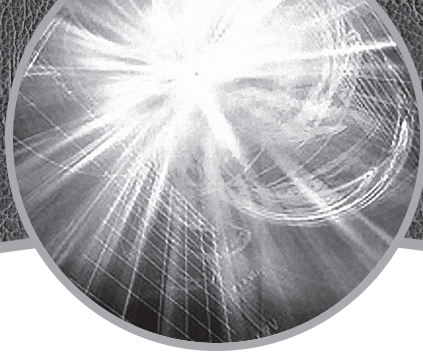


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CHAPTER 1

ATTEMPTING TO PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Channeling | Reincarnation | Near-Death Experiences

During the last few months of her struggle with cancer, Jacquelyn Helton kept a diary. Her thoughts and feelings would become a legacy for her husband, Tom, and her eighteen-month-old daughter, Jennifer.

In her diary she wonders what death would be like? What clothes should she wear for burial? She thinks of her daughter. Who will love her? Put her to sleep? In her writings, she tells Jennifer that when it hurts, she should remember that her mother would have cared. Then she thinks of her husband and the needs he will have after she is gone.

Finally she cries out, “What is the matter with you, God?”

My family is not a bunch of Boy Scouts who can figure all these things out for themselves—you're some kind of idiot to pull something like this!"



Denial, anger, fear, depression, and helpless resignation—all of these feelings erupt in the souls of those who face death. No matter that death is common to the human race; each person must face this ultimate ignominy individually. No one can endure this moment for us. Friends and family can walk only as far as the curtain; the dying one must disappear behind the veil alone.

Understandably, Jacquelyn was apprehensive as she faced the closed partition. She thought about the mystery that lay back of the shrouded veil. She wished for some insight, some glimpse into the future that would assure her that she did not have to be afraid. Yet neither her curiosity nor her desire to live kept her from slipping through the curtain and going into the night alone. Will she find herself fully conscious in some dark cavern seeking companionship but finding none?

Tom Howard says that when we face death we are like a hen before a cobra, incapable of doing anything at all in the presence of the very thing that seems to call for the most drastic and decisive action. "There is, in fact, nothing we can do," he writes. "Say what we will, dance how we will, we will soon enough be a heap of ruined feathers and bones, indistinguishable from the rest of the ruins that lie about. It will not appear to matter in the slightest whether we met the enemy with equanimity, shrieks, or a trumped-up gaiety, there we will be."¹

Naturally, we would like to know in advance what we can expect on the other side. Human nature being what it is, we grasp for some clue, some hint we might glean from

those who are about to cross the boundary. We are particularly anxious to hear a good word, the assurance that all will be well. When television actor Michael Landon, a star on the classic television shows *Bonanza* and *Little House on the Prairie*, lay on his deathbed, he confided to friends that he saw a “bright white light” that eased his fears and made him look forward to what awaited him on the other side. He died calmly, anticipating what he called “quite an experience.”

Reincarnation, altered states of consciousness, and glad reunions in a metaphysical place such as heaven are popular themes at the box office. Larry Gordon, chief executive of Largo Entertainment, says, “People are looking for something that makes them feel good. We all want to believe that death isn’t so bad.”² Dozens of movies portray the enchantment of the life beyond. One advertised, “There is at least one laugh on the other side.”

Fear of death has been supplanted by blissful feelings about a hereafter where everyone ends happily reunited. There is no judgment, no careful review of one’s life. To be sure, death has mystery, we are told, but is not to be dreaded. Given this positive assessment of the Great Beyond, we should not be surprised that some people want to hasten their arrival at this destination.

How legitimate are reported glimpses from behind the parted curtain? Many are convinced that the immortality of the soul is now confirmed by paranormal experiences that can have no other explanation but that the soul survives the death of the body. We might agree that the soul does survive the death of the body, but how much reliable information can be transmitted back to earth by those who tell us what they have seen and heard from the other side?

Let us evaluate three different kinds of evidence that are

sometimes used to assure us that all will be well as we make our own exits through the mysterious veil.

CHANNELING

Some people claim to have talks with the dead. In his book *The Other Side*, Bishop James A. Pike described in detail how he made contact with his son, who had committed suicide. Using a spirit medium, the bishop had what he believed to be several extensive conversations with the boy.

