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## **Acts chapter 6**

### **New International Version**

**1** In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'

**5** This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

**7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

**8** Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia--who began to argue with Stephen.

## Acts chapter 7

### New International Version

**1** Then the high priest asked Stephen, 'Are these charges true?'

**2** To this he replied: 'Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.

**51** You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! **52** Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- **53** you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.'

**54** When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. **55** But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

**56** Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'

**57** At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, **58** dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

**59** While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'

**60** Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 6:1, NIV: In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Context Summary

Acts 6:1–7 sees the early church in Jerusalem solve a problem caused by their rapid growth. The church is comprised of Jews from traditionally Jewish lands as well as nations to the east and Roman territories around the Mediterranean. As

more people follow Jesus, those who are able donate to the apostles to care for those in need. Greek-speaking widows are less familiar to the local believers, and so they are not getting the same amount of support as those who speak Aramaic. Instead of taking on one more responsibility, the apostles commission seven men to manage the donations. One of these men is Stephen.

### **What does Acts 6:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

The church in Jerusalem is still growing. Some of the members are from Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Some are from as far away as Rome to the west and Mesopotamia to the east. Those who are from the west are called "Hellenists." They're familiar with Greek and Roman culture and speak Greek instead of Aramaic. Since the day of Pentecost, the Jesus-followers have supported the visitors (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37). The Aramaic-speaking locals, however, are overlooking the Greek-speaking widows. The ESV says, "daily distribution." The original Greek refers to the presentation of a gift; in that context, it means service in the preparation for a social event. Some of the widows are being left out of charitable giving, due to a low-level problem with supervision. Acts 6:2 confirms this interpretation where it says it is not wise for the apostles to turn away from their calling to "serve tables." Their point is not that such service is beneath them, but that they need support in order to fulfill their spiritual calling.

The passage doesn't give very much information about the widows. It was custom at the time for elderly Jews who were not from Judea to come to Jerusalem so they could die in the land of their people. Enough foreign-born Jews came to Jerusalem that geographic regions had their own synagogues (Acts 6:9). If the widows weren't fluent in Aramaic, had broken from their countrymen's synagogue, and were the least bit homebound, the apostles wouldn't necessarily think to check on them. At this point in time, after all, twelve men were leading the spiritual development of thousands and the evangelism of tens of thousands.

The Hellenists' action is described using the Greek root word *goggysmos*. The modern English word "complaint" makes this sound more open and formal than the original. This is not a formal, open protest made to the apostles. Those who are unhappy are grumbling, or murmuring—they're complaining and criticizing without making their comments public. That's a particularly insidious type of rebellion that can cause divisiveness in any group (Philippians 2:14–15). Until

this point, Luke records that the church has been "together," and "of one heart and soul" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). It would be better for the Hellenists to present their concerns to the apostles. It would be better to trust that leadership will resolve the issue. In fact, we all should do this, in our church and with God.

Acts 6:2, NIV: So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

### **What does Acts 6:2 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Greek-speaking Jesus-followers in Jerusalem are upset. They feel the church is not providing equal distribution of charity for some Greek-speaking widows, compared to Aramaic-speaking widows. It is understandable that the apostles would not notice; at this point, the church numbers in the thousands and the apostles seek to evangelize tens of thousands. This is exactly what Jesus tasked them to do: to spread His story (Acts 1:8). So far, they've been faithful to the thousands in the church as well as the Jews who gather in the temple court (Acts 4:4, 33). Jesus did not task them with meeting the new disciples' physical requirements; that comes organically with the Holy Spirit's prompting.

This passage is the nascent version of 1 Corinthians 12. The apostles recognize that although every Jesus-follower has the same Holy Spirit dwelling within them, the Spirit empowers different people for different tasks. Jesus told the apostles to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They can't do that if they are also personally responsible for the physical well-being of all the widows in the church. The apostles are not claiming that some service is beneath them (John 13:14–16), or that they are too important for such work. They rightly understand that they cannot accomplish their spiritual calling *and* meet those other needs, as well.

This establishes the first of two significant principles in the passage. First, pastors cannot do *everything* in the church. They have just as few hours in their days as anyone else; God never intended or commanded spiritual leaders to do *everything* without help. Second, as inferred in Acts 6:3, everyone in the church has a role to fill. Waiting on tables is not a dishonorable job. It is a necessary one. But it does not belong to the apostles, it belongs to other members of the

church. As Paul will later say, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Corinthians 12:14). If the apostles were to take on every task of the church, they would not be honoring the other Jesus-followers.

The church is where every believer serves and leads; it is not where Christians go to be spoon-fed by a holy few. There are times where "need" outweighs "calling." There's nothing inappropriate about a pastor picking up a shovel, a broom, or a stack of diapers. But there is something inappropriate about pastors being *forced* to set their primary calling aside to do such things while other church members are idle.

Acts 6:3, NIV: Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

### **What does Acts 6:3 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

Although the passage doesn't use the word, this is the establishment of the office of "deacon" in the church. *Diakonia*, the Greek root word from which "ministry" comes, specifically refers to the role of the deacons who collect and disperse resources (Acts 6:1–6); it is also used in the more general sense (Acts 20:24). It means to serve others by command of someone else. A small leadership staff cannot fill every need in a church. Forcing infinite responsibility on them is disrespectful to non-staff who have gifts of their own.

Throughout the history of Christianity, God has used conflict to refine belief and understanding. Until this time, the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of the Jesus-followers to take care of each other's practical needs (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37). There is nothing wrong with this system of management if the group is small and the members diligent and attentive. There are now *thousands* of Jesus-followers in Jerusalem, and the benevolent mob can't keep track of everyone.

The church leadership needs some structure. Not only are the apostles willing to hand over responsibility for managing money and assets, they're willing to let others choose the candidates who will do so. This delegation of duties is consistent with the Old Testament. Moses wisely agreed to place the Israelites under the command of a hierarchy of leaders (Exodus 18:19–23). And Nehemiah

established quartermasters to make sure the Levites received their due (Nehemiah 13:13).

