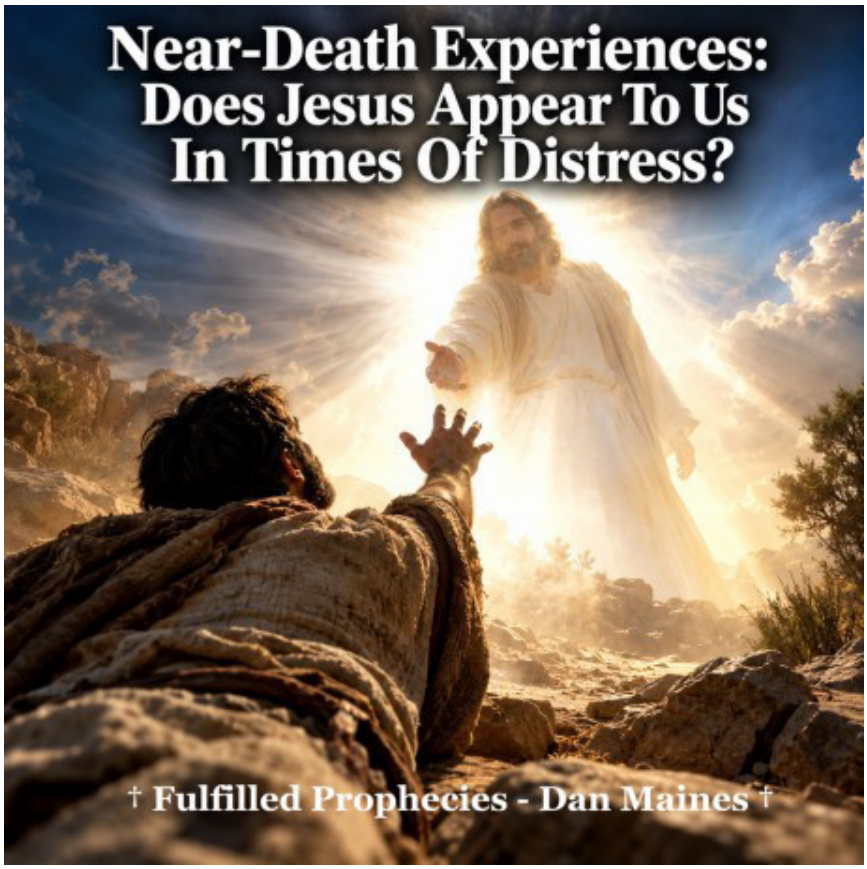
Fulfilled Prophecies

Near-Death Experiences: Does Jesus Appear To Us In Times Of Distress?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Throughout history, people who have come close to death have reported extraordinary experiences. Some describe seeing a brilliant light, others remember hearing a voice telling them that it isn't their time to die, and some describe looking down upon their own bodies while doctors worked to save their lives.

† These experiences have occurred during serious illnesses,

surgeries, accidents, and moments when people were unconscious or near death.
† Some people have described seeing Jesus, while others have experienced an overwhelming sense of peace, love, and comfort that they couldn't explain.
† Many have recovered with clear memories of what they experienced, and some have carried those memories throughout their lives.
† But what does Scripture actually tell us about these experiences? Can Jesus reveal Himself to someone approaching death? Can a person experience something beyond ordinary physical awareness? And how should Christians understand these testimonies?
† The Bible doesn't describe every medical situation or explain every near-death experience. However, it does provide several remarkable accounts of people seeing heavenly glory, receiving comfort from Christ, and experiencing visions beyond their ordinary surroundings.
† We must distinguish between what Scripture clearly reveals and what remains unknown. Personal experiences can be meaningful, but Scripture remains our authority for understanding spiritual truth (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Stephen Saw Jesus As Death Approached

Acts 7:55-56
But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
† Stephen was facing death when he experienced an extraordinary vision of heaven. Instead of being overcome by fear, he saw God's glory and Jesus standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:54-60).
† This wasn't a vision of judgment against Stephen. It was a revelation of Christ's presence and heavenly glory during a moment of terrible suffering (Acts 7:55-56).
† Stephen's experience establishes that Jesus can reveal Himself to someone approaching death. Scripture doesn't limit Christ's ability to make His presence known during moments of extreme distress (Acts 7:55-60).
† However, Stephen's experience was specifically recorded as a

revelation given through the Holy Spirit. We shouldn't automatically assume that every modern report of seeing light or Jesus is the same kind of revelation (1 John 4:1).
† Stephen's vision also reminds us that death doesn't separate believers from Christ. His final prayer expressed complete confidence that Jesus would receive him (Acts 7:59).

