

Acts 7:55-60
September 22, 2020

Acts 7:55-56. Stephen looked up into heaven

55. *But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, **56.** and said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”*

55a. “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven”

Stephen charged his audience of “always resisting the Holy Spirit” (v. 51) but he has been filled with the Holy Spirit.

As we discussed in chapter 6, Stephen was selected to be a deacon because he was full of the Spirit (6:5, 10). In this scripture, Stephen is granted the privilege of seeing into heaven.

55b. “and saw the glory of God”

The word “glory” is used in the Bible to speak of various wonderful things, but it is used especially to speak of God’s glory.

Biblical writers describe God’s glory using human words.

- Portrayed it as “devouring fire” (Exodus 24:17)
When Moses asked to see God’s glory, God replied, “You cannot see my face, for man may not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20-23)—but God continued, “Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand on the rock
- The point is that God’s glory is so overwhelming that humans aren’t engineered to be capable of experiencing it.

But Stephen, being filled with the Spirit and on the verge of martyrdom, is given the privilege of gazing into heaven and seeing God’s glory.

May be the only one to see inside Heaven??

55c. “and Jesus standing on the right hand of God”

Christ shares God’s glory.

- The glory of the Lord was revealed at his birth (Luke 2:9; John 1:14).
- His disciples, Peter, James and John, were privileged to see Christ’s glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:28-36).
- Christ’s cross was necessary so that he might “enter into his glory” (Luke 24:26; see also Philippians 2:5-11).
- The Gospel of John in particular speaks of the cross as Christ’s glorification (John 12:23; 13:31-32).
- Jesus spoke of returning “with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

56. “and said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’”

The commentaries I use vary in their opinion of why Jesus was standing rather than sitting. Earlier, Jesus said, "From now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69).

- Perhaps Jesus, knowing that Stephen was about to be martyred, stood to welcome him into heaven.
- It is also possible that Jesus stood to act as a witness for Stephen. Witnesses in Jewish courts stood to give their testimony. Jesus earlier said, "I tell you, everyone who confesses me before men, him will the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8).

Acts 7:57-58. They placed their garments at the feet of saul

57. But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed at him with one accord. 58. They threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses placed their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

57a. "But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears"

Who are "they"?

Yep, you guessed it. The council members in a bunch.

According to this scripture, they covered their ears so that they wouldn't hear Stephen's blasphemy, or what they perceived to be blasphemy.

Just for fun, let's read verse 7:51 above these scriptures.

"uncircumcised in heart and ears" (7:51)

they had already stopped their ears from hearing Godly messages that they didn't want to hear.

I will give you a McIlvain view of the conflict between Stephen and the council, but I encourage you to read 7:51-53. It's not in the verses I chose to study, but it tells how both the accused and the accusers interpreted the Mishnah and Moses' laws from the Pentateuch (first five books of Old Testament).

57b. "and rushed at him with one accord"

Proper procedure in this situation would be a formal trial before the council. The council would hear testimony, render a verdict, and impose judgment. The fact that none of this takes place indicates that the council has degenerated into a mob as it rushes against Stephen.

58a. "They threw him out of the city"

- Jewish law specifies that blasphemers are to be taken "out of the camp" before being stoned (Leviticus 24:14).
- Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate" (Hebrews 13:12).

58b. "and stoned him"

By what authority does the council stone Stephen?

Some scholars think that there was a power vacuum in Israel when the emperor recalled Pilate to Rome in 37 A.D. to answer charges of unnecessary violence. According to this theory, there was a period between rulers when Roman rule would have been disorganized and leaderless, and it would have been possible for Jewish authorities to ignore Roman law.

Other scholars say that Rome granted Jews the privilege of imposing capital punishment for offenses against the temple—so, perhaps, the council used this exception to impose capital punishment on Stephen.

Verses 57-58 show the action moving very quickly in response to Stephen's comment about seeing the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (v. 56). What we have here is not legal sanction, but mob action. The rule of law broke down and council members, and probably others, took the law into their own hands.

To my way of thinking, this is very similar to the mob action on Good Friday which led to Jesus' crucifixion.

58c. “The witnesses placed their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul”

Jewish law requires that witnesses against the accused in a capital case shall be “first on him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people” (Deuteronomy 17:7; see also Deuteronomy 13:9-10). These witnesses lay their coats at Saul's feet so that they will not be hampered as the stone Stephen.

Some scholars think that the fact that there were witnesses suggests a formal trial and verdict. However, the context suggests otherwise.

Paul (Saul) will acknowledge his presence at Stephen's stoning (22:20). He may have provided Luke (Paul's traveling companion and the author of this book) with an eyewitness account of Stephen's stoning.

Acts 7:59-60. Lord, don't hold this sin against them

59. They stoned Stephen as he called out, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60. He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, don't hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

59. “They stoned Stephen as he called out, saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’”

This echoes Jesus' words from the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

60a. “He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice”

This echoes Jesus “crying with a loud voice” as he died on the cross (Luke 23:46)

60b. “Lord, don't hold this sin against them”

This echoes Jesus' words from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

60c. “When he had said this, he fell asleep”

This echoes the account of Jesus’ death, where Luke tells us, “Having said this, he breathed his last” (Luke 23:46).

We can be sure that Luke intended us to notice the similarities between Jesus’ death and Stephen’s death. Both were holy men. Both were unjustly executed.