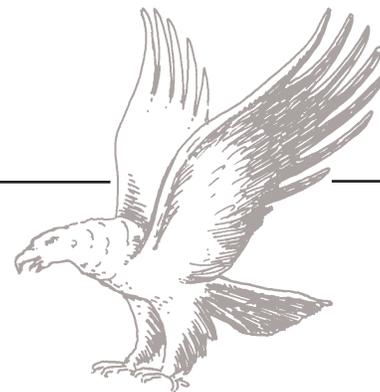


# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



February 1, 2015

## The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven (Not!)

The collapse of this popular story has exposed a serious defect in the Christian publishing industry. Believers need to learn a lesson from this episode.

*"The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?' says the Lord" (Jer. 23:28).*

*"And in their greed they will exploit you with false words" (2 Pet. 2:3).*



No doubt you have seen the recent headlines debunking the 2010 bestseller, *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*, a book that describes the story of Alex Malarkey, a six-year-old boy who visited heaven while in a coma. The book, written by the boy's father, was later made into a movie. The publisher is now pulling the book from circulation.

This is the final chapter in a long-running dispute that has scandalized the Christian publishing industry. Phil Johnson has been following this story closely from the beginning, and provides the sad details of a mother and son who for several years have challenged the father's outlandish claims, but could not get anyone to listen: "When Alex has tried to make similar statements on Facebook or in other online forums, he

has been routinely shouted down, his comments deleted, and his fragile voice silenced." Predictably, this story has given skeptics additional cause for smearing believers as gullible dupes who are easily misled by hucksters.

This sorry episode reinforces two lessons that we must never forget.

First, whatever the facts behind sensational stories like these (and there are many others like it), they challenge the primacy of God's word as the foundation of our faith. God has revealed to us in the Bible everything He wants us to know about the afterlife. If we deem that insufficient and choose to rely on these near-death experiences to ground our faith, then we have relegated God's word to secondary status in our belief system. Paul once experienced a heavenly vision, but he refused to provide any details about what he saw and heard (2 Cor. 12:2-4); he knew that's not what people need to hear. When people today recount their out-of-body stories, we may not be in a position to judge the veracity of their experiences, but we *can* pass judgment on the value of their tes-

timonies as vehicles of truth. They are *human experiences*, not the word of God. We must never conflate the two.

Second, Christians must exercise a generous dose of skepticism when confronted with slickly packaged stories like these. Not only are they theologically suspicious, they often border on the fraudulent. Phil Johnson continues: "There is a massive industry behind books like these, heavily populated with decision makers who care more for filthy lucre than for truth. Employed in that industry are some mercenaries who have no scruples whatsoever about making up tales like these, polishing and embellishing them, and buttressing them with details designed to enhance the illusion of believability. . . . What's 'good' is defined by what sells. . . . Christian publishing is long overdue for reformation" (read more at <http://www.gty.org/blog/B150116>).

Instead of getting carried away with sensational stories of dubious origin, we need to spend more time studying the Word of God. It will save our souls—and save us a lot of embarrassment.

— David King