Paul Experienced Something Beyond His Physical Understanding

2 Corinthians 12:2-4
But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
† Paul described an extraordinary experience involving heaven and Paradise, but he couldn't determine whether the experience occurred physically or apart from his body (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).
† This is particularly important when considering people who report floating above their bodies during surgery or unconsciousness. Paul acknowledged that an experience could be so extraordinary that its physical nature couldn't be determined (2 Corinthians 12:2-3).
† However, Paul's account doesn't prove that modern out-of-body experiences are genuine departures of the spirit from the body. His own words demonstrate the importance of admitting what we don't know (2 Corinthians 12:3).
† The experience was real to Paul, but he didn't attempt to explain every detail. He left what he couldn't understand in God's hands (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).
† Paul's example teaches us that we shouldn't dismiss every unusual experience, but neither should we build doctrines upon experiences that Scripture hasn't explained (2 Corinthians 12:6; 1 Corinthians 4:6).

Jesus Appeared To Paul In A Brilliant Light

Acts 9:3-6
Now as he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching

Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told to you what you must do."
† Paul experienced a brilliant heavenly light and heard the voice of Jesus speaking directly to him. This demonstrates that Christ can make His presence known through an extraordinary experience involving both light and a voice (Acts 9:3-6).
† Paul wasn't dying when this happened. Jesus appeared to him for a specific purpose, to confront him and redirect his life (Acts 9:6, 15-16).
† This distinction matters because people who report hearing a voice saying that it isn't their time to die sometimes associate that voice with Jesus. Scripture shows that Jesus can speak through extraordinary experiences, but it doesn't establish that every such voice belongs to Him (Acts 9:4-6; 1 John 4:1).
† The light Paul saw wasn't simply an unexplained brightness. Scripture identifies its source through the words of Jesus Himself (Acts 9:5).
† We should therefore be careful about identifying every brilliant light in a near-death experience as Jesus. Scripture provides examples of heavenly light, but it doesn't tell us that every reported light has a supernatural origin (Acts 9:3-6).

Jesus Comforted Paul During A Time Of Fear

Acts 18:9-10
And the Lord said to Paul by a vision at night, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many people in this city."
† Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision during a difficult period of his ministry. His message was one of encouragement, reassurance, and continued purpose (Acts 18:9-10).
† The Lord didn't tell Paul that every difficulty would disappear. He assured him of His presence and gave him courage to continue the work before him (Acts 18:9-11).
† This helps us understand why some believers associate extraordinary experiences during illness or distress with God's comfort.

Scripture confirms that Christ knows the fears and struggles of His people (Hebrews 4:14-16).
† Yet we must remember that Paul's vision was an identifiable revelation recorded in Scripture. It doesn't establish that every comforting dream, voice, or vision today is a direct appearance of Jesus (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
† What remains certain is that Christ's care for His people doesn't depend upon their receiving an extraordinary vision (Romans 8:38-39).

God's Presence In The Valley Of Death

Psalm 23:4
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
† David described God's presence during life's darkest moments. His confidence wasn't based upon seeing a brilliant light or hearing an audible voice, but upon trusting the Lord's continuing care (Psalm 23:1-4).
† This passage doesn't promise that every dying believer will receive a vision. It promises something greater, that God's faithfulness remains sufficient even when death approaches (Psalm 23:4).
† Some believers approach death with extraordinary experiences, while others pass away quietly without reporting anything unusual. Neither experience determines the strength of their faith or their standing before God (Romans 8:38-39).
† The presence of Christ isn't measured by what our physical eyes can see. Believers walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).
† Whether someone sees a light, hears a comforting voice, or experiences nothing unusual, the promise of God's faithfulness remains unchanged (Hebrews 13:5).