The leadership structure of the church is different than that in the Old Testament, however. God set aside the people of the tribe of Levi to serve Him. He designated that priests would come from the line of Aaron. The other Levite families had specific duties regarding the tabernacle (Numbers 3:21–37). Their tasks were based on what family they belonged to. In the church, however, leadership isn't based on family but character. First Timothy 3:8–13 lays out the qualifications for deacons, most of which deal with integrity. While deacons need to be spiritually mature, as any church leader, the apostles especially need to know they will handle the finances honestly and responsibly.

Acts 6:4, NIV: and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'

### **What does Acts 6:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

The apostles have realized that not all the Jesus-followers are receiving the support they need. In this case, the loose, generous system of donations is overlooking the Greek-speaking widows (Acts 6:1). Jesus has given the apostles their task: to spread His message. They have faithfully done so, to the point that the church in Jerusalem includes thousands of Jews and proselytes. That is their job, so they willingly pass on the administration of the donations to others who are qualified (Acts 6:2–3).

Ironically, "ministry" is from the Greek root word *diakonia*, the same word from which we get our term "deacon." The seven men selected are to be *deacons* of the resources of the church and the provision of the people (Acts 6:5); the apostles are to be *deacons* of the Word. This is not a sign that pastors are somehow "above" less prestigious tasks (John 13:14–16). It is a sign that those other than pastors ought to support their leaders by taking on what tasks they can.

The apostles are not taking the easy road. The Sanhedrin has recently beat them because they preach in Jesus' name (Acts 5:40). Tradition says that all but one will die a martyr's death because they spread Jesus' word. Before that happens, however, the apostles need to make sure they equip the Jesus-followers as

thoroughly as possible (Acts 2:42). Twelve apostles cannot reach everyone in the Roman Empire and all the people in the nations to the east. But they can train people who can.

The apostles' emphasis on prayer and the ministry of the Word and their willingness to delegate responsibilities should give us pause about the problems we expect our pastors and elders to solve. They should have the time to determine the major theological issues and lead the church in the direction the Holy Spirit leads. We should be willing to find solutions for the smaller problems and, with their agreement, get them done.

Acts 6:5, NIV: This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

### **What does Acts 6:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Faced with the task of discipling a church of thousands and evangelizing a city of tens of thousands, the apostles delegate the financial and practical side of ministry (Acts 6:1–2). The Jesus-followers have nominated seven men for the new office of deacon (Acts 6:3–4). The initial issue is that the Greek-speaking widows are not receiving daily meals. It makes sense that, judging by their names, six of the new deacons are Hellenist Jews, while the seventh is a Gentile proselyte. Two of the deacons have a significant role in the book of Acts.

The most famous of the deacons, Stephen, is the first recorded person to lose his life in service to Jesus (Acts 7). His death signals an open season of persecution on Jesus-followers. The Sanhedrin quickly commissions a Pharisee named Saul to track down believers and bring them to Jerusalem for trial (Acts 8:1–3; 9:1–2). The Jesus-followers flee Jerusalem, but they bring Jesus' message with them, spreading the gospel to Jews in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch.

Philip is neither the disciple Philip nor Herod Antipas' brother (Matthew 10:3; 14:3). He is the most-often mentioned of the deacons. After Saul persecutes and scatters the church (Acts 8:1–3), Philip becomes the first recorded to preach in Samaria (Acts 8:4–6, 12), and he participates in converting an Ethiopian official

in Judea (Acts 8:26–40). He moves up the coastline to Caesarea Maritima where he and his four prophetess daughters meet Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles is on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 21:8–9).

The Bible doesn't give any more information on the others. Tradition says Prochorus becomes the apostle John's attendant. As a proselyte, Nicolaus is a Gentile who has fully converted to Judaism, including undergoing circumcision.

The Holy Spirit is slowly expanding what the Jewish Jesus-followers understand about the kingdom of God. Here, the apostles give Hellenist Jews leadership positions. Soon, Samaritans will come to follow Jesus (Acts 8:4–8). Philip will witness the conversion of a God-fearing Ethiopian (Acts 8:26–40). The church's most dangerous enemy will come to Christ (Acts 9:1–19). And then Peter will realize that Gentiles are welcome in God's kingdom (Acts 10). When God wants big changes in us, sometimes He lets them come in small steps.

Acts 6:6, NIV: They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

### **What does Acts 6:6 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

When presented with a problem by the culturally Greek members of the church, the Aramaic-speaking apostles empowered the church to solve it (Acts 6:1–2). The church chooses men who have a good reputation, wisdom, and an abundance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3). Although the apostles will have to rely on "prayer and...the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4) regarding the integration of Gentiles into a Jewish-based religion later (Acts 11:1–18), the presence of the Holy Spirit and the character of a person should always be more important than cultural similarities.

The wording here resembles passages where Jesus-followers lay money and resources before the apostles (Acts 4:34–37). The congregation is dedicating these seven men to minister as the apostles see fit. The apostles turn around and give the men authority to decide how they will address the problem. The apostles can do this because of their dedication to prayer and because they know the character of the men and their relationship with the Holy Spirit.

The Bible speaks of laying hands on another often. Jesus laid His hands on the children (Matthew 19:13). Jairus begged Jesus to lay hands on his dying daughter (Mark 5:23). In Jesus' ministry, laying on of hands is related to blessing and healing. In the church, some receive the Holy Spirit when an apostle lays his hands on them (Acts 8:16–19; 9:17–18; 19:5–6), but most receive the Holy Spirit without the ritual. Jesus did not commission the apostles by laying His hands on them, but the early church does ordain those set aside for a special ministry with the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14). It appears the laying on of hands is a cultural practice, as the Bible describes it but doesn't command it.

Acts 6:7, NIV: So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

### **What does Acts 6:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

As Scripture describes Jesus' ministry, "disciple" sometimes means any of Jesus' followers, such as Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Lazarus, and Justus and Matthias, although it usually refers to the Twelve. Since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the word "disciple" has ceased to mean the Twelve and changed to mean all the Jesus-followers. "The Twelve" are called the apostles. A disciple is someone who repents, accepts Jesus as their Savior, and "devote[s] themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). This group now includes thousands of people (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14). The addition of priests, however, is extraordinary.

The Sanhedrin, comprised of priests, elders, and scribes, arrested Peter and John because the Sadducee contingent didn't like that they preached the resurrection from the dead. Peter and John firmly explained they would not stop preaching in Jesus' name (Acts 4:1–22).