“I failed the test, I can’t face you, can’t face life,” Pike’s son reportedly said. “I’m confused. . . . I am not in purgatory, but something like Hell, here, . . . yet nobody blames me here.”³ Jesus, the boy said, was an example but not a Savior.

A surprise was the alleged appearance in spirit of a friend, Paul Tillich, a well-known German-American theologian who had died several months before. Pike was caught off guard when he discerned his deceased friend’s German accent passing through the lips of the medium (or channeler).

How should this evidence be interpreted? Liberal theologian that he was, Pike did not realize that demons impersonate the dead to create the illusion that the living can communicate with the dead. These spirits have astonishing knowledge of the dead person’s life since they carefully observe individuals while they are living. Through the power of deception, they can mimic a deceased person’s voice, personality, and even appearance. The King James Version actually translates the word *medium* as those who have “familiar spirits” (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11), suggesting the familiarity some demons have with individuals.

Sometimes the story of Samuel and Saul is used to justify communication with the dead. In this remarkable instance,

Samuel was apparently brought back from the dead, but not by the witch of Endor. God Himself seems to have done this miracle; only such a surprising act can explain the medium's terror (1 Samuel 28:3–25).

We must remember that the voice of Samuel did not speak through the lips of this medium. Samuel and Saul spoke to one another directly because of this surprising miracle. What is more, the Almighty was displeased with Saul's desperate attempt to consult the dead prophet. No wonder Saul heard a prophecy of judgment that he and his sons would die the very next day—a prophecy that was fulfilled. Attempting to talk with the dead is consistently condemned by God (Deuteronomy 18:11–12).

So you can be quite sure that no one has ever talked to your dead uncle, cousin, or grandmother. There are, however, spirits that impersonate the dead. Their trickery is compounded because they may actually talk about love, the value of religion, or make favorable references to Christ. And of course they know enough about the one who has died to deceive the unwary.

This ability of demonic spirits to masquerade as the personality of the dead helps us understand haunted houses. While I was staying in a hotel near Calgary, a local newspaper carried a story saying that there were at least two ghosts in the beautiful building. One of the employees showed us a marble staircase where one of these ghosts lived (verified by the testimony of employees). A new bride had stumbled down the stairs years ago and hit her head, resulting in her death. We were told that her spirit now lives on the stairs, appearing with some regularity.

How do we explain this phenomenon? When a person who is inhabited by evil spirits dies, these demons need to

relocate. Often they choose to stay in the place where the death took place (this seems particularly true in the case of violent deaths, such as murder or suicide). They will take the name and characteristics of the deceased person and make occasional appearances under these pretenses. Such entities (as they are frequently called today) are evil spirits who often pose as “friendly ghosts.”

To try to contact the dead is to invite fellowship with hosts of darkness pretending to be helpful angels of light. Isaiah the prophet warned the people that to consult a medium was to turn one’s back on God. “When they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn [light]” (Isaiah 8:19–20 NASB).

The point, of course, is that all information about life after death that comes from spiritists or channelers is unreliable. Those who turn to the occult world for knowledge of death are misled. Yes, there is life after death, but we cannot learn the details from demons, whose chief delight is to confuse and deceive. No wonder the theology allegedly given by Pike’s son was so convoluted.

We have no right to try to peek behind the curtain by communicating with those on the other side. Once the curtain has opened to admit a fellow traveler, it closes and we must not try to peek behind the veil.

REINCARNATION

Another form of occultism that purports to give information about life after death is reincarnation. This doctrine teaches

that we just keep being recycled; death is nothing more than a transition from one body to another. Thus, we can eliminate the fear of death by proclaiming that it does not exist. Some people even claim that through contacts in the spirit world, they have discovered that they had a previous existence. One celebrity announced she has been a princess in Atlantis, an Inca in Peru, and even was a child raised by elephants.

A woman I met on a plane told me that as a child she had detailed knowledge of a house in Vermont that she had never visited. Later, as an adult, she visited the house, and the details coincided with her visions. She was then convinced she had lived there during the eighteenth century. I pointed out that there is no such thing as a transmigration of souls, but there is a transmigration of demons. She was getting knowledge about an eighteenth-century family from evil spirits.

