

*The Adopted Life*

Fifth Sunday of Easter ~ 05.22.2011

## **When the Heavens Open**

When Stephen looked up and saw “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7.56), what was he seeing? Was he on a video teleconference call with a faraway deity? Or was this an episode of “The Ghost Whisperer,” where he saw himself surrounded by apparitions made of a ghostly immaterial substance that could be seen only by special eyes? I dislike both of these dualist interpretations. So I beg your indulgence while I exercise my theological imagination to think through this event in a fresh way:

N.T. Wright says: “Heaven and earth in biblical cosmology are not two different locations within the same continuum of space or matter. They are two different dimensions of God’s good creation.... Heaven relates to earth tangentially so that the one who is in heaven can be present simultaneously anywhere and everywhere on earth: the ascension therefore means that Jesus is available, accessible, without people having to travel to a particular spot on the earth to find him.... God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together forever” (*Surprised by Hope*).

The Bible indicates several instances of travel between these two “dimensions” (Gen 5.24; 28.12; 2 Kings 2.11; 6.17; Ezek 3.12, 8.3; etc), but I think in Stephen’s vision we are seeing something new. The connections between heaven and earth are no longer sporadic or temporary, because in Jesus, the two space-times have been permanently joined together. I wonder if Stephen was seeing the new shape of reality, a new cosmos re-formed by the Incarnation—the beginning stages of the full integration of heaven and earth. This vision inspires hope for the day when the two dimensions will be so interwoven that all will see what Stephen saw, and death itself will be unable to survive.

~ *John Stonecypher*