Then the jealous Sanhedrin arrested many if not all the apostles. God sent an angel to let them escape, and they returned to the temple to preach that Jesus had risen from the grave. The temple guards escorted—rather than dragged—the apostles back to the Sanhedrin. The apostles went peacefully and, again, said they would not follow the Sanhedrin's restrictions on their preaching. The Sanhedrin beat them and released them, and the apostles rejoiced that they "were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:17–42).

Now, some of the priests, many of whom probably witnessed these two trials, come to a saving faith in Christ. Maybe they are convicted of what they did to Jesus. But maybe they see the confidence and freedom of Peter and the others who had fled when Jesus was arrested. Our faithfulness to Jesus can be a strong beacon to others, even if we've failed Him in the past.

"Word" is from the Greek root word *logos* which means an idea, a doctrine, and/or a message. John 1:1 identifies Jesus as the Word of God. Here, before the church has widely spread what becomes the New Testament books, the "word of God" does not yet have the meaning of Scripture. It does mean the total message God means to give mankind. This includes that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Savior, that He rose after His death, and that He is the core of salvation.

Acts 6:8, NIV: Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

### **What does Acts 6:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

We don't know a lot about Stephen; Scripture does not mention him beyond the context of his story in Acts 6–7. He is a Hellenist Jewish-Christian, meaning he is Jewish, but is not from Jerusalem; he was raised elsewhere in the Roman Empire where the primary language was Greek instead of Aramaic. He is "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3) and other church members choose him to be one of the first deacons (Acts 6:5). However long he has been a Jesus-follower, he has used his time to good effect; other Hellenist Jews cannot match his wisdom, in large part because he is so submissive to the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10).

"Wonder" is from the Greek root word *teras*, and "signs" is from the root word *semeion*. A wonder is a miracle that reveals a hidden truth, while a sign identifies the miracle-worker as God's messenger. We don't know why the men Stephen is debating refuse to accept the authority represented in the miracles he performs. The reason they give is that Stephen wants to see the temple destroyed. Stephen will succinctly explain why this is a non-issue with a quick recitation of Israel's history (Acts 7:1–50).

The God-endowed protection that God has given the early church in Jerusalem is eroding. The Jewish leadership has arrested and beaten the apostles (Acts 5:17–42). Jesus trained the apostles to expect persecution (John 15:18–20), and it's reasonable to assume the apostles passed on this warning to the new Christians. God knows Stephen's opponents will grow into a mob that will kill him (Acts 7:54–60), but He will effectively use Stephen's sacrifice. The coming persecution will spread Jesus' followers and His gospel message all over the known world.

Acts 6:9, NIV: Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia--who began to argue with Stephen.

### **What does Acts 6:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

a Hellenist: not raised in Judea but elsewhere in the Roman Empire, and his primary language is likely Greek, not Aramaic. The synagogues listed are also comprised of Greek-speaking Jews.

"Freedmen" is a blanket name for former slaves and their descendants. In the first century BC, Roman general Pompey captured some Jews, enslaved them, and took them to Rome. The Jewish slaves followed their religion so strictly, including refusing to work on the Sabbath and adhering to kosher law, they were useless as slaves, so Pompey released them. The Freedmen are descendants of these and other former slaves.

The Cyrenians are from Cyrene in modern-day Libya, and the Alexandrians are from Alexandria in Egypt. At the time described in this passage, both cities have large populations of Jews.

Cilicia is a province on the southeast coast of modern-day Asia Minor. Tarsus, where Paul comes from, is in Cilicia. "Asia," in this context, does not mean the eastern continent. In Stephen's era, the term Asia referred to a province in the western part of modern-day Asia Minor; this includes Troas, Ephesus, Colossae, and the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2–3. Paul will spend two to three years in Ephesus (Acts 19). It is the Jews from Asia who eventually get him arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27).

A synagogue is a place for Jews to meet, read Scripture, and discuss what they read. Although Moses gave the Israelites God's law, the kings often neglected or lost the law. In the reign of Jehoshaphat, the wise king sent officials throughout Judah to teach the people the law (2 Chronicles 17:7–9). When the exiles returned from Babylon, they had a problem. The law was in Hebrew, which very few people had learned. They natively spoke Aramaic, the trade language. So, when Ezra read the law to the people, scribes intermingled with the crowd, explaining what the words meant (Nehemiah 8:1–8). Synagogues served a similar purpose and are the model for the Christian church.

According to the Mosaic law, the men of Israel were to gather in Jerusalem for certain feasts throughout the year. Jerusalem is 1,400 miles from Rome, so Jews who did not live near Jerusalem came when they could. When they arrived, they found a group of their countrymen in an established synagogue. Some stayed in Jerusalem while others completed their business and returned home. Either way, to travel that far to worship at the temple of their people was a serious commitment and took a very devout person. It's easy to see how they would be protective of their faith and their temple.

Acts 7:2, NIV: To this he replied: 'Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.

### **What does Acts 7:2 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

Stephen is giving his defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12). He starts by addressing the crowd which includes "fathers," or the priests, scribes, and elders of the court, and "brothers," or the other Jews in the audience—particularly the Hellenist Jews who have accused him (Acts 6:8–15). In this section, he shows how God's favor is not confined by geography.

Israelite leaders recited their history to teach or remind the people of God's faithfulness throughout the ages (Joshua 24:1–13; Nehemiah 9:6–15). In this case, Stephen uses the historical account to confirm his own Jewish faith and to prove a point: the Jewish forefather, Abraham, experienced God's glory far from Judea and hundreds of years before the temple was built.

Where Stephen mentions Mesopotamia, Genesis 11:31 says Abraham started in "Ur of the Chaldeans." Ur was a city-state on the Euphrates near the Persian Gulf. The Chaldeans are a people group that in Abraham's time settled along the two rivers from the Persian Gulf up to modern-day Mosul. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean. Mesopotamia is the geographic area along the Euphrates and the Tigris, extending from the Persian Gulf, northwest to modern-day Turkey, and down along the coast of the Mediterranean. Mesopotamia is also known as the Fertile Crescent.