“But,” she protested, “I have nothing to do with evil spirits; I communicate only with good ones!”

“How do you tell the difference between good spirits and evil ones?” I asked.

“I communicate only with those spirits that come to me clothed in light.”

I reminded her of 2 Corinthians 11:13–14, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” Yes, light indeed!

Her experiences and similar ones do not prove reincarnation, but rather confirm that people of all ages can become the victims of demonic influence. There is evidence that even children sometimes inherit the demonically induced traits of their parents or ancestors. This would explain why some children, a few months old, have reportedly babbled blasphemies and obscenities they could never have

personally learned in their short lifetimes.

Occultism, of whatever variety, is not a reliable source of information regarding what happens after death. It proves only the existence of a spirit world, a world of deception and dark intelligence. God considers all forms of occultism an abomination (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:9–12; Isaiah 8:19–20; 1 Corinthians 10:14–22).

No self-proclaimed guru is qualified to tell us about eternity. No one can prove that he or she has had the experience of being recycled from another existence. The curtain opens when we go in, but once it is firmly closed, it will not open to let us return.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Some people claim to have died and returned to their bodies to give us information on the life beyond. Raymond Moody, in *Life After Life*,⁴ recorded the interviews of many who were near death but were successfully resuscitated. Their stories, for the most part, had many similar elements: the patient would hear himself being pronounced dead; he would be out of his body, watching the doctors work over his corpse. While in this state, he would meet relatives or friends who had died and then encounter a “being of light.” When he knows that he must return to his body, he does so reluctantly because the experience of love and peace has engulfed him.

Melvin Morse, in *Closer to the Light*, recounts the stories of children who have had near-death experiences. Again, their stories are remarkably similar, and in almost all instances very positive. Typical is the account of a sixteen-year-old boy who was rushed to the hospital with a very severe kidney problem. While in the admitting room, he slumped over

in his chair. A nurse searched for his pulse but found none. Thankfully, he was eventually resuscitated. Later he told of a supernatural experience:

I reached a certain point in the tunnel where lights suddenly began flashing all around me. They made me certain that I was in some kind of tunnel, and the way I moved past them, I knew I was going hundreds of miles an hour.

At this point I also noticed that there was somebody with me. He was about seven feet tall and wore a long white gown with a simple belt tied at the waist. His hair was golden, and although he didn't say anything, I wasn't afraid because I could feel him radiating peace and love.

No, he wasn't the Christ, but I knew that he was sent from Christ. It was probably one of his angels or someone else sent to transport me to Heaven.⁵

Betty Eadie, in *Embraced by the Light*,⁶ gives a fantastic account of her visit to the "other side." She claims to have seen Christ and thus even dedicated her book to him: "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 fail." Yet it becomes clear that the Christ she tells us about is not the Jesus of the New Testament.

Eadie's Jesus is a benevolent being of light that surrounded her in such a way that she could not tell where her "light" stopped and his began. Jesus, she tells us, is separate from the Father and would do nothing to offend her. There was no reason to regret past deeds, for we as humans are not sinful creatures; indeed, human "spirit beings" assisted the heavenly Father at creation. Thankfully, the world is not filled with tragedy as we suppose, and in the presence of

Christ, Eadie concluded, “I knew that I was worthy to embrace Him.”⁷

What do these experiences prove? Apparently, they do confirm that at death the soul separates from the body. A few patients not only looked back and saw doctors hover around their body, but could see what was going on in other places in the hospital. This, it seems, is impossible unless the soul had actually left the body and could review earth from a different perspective.

We have reason to believe that a person may see Christ in the twilight zone between life and death. Before Stephen was stoned God gave him a glimpse into heaven. Stephen said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). This experience was unique in that it happened before Stephen died, not at death. Here was positive encouragement that heaven was waiting to receive him!

The apostle Paul had a similar experience, though some think that he actually died when he was caught up into paradise, where he heard “things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4). Since he said it happened fourteen years before writing these words to the church at Corinth, there is at least some evidence that the event coincided with his experience at Lystra, where he was stoned and dragged out of the city presumed dead (Acts 14:19–20). If he did die and then revived, this account could be classified as a near-death experience, or perhaps even a “revived from death” experience.

