

## Close Encounters of the Third Kind

Close Encounters of the Third Kind is a science fiction film written and directed by Steven Spielberg. The title comes from the writings of astronomer/ufologist J Allen Hynek's classification of aliens. According to the film, a "close encounter" is when a person witnesses an unidentified flying object, a UFO. This in turn leads to contact with the "Third Kind" or supposed aliens or animate beings. NASA is spending millions of dollars in exploring space in search of life "out there." And if there is, what form does it take?

This curiosity with the possibility of life outside of planet earth is not new. For millennia people have wondered and searched for whatever it is that is "out there." The Greeks and Romans believed these aliens took the forms of gods. Some societies believe they take the form of bodiless spirits. Others, like Richard Dawkins, believe there is no one out there. Claims are made by a few, who were supposedly dead and then revived, that they had encountered a living, heavenly being. Stephen, a first century martyr, claimed, as he was about to die, that he looked into an open heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56).

A man named Saul asserted that, while on the road near the city of Damascus in Syria, a brilliant light, brighter than the midday sun shone out of heaven and in that light he saw into heaven itself and saw Jesus of Nazareth who actually talked to him (Acts 26:13-18). That encounter so changed his life that even today we use the expression "a Damascus Road experience" for a life-changing event.

Today, we begin a series of messages on *Encounters with Jesus*. The Bible reminds us that it is not necessary to ascend into heaven to hear some extraterrestrial voice or descend into the abyss to encounter God. In fact, God's voice is as close as a word in our mouth. The crucial thing is whether or not we have heard and responded to that voice.

What does the Bible say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (Romans 10:8-11).