Abraham left Ur with his wife Sarah, his father Terah, and his nephew Lot. Lot was the son of Terah's late son Haran who was also Sarah's brother. They traveled up the Euphrates to the northern-most point where they stopped at the city of Haran. After Terah died, God called Abraham to continue his journey to Canaan (Genesis 11:27–12:1).

### Context Summary

Acts 7:51–53 reminds accusers of Stephen, the Jewish Christian deacon, that the Jews have a tradition of killing the prophets God sends to them. Stephen has been accused of blasphemy against Moses, the Mosaic law, and the temple (Acts 6:8–15). He's already established that the Jews didn't need the temple or the Law to worship God. Stephen's final jab is that this neglect is in character with a people who claimed to live under a Law they could not keep.

Acts 7:51, NIV: You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

### What does Acts 7:51 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

One of Stephen's arguments addresses the accusation that he spoke words against the Law (Acts 6:13) and that Jesus preached that Jews did not have to follow the Mosaic law (Acts 6:14). Jesus, of course, preached against the man-made oral law (Matthew 23) and deeply respected the Mosaic law (Matthew 5:17–19). But here, Stephen gets further into his argument, showing that the Jewish leaders who claim to uphold the sanctity of the Law are descendants of those who rejected God's messengers.

Circumcision was the ritual God gave Abraham to indicate that God chose Abraham to be the patriarch of His people. Abraham would have many descendants, and his people would own the land of Canaan and bless the world (Genesis 17:1–14). To be uncircumcised was to reject one's place in God's covenant. Stephen has already mentioned that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons were circumcised, taking their place in the Abrahamic covenant. In the same way, the men of Stephen's audience have been circumcised and expect to take their place in God's promise to Abraham.

But Stephen attacks their hypocrisy. They may be circumcised physically, but neither their hearts nor their ears are attuned to God. Instead of following God's leading in their hearts through the Holy Spirit, they actively resist Him (John 16:8).

Stephen's accusers and the members of the Sanhedrin are just like their fathers. Weeks after the Israelites escaped Egypt, while Moses was on Mount Sinai getting the Law that would teach them how to be God's people, the Israelites built a golden calf and worshiped it as their rescuer (Exodus 32). Before Joshua died, he charged the Israelites to choose whom they would serve. They vowed to serve God. Joshua told them they wouldn't (Joshua 24:16–20). He was right. Before and after the account of Joshua's death, Judges 2 talks about the Israelites' disobedience. They couldn't even wait for Joshua to die. It's no wonder Stephen's audience is not faithful to the God they claim to serve.

Acts 7:52, NIV: Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—

**What does Acts 7:52 mean? [\[↑ See verse text ↑\]](#)**

Stephen is bringing his argument home. His accusers claim to defend the Mosaic law, but they don't even have the hearts to understand it. They actively resist the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51), just as their forefathers did throughout the Old Testament. Now, Stephen declares the biggest irony of all. These same forefathers, whose legacy they claim to honor, persecuted the prophets God sent them to turn their hearts back to Him. Jezebel killed many prophets (1 Kings 19:10). God sent more, warning of the Babylonian captivity, and the people

mocked them (2 Chronicles 36:15–16). Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees —Jewish religious leaders—of continuing that legacy (Luke 11:47–48), a legacy Stephen's audience continues as well.

The ironic part is that those prophets often spoke about the Messiah. It's thought that the prophet described as "sawn in two" (Hebrews 11:37) was Isaiah, one of the most prolific writers about the coming Messiah. If Stephen's audience had studied and accepted the prophets with hearts bent toward God and focused on understanding, they would have recognized that Jesus is the Messiah (Luke 24:26–27; John 5:39–40). Instead, they functionally "killed" the prophets by disregarding their words. Not only that, they had actually conspired to have Jesus crucified; they "betrayed and murdered" the Messiah, the Righteous One.

Verses 51 through 53 feel rather abrupt, compared to Stephen's prior words. It's possible that Stephen senses the crowd is getting agitated and he must cut his speech short. It's also possible he realizes he is about to become one of those whom the "sons" will persecute and kill.

Acts 7:53, NIV: you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.'

### **What does Acts 7:53 mean? [\[↑ See verse text ↑\]](#)**

This completes Stephen's defense with a strong accusation. He is charged with blasphemy against God, Moses, the Mosaic law, and the temple (Acts 6:8–15). His accusers bring him before the high priest for trial. Stephen takes them through a history lesson of Israel. He shows them that the patriarchs didn't need the temple or the Law. He demonstrates that Moses wasn't always worth following, but when he was the Israelites rebelled against Moses and his God. Stephen recounts how God didn't ask for the temple, but when He accepted and sanctified it, He proved it could not contain Him. Stephen finishes his defense by claiming that his accusers are no better than their forefathers who killed and persecuted the prophets who taught them about God and His Messiah. In fact, they had "betrayed and murdered" the Messiah.

Now, Stephen accuses his accusers and the Sanhedrin of rejecting the very Law God gave them.

Moses received the Law from God on Mount Sinai. The involvement of the angels is incidental; as God's representatives, they would have acted with His authority, so there's no contradiction if another passage says God gave Moses the Law directly. Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 2:2 confirm angels had a part. It would be like saying a friend gave you a letter when it was the postal worker who put it in your box.

The point here isn't the angels. The point is that God called the Jews apart to be dedicated to Him. In return, He promised to bless them, and bless the world through them. But they have followed the tradition started by the Israelites at the base of Mount Sinai who grew impatient of Moses and transferred their affections to a golden calf.

This is a significant moment in the history of the church. Stephen's defense is over. He has condemned the Jews of working against God. Now, the mob will lay their coats at Saul's feet and kill Stephen (Acts 7:54–60). Saul will start a systematic assault on the Jesus-followers. But his efforts will serve to spread Jesus' message all over Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Then, Saul will meet Jesus, assume the Greek form of his name (Paul), and accept the role of missionary and martyr for the Savior he once persecuted (Acts 9).

It's unknown if anyone else in the mob accepted Christ, but Stephen's sacrifice was not in vain.