If Stephen saw our Lord before he died, and if Paul died and was caught up into paradise, it is just possible that other believers might also have such a vision. Reports of seeing Christ or relatives long dead might have some validity. We

should not expect such experiences, but they could happen.

The problem, of course, is that we cannot accept without scrutiny what people claim to have seen behind the curtain. Near-death experiences may or may not reflect the true conditions of life beyond death. They must be carefully evaluated to see whether they conform to the biblical picture of the hereafter. Also, the prior beliefs of those who report what they have seen and heard are essential in evaluating what was experienced.

Remember—and this is important—Satan would try to duplicate the same positive experiences for unbelievers that God gave to Stephen and Paul. The Great Deceiver wants to have people think that one's relationship with Jesus Christ has no bearing on the beauty and bliss that awaits everyone. If it is true that angels await those who have been made righteous by Christ, it is understandable that demonic spirits would await those who enter eternity without God's forgiveness and acceptance.

We know that at least some positive near-death experiences are demonic, for they sharply contradict the teaching of the Bible. First, some like Betty Eadie tell us that the Jesus they met assured them that everyone will have an equally blissful welcome into the life beyond. Second, we are told that there is no judgment, no rigorous examination of a person's life. Several of the people explicitly mention that the "being of Light" they met gives everyone an unconditional welcome.

One woman reported that when she crossed the line between life and death she met Christ, who took her for a walk. He explained that all the religions of the world were paths to the same destination. There was a Buddhist path, a Hindu path, an Islamic path, and of course, a Christian path. But, like spokes in a wheel, all of them led to the central hub of

heaven. In other words, everyone will be saved. This has always been Satan's most believable lie.

As for the widely reported experiences of seeing light, we should remember that since God is light, it is understandable that Satan duplicates light of his own. We cannot emphasize too strongly that he wishes to disguise himself as an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). And of course, many unsuspecting souls simply assume that this "being" who radiates light is kind and benevolent; in an age of "feel-good" religion they can't imagine that it is anyone else but Christ.

Although positive near-death experiences are widely reported, I must point out that other research indicates that many have dark and foreboding experiences. In *The Edge of Death* by Philip Swihart,⁸ and *Beyond Death's Door* by Maurice Rawlings,⁹ there are accounts of those who tell terrifying stories of the life beyond. Some have seen a lake of fire or abysmal darkness, along with tormented persons—all of whom are awaiting judgment. These reports, the authors contend, are more accurate because they were gained through interviews almost immediately following near-death and resuscitation. These dark experiences, the writers say, are often lost to the memory after a short period of time.

We cannot overstate the deception perpetuated by the "religion of the resuscitated," who report only the utopian idea that death leads to a higher degree of consciousness for all people regardless of their religion or beliefs. We must remember that all near-death reports are from those who might have died clinically but have not experienced biological or irreversible death. None has been resurrected. Whether the experience is positive or negative, it must always be evaluated by a more reliable authority.

Personally, I am much more concerned about what I will

experience after death than what I will experience when I am near death. It's not the transition but the destination that really counts. Thus, to discover what really lies on the other side, we must find a more credible map, a more certain authority than people who go only to the threshold of the life beyond and give us their reports.

We will do much better if we trust someone who was actually dead, not someone who was just near death. Christ, as we shall see, is the only One who is qualified to tell us what we can expect on the other side. He was dead—so dead that His body became cold and was put into a tomb. Three days later He was raised from the dead with a glorified body. Here is someone whose opinion can be trusted. To John this risen Christ said, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17–18).

Reliable information does not come to us by trying to peer behind the partially open curtain. God alone knows what really lies on the other side of the veil. And that is why we can do no better than study what the Bible has to say about the Great Beyond.

We begin with the Old Testament, where the first glimpses of the regions of death come into view. This will prepare us for the much clearer revelation given in the New Testament. Though we have no right to peer behind the curtain and report what we have found, we can gratefully accept all that God has shown to us in His Word.

What follows in the next chapters of this book is His revelation, not our observation. God parts the curtain so that we can glimpse inside.

Let us find out what is there.