

**Dying Well**  
**Acts 7:54-60**  
**January 17, 2021**

What will death be like? What will heaven be like?

Can we see spiritual reality? (Isa 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1:26-28; 2 Cor 12:2-4; Rev 1:12-16)

What can we learn from Stephen's vision of glory?

**Context of Stephen's death**

Was Stephen killed by Mob violence or court execution?

What was stoning? (Lev 24:10-23; Deut 17:2-7; Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1-4)

**Contrast Stephen and his killers**

Filled with the Spirit, filled with rage

He sees and proclaims the glory of Jesus, and they cover their ears and shout him down.

What is significant about the term Son of Man? (Daniel 7:13-14)

Why is Jesus standing?

What did Stephen say? What did it say about Jesus? (Mark 14:61-62; Luke 12:8)

He prays as they stone him. Like Jesus 'own words. (Luke 23:46)

He seeks their forgiveness as they kill him. Like Jesus 'own words. (Luke 23:34)

**Application:**

Our suffering and service for Christ matters, and God does notice.

God will use our service for his own purpose and glory.

When we suffer, we can still love and serve our enemies.

Death is gain for the believer. (Phil 1:21, 23; 2 Cor 5:6-10)

**The Sleep of Death**

“He fell asleep,” writes Luke (Acts 7:60). It is such a calming and quiet way to describe Stephen's death. It is not meant to be anything more than a picture word. Nothing is meant to be conveyed that denies consciousness after death (in the disembodied state before the future, bodily resurrection). It is merely meant to suggest that in contrast to the violence his body suffered, his soul slipped peacefully into the presence of Jesus. Death is like falling asleep, even when the body may be falling apart. You shut your eyes and you are in heaven with Jesus!

Christianity has always seen this clearly. We are, each one of us, made for life beyond the temporal. God created us to enjoy an endless life, which for those like Stephen who know God will be far richer and more joyous than anything this world could ever provide. We are never meant to treat this world as home, or live in it, or make prayers for it as though we were going to be in it forever. Jesus pictured the person who lives for the here and now as a fool. It is part of God's design that we live by our hopes, and part of the real joy of being a Christian is to have one's anticipation of heaven increase the older we get. Not many are called to heaven as Stephen was; but every one of us will die sooner or later (unless Jesus returns), and knowing what awaits us spurs us on to desire it more and more.

The Puritans taught us to see this life as a gymnasium preparing us for heaven. This is why saintly John Bunyan, who experienced twelve years in prison for his faith, away from his beloved wife and blind daughter, wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan saw that our lives are a journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. In the days when his readers knew only rudimentary medicine and surgery, and knew nothing of social security or insurance, life was hard and unforgiving. More than half the population died in infancy, and disease caught up with most of the rest, sooner or later. They would have been lost had they not kept their eyes on heaven and believed themselves pilgrims traveling home to a better place.

~Thomas, D. W. H. (2011). *Acts*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (pp. 211–212). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.