### **Context Summary**

Acts 7:54–60 finishes the story of the Jesus-follower Stephen. He has been falsely accused of blasphemy against God, Moses, the Mosaic law, and the temple (Acts 6:8–15). He has used the history of the Jews to show how over the years the Jews have come to worship Moses, the Law, and the temple like idols (Acts 7:1–53). His accusers are furious, but when Stephen claims to see Jesus standing next to God, the crowd goes mad, and Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr. His death sparks a great persecution against the church, but as the Jesus-followers flee Jerusalem, they take the gospel to the world (Acts 1:8).

Acts 7:54, NIV: When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

### **What does Acts 7:54 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

Stephen has finished his defense against false accusations that he blasphemed the Mosaic law and Moses and wished to destroy the temple. The rushed tempo in Acts 7:51–53 suggests the crowd's anger has been quickly building and Stephen had to cut his speech short.

"They" is a reference to Jews from Cyrene, meaning Libya, Alexandria, meaning Egypt, and the provinces of Cilicia and Asia in modern-day Asia Minor, as well as Jews descended from freed slaves who apparently live in or are visiting Jerusalem (Acts 6:8–15). Many have traveled to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. Stephen, a Jewish Christian and one of the first deacons of the church, may be a member of the synagogue of the Freedmen; it's there that he preached the gospel of Jesus.

It's very possible that many members of his audience know little about Jesus, as Jews dwelling outside Judea didn't make it to Jerusalem for all the required feasts. The men from northern Africa and Asia Minor have made a significant time and financial commitment to get to their homeland; the members of the Freedmen synagogue may be especially reverent since if they were the first free generation, they would be the first generation allowed to worship in the temple. The message that a man they know little about is the Son of God is not something they can accept.

To "ground" or "gnash" teeth is a sign of an imminent attack (Job 16:9; Psalm 35:16; 37:12; 112:10). The Jews who came to worship at the Pentecost seven weeks after the crucifixion had a better reaction. When Peter preached to them, they "were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).

God's plan was always that once Jerusalem was sufficiently saturated with the gospel, Jesus-followers would spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. He's about to use persecution to do this.

Acts 7:55, NIV: But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

### **What does Acts 7:55 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Stephen is facing a furious mob bent on murder, but his attention is on Jesus. There is a difference between being notably "full of the Holy Spirit" and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. All Christ-followers are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17). Being truly "filled with" the Holy Spirit means a total yielding of our thoughts and actions (Ephesians 5:18). Given our fallible human nature, this filling of the Holy Spirit doesn't usually last, but it is a normal state for Stephen (Acts 6:3, 5).

One of the crimes Stephen is accused of is that he is continuing Jesus' plan to destroy the temple (Acts 6:13–14). The charge is ridiculous, since the Sanhedrin knew Jesus was talking about His own body, not the actual temple (John 2:19–22; Matthew 27:40). The greater irony, however, is that Jesus was really crucified because He prophesied what Stephen is seeing: "And Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:62). It was those words that gave the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes justification in their own minds to take Jesus to Pilate (Mark 14:63–64).

There is a slight difference, however. Jesus said He will sit at God's right hand, but Stephen sees Him standing. To stand in someone's presence is to offer one's services. It seems Jesus is letting Stephen know that He is there for him.

Acts 7:56, NIV: Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'

### **What does Acts 7:56 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Even before making his pointed speech, Stephen had already enraged his accusers. First, he argued so well that Jesus is the Messiah they couldn't defend themselves and had to resort to lying (Acts 6:10, 13–14). Then he had the

audacity to explain how the patriarchs worshiped God without a temple, the Law, or even a homeland. He explained that Moses wasn't always a good leader, and that even when he was the people didn't follow him well. Stephen rejected his accusers' idolatry of the temple, reminding them that even Solomon, who built the first temple, knew it couldn't contain God. Finally, he reminded them that throughout the ages Jews have rejected and killed God's prophets and worshiped pagan idols (Acts 7:2–53).

All of that is nothing compared to what he says now. This is not the first time the heavens have opened up to reveal God (Matthew 3:16–17). And it is not the first time Jesus has been referred to as the "son of man," as it was one of Jesus' favorite titles for Himself. It is also the title of a figure in Daniel's prophecy: the son of man would come "with the clouds of heaven." The Ancient of Days would give the son of man "dominion and glory and a kingdom" over all nations forever (Daniel 7:13–14).

There are two common confusions tied to this verse. First, how could Stephen have seen God when God told Moses that no one could see Him and live (Exodus 33:20) and even Jesus said no one can see God (John 1:18)? It is true that no one has seen God's *face*, that is, His countenance—His full glory. Being omnipotent, God the Father is well able to appear in a form that humans can see, He just doesn't do it very often.

Second, why was Jesus standing when He prophesied that He would *sit* at God's right hand (Mark 14:61–62)? It appears that the fact He is standing is a special case for Stephen's situation. It may be that Jesus is acting as Stephen's witness or advocate, or that He is prepared to serve Stephen in whatever way he needs. It could also be that "stand" just means that Jesus is in a fixed place. But just because the prophecies state Jesus would sit at God's right hand doesn't mean He can't stand, as well.

This scene, Jesus at the right hand of God, echoes Jesus' prophecy from when He was on trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:62). It was the statement that the Sanhedrin took as justification to condemn Him to death. Stephen's description seals his fate as Jesus' had His. The Sanhedrin cannot indulge such a public confession that Jesus is God.

Acts 7:57, NIV: At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

## What does Acts 7:57 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Stephen's accusers were angry that they couldn't refute his arguments that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah (Acts 6:8–15). They were furious when he defended himself, using Jewish history to show how hypocritical they were. But now, Stephen has claimed that he sees Jesus—the man who was crucified—standing at the right hand of God. This is something they cannot let go unchallenged.

One of the false accusations Stephen is charged with is that he "will change the customs that Moses delivered" to the Jews (Acts 6:14). Stephen's defense pointed out that the Jews were never good at following the Mosaic law, anyway. They much preferred worshipping foreign gods (Acts 7:39–43). Stephen's accusers are now stopping their ears. The phrase is also used in Zechariah 7:11. It literally means "made their ears too heavy to hear." In Zechariah 7, God is accusing the Jews of purposefully ignoring the parts of the Law aimed at protecting the vulnerable. But God also says, "They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets" (Zechariah 7:12). God responds to such resistance by allowing it to continue: "Make the heart of the people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isaiah 6:10).