Jesus Promised Life Beyond Physical Death

John 11:25-26
Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and

believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"
† Jesus didn't teach that physical death would cease to occur. He promised that those who belong to Him possess life that death cannot destroy (John 11:25-26).
† This promise is central to understanding death from the fulfilled perspective. Christ accomplished the promised victory over death through His redemptive work and the fulfillment of the resurrection hope (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
† Under the Old Covenant, death and Hades were associated with humanity's separation from the completed resurrection promise. Christ brought that covenantal order to its appointed end (Revelation 20:14; Hebrews 9:8-10).
† We understand the resurrection fulfillment in connection with the passing of the Old Covenant age in AD 70. Believers now live under the completed New Covenant, with direct access to the Father through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:18).
† Therefore, the Christian's hope doesn't depend upon returning from a near-death experience with a remarkable story. Our hope rests upon Jesus Christ and His accomplished redemption (John 11:25-26; Hebrews 10:19-22).

Believers Are With Christ Beyond Physical Death

2 Corinthians 5:6-8
Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-for we walk by faith, not by sight-but we are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.
† Paul expressed confidence that being absent from the physical body didn't mean being separated from Christ. His hope was to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).
† This passage supports the believer's hope beyond physical death, but it doesn't describe the medical experiences of people who temporarily lose consciousness and later recover (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).
† Someone who survives cardiac arrest or a serious medical emergency hasn't necessarily experienced irreversible death. We shouldn't confuse a near-death experience with the completed transition Paul was discussing (Philippians 1:21-23).

† From the fulfilled perspective, Christ has completed His victory over covenantal death. Physical death remains a reality, but it doesn't separate those who belong to Him from His presence (Romans 8:38-39).
† This is why believers can face death with confidence even when they don't know exactly what the final moments of physical life will feel like (Philippians 1:21-23).

The Bible Describes Heavenly Light

Revelation 21:23
And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb.
† John described the New Jerusalem as illuminated by God's glory, with the Lamb as its light. This is covenantal imagery revealing the completed presence of God among His redeemed people (Revelation 21:22-23).
† The New Jerusalem isn't a future physical city waiting to descend upon the earth. It represents the fulfilled New Covenant dwelling of God with His people (Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).
† Some people who have nearly died describe a beautiful light that brings peace and removes fear. Their descriptions may remind Christians of biblical imagery, but similarity doesn't establish that they actually saw the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:23).
† Scripture identifies Jesus as the true light, but it doesn't teach that every unexplained light encountered during unconsciousness is a personal appearance of Christ (John 8:12).
† Our understanding of heavenly glory must come from what Scripture reveals, rather than from attempting to interpret every reported vision as a description of heaven (Revelation 21:22-23).

God Determines The Days Of Our Lives

Psalm 139:16
Your eyes have seen my formless substance; And in Your book were written All the days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was

not one of them.
† David acknowledged God's complete knowledge of human life, even before birth. Our existence isn't hidden from the One who created us (Psalm 139:13-16).
† This passage helps explain why believers find comfort in testimonies from people who heard a voice saying that their time hadn't yet come. God's knowledge extends beyond what human beings can understand (Psalm 139:16).
† However, Scripture doesn't teach that everyone who survives a medical emergency was literally sent back from heaven after receiving a divine command (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).
† Medical treatment, the body's response to injury, and the circumstances of recovery can all contribute to survival. Recognizing those realities doesn't deny God's providence (James 1:17).
† We can thank God for someone's recovery without claiming to know exactly what caused a vision or who spoke during an unusual experience (Psalm 107:19-21).

We Must Test Spiritual Experiences Against Scripture

1 John 4:1
Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
† John instructed believers not to accept every spiritual claim without examination. This principle is important when considering visions, voices, and unusual experiences (1 John 4:1).
† A person may sincerely describe what they remember without understanding exactly what produced the experience. Sincerity and accuracy about the cause aren't necessarily the same thing (Proverbs 14:15).
† Medical research has identified several possible contributors to near-death experiences, including changes in brain activity, oxygen availability, medications, and altered states of consciousness. These explanations don't account for every testimony, but they remind us to avoid premature conclusions.
† We shouldn't accuse someone of dishonesty simply because their experience is difficult to explain. Neither should we declare an

experience supernatural merely because it was vivid or emotionally powerful (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
† Most importantly, no personal vision should be treated as new divine revelation that adds to or changes the completed testimony of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3).

