

## Books

# Knocking on Heaven's Door

*How biblical is the near-death-experience phenomenon? Two new books offer hints.*

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hat most of the world knows about near-death experiences (NDE) comes from New Age bunk like

*Life After Life* and *Embraced by the Light*. If you buy the malarkey these books peddle, you'd believe all sorts of unbiblical things, like reincarnation and the idea that there's no such thing as hell. What's that line about Satan's greatest achievement was to convince mankind he doesn't exist?

The Bible is mum on the subject, so whether you're a skeptic or a believer in NDE's, the debate rages on. While the most convincing evidence is chronicled from a biblical perspective in *To Hell and Back* (Nelson) by Christian cardiologist Maurice Rawlings, other God-fearing "authorities"—such as Dr. Raymond Quigg Lawrence Jr., who wrote *Blinded by the Light* (Word)—hold to a more rigid view.

■ **At the Heart of Every Great Father** by Clark Cothorn (*Multnomah*, \$10.99). *Helpful and concise, this book may be the answer to a lot of fathers' prayers. Each chapter pins down an attribute of being a great dad—each based on a characteristic of Jesus.*

■ **Organic Faith** by Ron Mitchell (*Cornerstone Press*, \$10.95). *In the spirit of decompartmentalization, Mitchell will draw you out of your own little world, into the community of believers Christ has in mind. A call for deeper faith, evangelism and social action.*

■ **The Resurrection Report** by William Proctor (*Broadman & Holman*, \$13.99). *A veteran newspaper reporter investigates Christ's resurrection—with fascinating results.*

Now, two more authors have released books targeted at the inquisitive. One seems to conform to the canon of Scripture by not contradicting it; the other paints a deceptively pretty picture on top of a decidedly New Age canvass.

Rita Bennett's *To Heaven & Back* (Zondervan, \$10.99) uses NDE's to evangelize. Bennett flanks each story, often told in the words of the NDE survivor, with truths about God and how the experience mirrors what we already know about Him from His revealed Word.

For example, after wondering if her insatiable curiosity about heaven may stem from her mother's NDE during Bennett's birth (and the possibility of her own visit to heaven tethered to her mother by an umbilical cord), Bennett delves fairly deeply into what the Bible says about heaven.

Unlike New Age NDE gurus, Bennett concedes the possibility of NDE forays into hell. A few of these unfortunate souls tell their ghastly tales, but the book primarily focuses on the more pleasant destination.

What makes *To Heaven & Back* valuable, if not conclusive, to seekers of the truth is Bennett's frequent comparisons of NDE survivors' stories to markers in Scripture. For, as she writes, "the Bible is the only reliable travel guide."

*The Journey Home* by Phillip L. Bergman (Pocket Books, \$14) is another

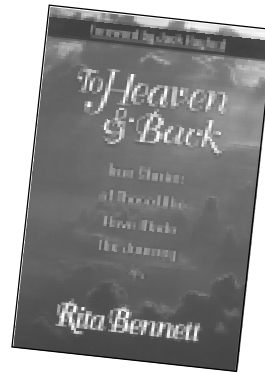
matter. Despite claiming to be a survivor of a near-death experience himself, the Harvard-educated theologian approaches the topic in a more academic manner. This, along with citations from Scripture, gives his words a dangerous air of credibility. Dangerous because his message is essentially the same old New Age drivel.

Bergman flat-out says that you don't have to believe in Christ to enter heaven, that God wants only for us to love one another. To help support his theory that we earn entree into heaven by doing good deeds, he misapplies Jesus' words, "The measure by which you give is the measure by which you receive."

In another place, he tries to convince readers that we are heaven-bound because we are not only created by God, but we are partially divine ourselves. He also suggests that so-called NDEs of hell have less to do with a soul's condemnation than "a concept deeply imbedded in human consciousness," a manifestation of being "terrified by the prospect of losing one's ego in the process [of death]." Oh brother.

You don't have to be a skeptic of NDEs to see the white robes and crystal necklaces draped around that guy. It's this stuff that casts a shadow of lunacy over everybody entering the debate. But people like Bennett, who want to look at the evidence in light of Scripture, deserve more respect than that—even if we don't make up our minds until we go into that Good Night ourselves.

—Robert Liparulo



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