The last part of Stephen's defense is that the Jews would rather murder God's prophets than listen to them (Acts 7:52), a conviction also held by Jesus (Luke 11:47). Stephen's accusers are about to prove his point.

Acts 7:58, NIV: dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

## What does Acts 7:58 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

A Jewish Christian and deacon, Stephen, has angered other Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem by showing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. His arguments were so unimpeachable that the men resorted to falsely accusing him of blasphemy against the Mosaic law and the temple (Acts 6:8–15). The specifics are hard to determine, but it's believed that under Roman law, the Jews were not allowed to execute someone unless they threatened a religious structure, which was a capital offense anywhere (John 18:31). The Sanhedrin was unable to convincingly convict Jesus of such a charge (Mark 14:55–59), so they couldn't kill Him outright. Plus, Jesus was so popular they didn't want His blood on their hands (Mark 14:1–2), so they took him to Pilate, knowing that if the Roman government killed this teacher from Galilee, the attention would be off them.

So why does the mob feel free to kill Stephen? Although he has been performing miracles and signs (Acts 6:8), he's still relatively unknown, and he certainly isn't the leader of the movement, so he has no crowd of defenders. And his accusers are angry beyond reason. Not only has he successfully shown that the Jews are God's people without the Law or the temple, he has claimed to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:57). If Stephen is speaking falsely, this is the grossest blasphemy possible: to say that a man shares God's glory. And because they've rejected Stephen's message of the gospel, the accusers can't accept Stephen might be telling the truth.

Although their execution of Stephen is against Roman law, although Stephen hasn't been officially convicted, and although the charges are false, the mob is at least performing the execution according to Mosaic law. According to Leviticus 24:10–23, if someone blasphemes against God they should be taken outside of the city and the witnesses should stone him.

Jesus prophesied what is happening to Stephen. He told the disciples that the world would treat them the same way they treated Him. Jesus was almost stoned twice (John 8:59; 10:31) and was executed for the same reason as Stephen: for claiming Jesus is God.

But Jesus did not tell His disciples about the "young man" who stands with the mob's coats at Stephen's feet (Acts 22:20). He is a Jew who grew up in Tarsus, on the south-facing eastern coast of modern-day Asia Minor. He has been trained by one of the most revered Pharisees (Acts 22:3) and there is no one more

zealous for the Law. Soon, he will persecute the Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 8:3). When they flee, he will get permission to chase them, even to Damascus, two hundred miles away. There he will meet Jesus. After years of growth, he will start to use the Greek version of his name—Paul—and be a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 9).

Acts 7:59, NIV: While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'

### **What does Acts 7:59 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

The process of stoning is more involved than simply throwing rocks. According to the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 6.1–4, the officials take the person out of the court, ask for defensive testimony, then ask the person to acknowledge his crime and that he deserves the punishment. The convict is thrown into a lower area off a cliff twice the height of a man, so that he falls face up. If he lands face down, he is flipped over; if he dies from the fall, the execution is over. If he doesn't die from the fall, a witness slams a large stone into his heart. If this doesn't kill him, the crowd throws stones on him until he is dead. So, it's likely Stephen is saying these words as they are walking him to the place of stoning, not while they are throwing rocks at him.

It's not known how long Stephen has been in Jerusalem, or if he was present at Jesus' crucifixion, but he's surely heard the stories. And so he knows that as Jesus breathed His last, He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Stephen has just seen Jesus, standing at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 7:55). As painful as his circumstances are, he has full assurance that Jesus is waiting for him. He doesn't fear dying, because he knows where he's going (Matthew 10:28).

Very few of us today will see Jesus on earth, let alone see Him next to God as the skies open up. But if we trust Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins, if we willingly accept Him as our Lord and Savior, we can have the same ending as Stephen: our souls in Christ's hands where we will never be taken away (John 10:28).

Acts 7:60, NIV: Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep.

### **What does Acts 7:60 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

As Stephen is stoned, he paraphrases Jesus' words from the cross (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59). As Jesus hanged on the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). As Stephen dies, he echoes the sentiment. It's not exactly clear what effect this has on God's interaction with Stephen's murderers. It doesn't mean they are saved, because salvation only comes through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–9). But Stephen, at least, dies with no feeling of ill will.

In the New Testament, to "fall asleep" is a euphemism for dying (Matthew 9:24; Acts 13:36; 2 Peter 3:4). It reflects the fact that for the believer, death is not permanent. We will rise again, receive new bodies, and live for eternity with God (1 Corinthians 15:1–58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

Stephen's death is a tragedy and a crime, and what happens next is more so. Saul, the young man watching the mob's coats (Acts 7:58) will do everything in his power to destroy the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1–2). He will arrest believers, try to get them to blaspheme, and vote for their executions (Acts 26:10–11). But God works good out of Saul's sadism. As the Christians flee Jerusalem, they take the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Philip goes north to Samaria where the first group of non-Jews accept Christ (Acts 8:4–8), then south where an Ethiopian court official is saved (Acts 8:26–40). Some of the believers in Jerusalem are from Cyprus and Cyrene. These second-generation Jesus-followers take the gospel to Antioch, near modern-day Antakya, Turkey, where Barnabas will find a thriving church (Acts 11:19–24).

After Saul meets Jesus and repents from his sins against the church and Christ, he will meet Barnabas in Antioch where they will make their headquarters (Acts 11:25–26). And it is in Antioch where Jesus-followers are first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Stephen's death is an illustration of a cryptic comment Paul will make several years later. He will write to the church in Colossae, "Now I rejoice in my

sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Colossians 1:24). Obviously, there is nothing we can do or experience that will add to Jesus' sacrifice, and His sacrifice is fully sufficient for our salvation. Paul was saying that suffering is necessary to spread the gospel (Colossians 1:25–29). May we remember this as we suffer, whether with slight ridicule or by martyrdom. Jesus told the disciples that the world hates Him and will hate His followers (John 15:18–25). But God will redeem the hate we experience and use it for something good (Romans 8:28–30).