Historical References

† Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, recorded Jewish beliefs concerning the soul, death, and the existence of life beyond the grave. His writings demonstrate that questions about consciousness and death were important in the ancient world (Josephus, Jewish War 2.8.14).
† Tertullian, writing around the beginning of the third century, discussed dreams, visions, and the soul's relationship to the body. His writings show that early Christians considered extraordinary experiences while attempting to understand them through their beliefs about human nature (Tertullian, On the Soul, chapters 43-49).
† Augustine, writing in the early fifth century, examined unusual visions and experiences that appeared to involve perception beyond ordinary physical senses. He recognized that such reports raised difficult questions about how human beings experience visions (Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Book 12).
† Gregory the Great, writing near the end of the sixth century, preserved accounts of people who reportedly approached death, experienced visions, and returned to life. These accounts demonstrate that near-death testimonies aren't limited to modern times (Gregory the Great, Dialogues, Book 4).
† These historical writers provide evidence that unusual experiences surrounding death have been discussed for centuries. However, their reports don't establish that every experience was supernatural or that every interpretation was correct (1 John 4:1).
† Historical testimony can help us understand what people believed and reported, but it cannot replace Scripture as our authority for Christian doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

My Near-Death Experience

† Yes, I saw and talked with Jesus as well. This wasn't something I read about or heard from someone else. It was something I personally experienced on December 7, 1979, following a terrible automobile accident.
† I was told that I had died for more than seven minutes. What happened during that time changed the direction of my life forever.
† I remember meeting Jesus inside what appeared to be some kind of cave or enclosed building. The surroundings reminded me of what I later came to understand about Hades. I can't explain exactly where I was, and I won't claim that Scripture identifies the place I saw.
† The first thing I remember was Jesus walking right through me. He knew exactly who I was, how I had been living, and what needed to change.
† He told me that He knew I didn't reject Him, but I needed to make some serious changes because I had been living for myself. He told me to go back, study, and find Him.
† At that time, I believed in God, but I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus. I was a partier, living the way I wanted without giving much thought to what God expected of me.
† Jesus wasn't pleased with the way I had been living. I remember that very clearly. This wasn't simply a comforting experience filled with beautiful light and peaceful feelings. It was a serious encounter that confronted me with the direction of my life.
† During our conversation, Jesus told me that I wouldn't remember everything we had discussed. I remember asking Him to allow me to remember so that I could study, search for Him, and come to know Him.
† He told me to search for Him, knock, and get to know Him. He also made it clear that it wasn't my time to stay there. I needed to return and make changes in my life.
† I remember waking up on the operating table and exclaiming that I had just seen and talked with Jesus!
† When I fully regained consciousness about four weeks later, I told my parents, doctors, and nurses that I had met Jesus. To my surprise, they believed me. I had expected them to question my story or think I was imagining things.
† I can't explain everything that happened to me through Scripture,

and I'm not asking anyone to accept my experience as biblical revelation. I'm simply telling you what I experienced and what I remember.
† Jesus told His listeners to seek, and they would find, and to knock, and the door would be opened (Matthew 7:7-8). Those words have special meaning to me because they remind me of what I remember Jesus telling me during that encounter.
† I also think about His words concerning repentance and turning away from a life centered upon ourselves (Luke 13:3; Matthew 16:24-26).
† Looking back, I understand that believing God exists isn't the same as living in fellowship with Him. My experience confronted me with that difference and gave me a desire to search the Scriptures and understand Jesus more deeply (John 5:39; John 17:3).
† I don't claim to understand how I could have experienced these things while my body was undergoing a medical emergency. I can only tell you that the memories remain with me.
† I remember Jesus. I remember our conversation. I remember that He wasn't happy with the way I had been living. And I remember being told to go back, study, search for Him, and change my life.
† That happened on December 7, 1979, and I've never forgotten it. I share this testimony not to establish a new doctrine, but to explain why my relationship with Jesus and my commitment to studying Scripture became so important to me.
† My experience is my personal testimony. Scripture remains the authority for what I believe and teach (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

