in this book include the reliability of both the Old and New Testament manuscripts, introduction to archaeology, archaeology of both Old and New Testaments, and many discoveries and finds that relate directly to the Scriptures. There is also a section (pp. 60-65) that clearly shows the weaknesses of the theory of evolution. The authors have also provided a chapter on the Intertestamental Period and the Apocryphal books.

These things and much more are all covered in detail in 26 chapters. The book has many charts and tables along with numerous photos that add a visual component for better understanding. The book provides footnotes, documentation, and a bibliography if one wants to research further. It also has a large alphabetized index for retrieval. Another of its features is that it is not one long continuous text, but sectioned with a limited number of breaks. The chapters do not have to be read in order. We might say, "easy start, easy stop."

There is a chapter on the history and archaeology of the Temple Mount along with a chapter on Herod, Pilate, and Caiaphas. There is also current information about the

archaeology of Nazareth. The material is relevant and exciting.

In his Introduction to the book, Walter Kaiser reminds us of two facts: "The case for the reliability of the persons and events of the Bible becomes more needed and more necessary each day as the newer generation's antibiblical thesis takes a greater hold on the hearts and minds of its members. ... Never has any previous generation seen the amount and significance of evidences that are now available to us today" (pg. 13).

Holden and Geisler state their desire and wish for the book as "an introductory summary for the beginner who desires an understanding of the more significant artifacts and manuscripts relating to the historical and textual reliability of the Bible. Every attempt was made to offer commonly accepted facts concerning the data and its relation to the Bible, leaving the 'technical' discussions for the professional archaeologist" (pg. 17).

The second chapter provides interesting information on the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The authors show in detail what was found in each of the 11 Dead Sea caves. They explain just how the scrolls were dated to the B.C. period and fully inform us about the complete Isaiah scrolls, one of which is on display at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem.

Along the way there is an introduction and an explanation of various archaeological terms along with a four-page glossary of terms.

Chapter 11 responds to recent criticisms of the Bible, particularly Bart Ehrman and his 2009 book, *Jesus, Interrupted*. Ehrman's premise is that the Bible is hopelessly filled with discrepancies, errors, and mistakes, and is irretrievably flawed. The authors show that this may be more true of Ehrman's writings than it is of the Bible. They pick through the serious misunderstandings and faulty scholarship of Ehrman and show how he has missed it on so many fronts. We need current examples like this to fully understand the landscape.

As the title states, this is a handbook and an ongoing resource. We can return to it again and again. We can use pieces of it to document our teaching and preaching. It is filled with archaeological material that can be mined to illustrate many portions of Scripture. With so much revisionism and denial of the Bible in our world, we need more books like it.

—GRF

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