## **Psalm chapter 146**

### **New International Version**

**1** Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul. **2** I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. **3** Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. **4** When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. **5** Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God. **6** He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- he remains faithful forever. **7** He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, **8** the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. **9** The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. **10** The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

## **1 Peter chapter 2**

### **New International Version**

**1** Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. **2** Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by

it you may grow up in your salvation, **3** now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

**4** As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him-- **5** you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

**6** For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'

**7** Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,'

**8** and, 'A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.

**9** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:2, NIV: Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

### Context Summary

1 Peter 2:1–12 describes the spiritual house God is building. Jesus is the perfect foundation stone God has chosen for the house. Those who trust in Him are also living stones used to build the house. In addition, we individually serve as both the priests and the spiritual sacrifices, our lives offered to the builder. Thus we must live good lives, as strangers in the world preparing to go home to be with our Father, engaged in battle against our desire to sin.

**What does 1 Peter 2:2 mean? [\[↑ See verse text ↑\]](#)**

Having set aside unloving attitudes and actions (1 Peter 2:1), Peter writes that we must now crave something other than our own selfish gratification. Notice that Christians are being commanded about what to want. We have to be told what to crave because this appetite doesn't always come to us naturally. This "pure

spiritual milk" is exactly what we need: the stuff that meets our deepest needs. In fact, we do not always long for it.

How do we develop this appetite? We must start drinking. Newborn infants will sometimes reject the very milk they are crying for, at first, until they get a taste of it. And then they guzzle hungrily. In Peter's metaphor here, all Christians are to crave this milk like newborns, even the mature believers. This is not to be confused with Paul's separate metaphor of milk and meat in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3. No Christian reaches the point on this side of eternity where spiritual growth is completed.

So what is this "pure spiritual milk" we need to hunger for? The word "pure" simply means undiluted or uncontaminated. The word used to describe this milk in the original Greek is *logikon*, which could also mean "rational or reasonable." More importantly, it shares a root with the word *logos*, "the word." This phrase is sometimes translated as "pure milk of the word," as in the NASB. "The word / Word of God" can refer both to His revealed word in Scripture, including the message of the gospel—and to Christ Himself, the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

So this command means we must learn to crave the undiluted word of God, as a newborn craves milk. By drinking this milk, taking in God's word, drawing close to Christ, believers will continue to grow up in our salvation. Peter has already made clear that God has secured our salvation (1 Peter 1:3–5), that we are being saved (1 Peter 1:9), and that we will receive salvation fully when Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:5). For now, taking in the "milk" of God's Word is the intended path of spiritual growth.

1 Peter 2:3, NIV: now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

### **What does 1 Peter 2:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

The previous verse includes a command from God to Christians: crave "pure spiritual milk" as a newborn baby craves milk, so you can grow up in your salvation. This verse concludes that thought by referencing Psalm 34:8. Depending on the translation, the verse either starts with the word "if" or "since." Some choose "since," assuming that Peter's readers had indeed tasted that the

Lord is good. Still, the word "if" encourages us to think about our answer to the question.

How have we tasted that the Lord is good? Have we received comfort and confidence in knowing that God has caused us to be born again into a living hope (1 Peter 1:3)? Have we experienced joy in believing in Him (1 Peter 1:8)? Have we found great purpose in the ability to set ourselves aside and give genuine love to each other (1 Peter 1:22)? Peter assumes those things to be true of his readers and of all Christians. Having tasted that the Lord is good should increase our appetite for Him. It should make us even hungrier for the Word of God.

Don't be confused, though. Peter is not suggesting that we "taste" the circumstances of the moment to see if the Lord is good. He has already written that his readers may be suffering greatly (1 Peter 1:6). In fact, we all suffer. We "taste" the goodness of the Lord in and through our suffering and in His promises that our suffering will end as we continue on with Him forever.

1 Peter 2:4, NIV: As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—

### **What does 1 Peter 2:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In beginning a new thought, Peter again makes an assumption about his readers and about Christians, in general. We should continually come to the Lord. Coming to the Lord—the Word of God—is a way in which we drink the "pure spiritual milk" and "taste" that He is good. And who is this Lord that we come to? In addition to being the "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3) and the "living word" (1 Peter 1:23), the Lord is now identified as the "living stone." Each of the three emphasize that Jesus was resurrected after His death on the cross.

Specifically, Peter calls Jesus the living stone rejected by men, a reference to Psalm 118:22. Peter also quoted this verse when making his defense of Jesus before the Jewish religious leaders after they arrested him for preaching the gospel. There, he specifically called out those men who had Christ crucified as the rejecters described in Psalm 118.

In this verse, Peter identifies the Lord both as the rejected one and the chosen one—rejected by Israel's official leadership, but chosen by God Himself and precious (of enormous value). As the coming verses will reveal, Christians who experience the world's rejection can be encouraged by two things: Jesus was rejected as we are and, like Him, we are also chosen by God and precious to Him.

1 Peter 2:5, NIV: you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

### **What does 1 Peter 2:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In the previous verse, Peter identified Jesus, the Lord, as *the* living stone. He is living because He was dead and now is alive. We will see in the next few verses that He is called the stone because He is the cornerstone of the house of God. Now Peter includes believers in the metaphor. Like Jesus, Christians are living. We once were dead spiritually, but have been made alive by God's grace through our faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). We may die physically, but our resurrection is already secured by God's promise (1 Peter 1:3–5).

Christians are stones, as well, set aside for a specific project. God is currently building us into a spiritual house, a dwelling place for Himself. In this new temple—made out of the people of God—each of us also serve as priests.

Under the Old Testament Law, of course, the people would come to the temple where the priests would represent them to God. Now, Peter writes, God's people in Christ *are* the temple. We are also the priests. All of the barriers between God and us have been removed. We come to our loving Father boldly, needing no other mediator but Jesus Himself (Hebrews 4:16).

Also under the Law, the people would have brought sacrifices to the temple where the priests would have killed the animals and offered them to God on behalf of the people. Now, in Christ, the people are the temple; we are the priests; and we are also the sacrifices offered to God.

However, as Paul writes in Romans 12:1, we are living sacrifices. With our sin already forgiven through Jesus' death, no more death or blood is required. Instead, we offer our living bodies—every part of ourselves—as acceptable spiritual sacrifices to be used by God for His purposes.