How It Applies To Us Today

† When someone tells us they saw a brilliant light while approaching death, we should listen respectfully. Their experience may have been deeply meaningful, even when we can't determine its source (Romans 12:15).
† When someone remembers hearing a voice telling them that their time hadn't yet come, we can acknowledge their testimony without claiming certainty that Jesus personally spoke those words (1 John 4:1).
† When someone describes floating above an operating table and

seeing doctors working below, we should distinguish their remembered experience from the conclusion that their spirit literally left their body (2 Corinthians 12:2-3).
† Scripture demonstrates that God has revealed Himself through visions, heavenly light, and extraordinary experiences. But it doesn't promise that these experiences will accompany death or severe illness (Acts 7:55-56; Acts 9:3-6).
† Jesus can comfort His people during suffering, whether through prayer, Scripture, the care of others, or an awareness of His presence. We don't need a supernatural vision to know that He cares for us (Hebrews 4:15-16).
† For those facing serious illness, the greatest comfort isn't a promise that they'll recover or receive a heavenly vision. It's the assurance that nothing, including death, can separate believers from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:38-39).
† We should never tell someone that a lack of extraordinary experiences means they lack faith. Our relationship with Christ is grounded in His completed work, not in visions or sensations (Ephesians 2:8-9).
† We can rejoice when someone survives a life-threatening illness, thank God for the doctors and treatments that helped them, and continue trusting Him without claiming knowledge He hasn't revealed (James 1:17).
† From the fulfilled perspective, Christ's promised victory has already been accomplished. We aren't waiting for another resurrection event, another final judgment, or another coming of Christ to complete redemption (Hebrews 9:26-28; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
† Physical death remains part of human experience, but it doesn't have the final word over those who belong to Jesus. The completed New Covenant provides our confidence in life and in death (John 11:25-26; Philippians 1:21-23).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Can Jesus appear to someone who is approaching death?
A: Scripture records Jesus revealing Himself to Stephen as he faced death. This establishes that Christ can make His presence known in extraordinary ways, but it doesn't prove that every modern vision is an

appearance of Jesus (Acts 7:55-60).

Q: Is the brilliant light people describe during near-death experiences actually Jesus?
A: We can't know that from the description alone. Paul saw heavenly light when Jesus appeared to him, but Scripture doesn't identify every unusual light as Christ (Acts 9:3-6; John 8:12).

Q: What about people who hear a voice saying it isn't their time to die?
A: Scripture teaches that God knows our days, but it doesn't explain every voice heard during a medical emergency. We can respect the person's experience without claiming certainty about the speaker (Psalm 139:16; 1 John 4:1).

Q: Can a person's spirit leave the body during surgery and watch everything from above?
A: Paul described an extraordinary experience without knowing whether it occurred in or apart from his body. His account doesn't establish what happens during modern surgical experiences, so we should avoid claiming more than Scripture reveals (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Q: Why do some people remember these experiences so clearly?
A: Vivid memories can occur during unusual states of consciousness. Scripture doesn't explain the medical processes involved in near-death experiences, and a clear memory alone doesn't establish that the experience was supernatural (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Q: Are people who report these experiences lying?
A: Not necessarily. Someone can sincerely remember an experience without knowing its cause. Christians should respond with compassion while carefully examining any spiritual interpretation (Romans 12:15; 1 John 4:1).

Q: Does Jesus still comfort believers during serious illness?
A: Yes. Christ understands human suffering, and believers can approach God confidently for mercy and help. His comfort doesn't require an audible voice or visible appearance (Hebrews 4:15-16; Romans 8:38-39).

Q: Does someone who has a near-death experience actually enter heaven and then return?
A: Scripture doesn't provide enough information to establish that conclusion. Paul's experience involved Paradise, but he didn't explain its physical nature, and his account shouldn't be applied automatically to every modern testimony (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Q: Does the fulfilled resurrection mean Christians no longer physically die?
A: No. Physical death continues, but Christ has fulfilled the promised victory over covenantal death. Believers have the assurance of life with Christ beyond physical death (John 11:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Q: What should we believe when someone we love says they saw Jesus or heard His voice near death?
A: We should listen with love, respect the importance of their testimony, and recognize that we may not be able to verify its source. Our confidence rests upon what Christ has revealed in Scripture, not upon our ability to explain every extraordinary experience (Acts 7:55-56; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Q: What is the greatest assurance for someone approaching death?
A: The greatest assurance is that Jesus Christ has accomplished redemption and that physical death cannot separate those who belong to Him from His love and presence (Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 1:21-23).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Acts 7:55-56; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4; Acts 9:3-6; Acts 18:9-10; Psalm 23:4; John 11:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Revelation 21:23; Psalm 139:16; 1 John 4:1.

† Josephus, Jewish War, Book 2, Chapter 8, Section 14; Tertullian, On the Soul, Chapters 43-49; Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Book 12; Gregory the Great, Dialogues, Book 4.

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