1 Peter 2:6, NIV: For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'

### **What does 1 Peter 2:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Peter supports the points he has made in the previous verses by referencing Isaiah 28:16. Peter affirms that Jesus is the one Isaiah pointed to, the cornerstone of the building God is completing at this very moment. The cornerstone served as the basis for the foundation of a structure. Its size, placement, and solidity were crucial if the building was to stand. A good builder would invest much time and energy in choosing and shaping the perfect cornerstone.

In this spiritual house, Christ is that cornerstone. This building will not fall. Those who trust or believe in Jesus will be vindicated for their faith. This is more than simply proving that believers were not foolish for trusting in Christ. It's also that Christians can be confident that God will not shame us in judgement. In Christ, a Christian's sins are covered, and our purpose is clear. We are part of the house built by God, the house that will never fall.

1 Peter 2:7, NIV: Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,'

### **What does 1 Peter 2:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In the previous verse, Peter continued a metaphor about God building a house. Jesus is the cornerstone—or key foundation stone—of that house, chosen and greatly valued by God. Those who trust in Him, Christ, will never be shamed or judged as guilty by God. Now in verse 7, Peter states the positive: believing in

the cornerstone is an honor for Christians. Jesus is of precious value to God. As believers, He becomes our precious value, as well. Through faith, we share in His honor.

But for those who do not believe in Christ, who do not place their faith in Him, the cornerstone serves a very different purpose. Peter references Psalm 118:22 and applies it to Christ. The builders rejected the cornerstone that God chose. Those once responsible for the house of God, in Peter's metaphor, are the Jewish religious leaders—the same ones who officially rejected Jesus on behalf of Israel. Jesus Himself quoted the same verse when talking to those religious leaders in Matthew 21:42–46.

1 Peter 2:8, NIV: and, 'A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.

### **What does 1 Peter 2:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In verse 8, Peter concludes a thought begun in the previous two verses. In this metaphor of building a house, Jesus is the key foundation stone or "cornerstone." God placed enormous value on Jesus and chose Him to be the cornerstone. Those who believe in Christ, then, won't ever be put to shame (1 Peter 2:6). Jesus is of precious value to us, as well, and by believing in Him we share the honor He receives from the Father.

Those who do not believe in Christ, though, experience Him as a stone in a very different way. In the previous verse, Peter echoes Jesus' own words to the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus also quoted Psalm 118:22, applying it to Himself, describing those leaders as the builders who rejected the stone that God had chosen (Matthew 21:42–26).

Now, Peter references Isaiah 8:14. Isaiah described the Lord as a rock of stumbling for Israel. Peter writes that Jesus, the cornerstone, is exactly the stumbling rock Isaiah was talking about. All who reject Jesus, who refuse to place their faith in Him, will stumble over Him. Why do they stumble over Jesus? What does it mean that they disobey the word? "The word," as Peter has been describing it so far, appears to refer to the message of the gospel. As Paul stated

that message, to someone who asked, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

To disobey the word, then, means to refuse to believe in Jesus. Those who reject Christ as the path to God will stumble over Him. He is either the way to God, or the obstacle that prevents one from reaching God (John 14:6). Peter adds that those who stumble because they disobey the word were destined to do so. He doesn't suggest they are not responsible for their disobedience. Simply put, the destiny of all who reject Christ is to "stumble" over Him.

1 Peter 2:9, NIV: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

### **What does 1 Peter 2:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In contrast with those who reject Christ and are destined to "stumble," Peter now describes the chosen people of God.

Peter uses language that had been used to describe God's special relationship with Israel. As Israel was, we—believers, the church—are also a chosen race. Unlike Israel, though, we are not a race in the sense of our family, ethnicity, skin color, or country of origin. We are a spiritual race, in the sense that, in Christ, we share a single spiritual Father. In that same meaning, we are a "holy nation," a specific group of people called out and set apart from all other nations.

Christians, together, are a royal priesthood. In Israel, under the Law, one tribe was given the task of serving as priests, performing the duties of mediators between God and the rest of the nation. Very few held the honor and responsibility of actually coming into God's presence. But in and through Christ, the King, all believers are priests with direct access to our Father. We need no other mediator.

Finally, God has formed this nation, this race, this priesthood to take possession of us. We are His people in a very real way. It's not just that we pledge our allegiance to Him; it's that He has taken ownership of us. We belong to Him.

Why? For one, He has made us to declare His praises. That's more than just a natural response to our Father's mercy or something we should do to be polite. Declaring God's greatness is one reason for our very existence. When we praise Him, we fulfill our purpose. He has called us out of the darkness of a meaningless life, and an eternity apart from Him, and into His wonderful, marvelous light. Because we belong to Him, we belong in His light.

1 Peter 2:10, NIV: Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **What does 1 Peter 2:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In verse 10, Peter references Hosea 2:23. This Old Testament prophet was a living symbol of God's willingness to forgive sin, and to redeem mankind. Even though Hosea's wife was constantly unfaithful, he forgave her and rescued her from a life of slavery. Like Israel, all Christians together—the church—have been changed. We have a before and an after. Before, we were not a people. We belonged to ourselves and served only our own desires. But in Christ, we have become God's people. We have belonging. We have purpose. We have a shared destiny with Him in eternity.

Before, we had not received mercy. We would have received the full penalty for our sinful choices. But through faith in Christ, we have received mercy. Our status has been permanently changed. Notice that both statements are in the present tense. We are not seeking and hoping to become God's people and receive mercy. In Christ, we are God's people. We have received mercy. The transaction is complete.

## **John chapter 14**

### **New International Version**

**1** Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. **2** My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for

you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. **4** You know the way to the place where I am going.'

**5** Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

**6** Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **7** If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

**8** Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

**9** Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **10** Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. **11** Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. **12** Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. **13** And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'

John 14:1, NIV: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.

### Context Summary

John 14:1–14 continues Jesus' discourse with the disciples at the last supper. He has recently mentioned a traitor in their midst and predicted Peter's denials. That leads Jesus to reassure these men—reminding them that He has told them the truth and has all things in hand. In this passage, Christ famously refers to Himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life." That is the sixth of seven such "I Am" statements included in John's gospel. This section includes Jesus' words, personal experience, and evidence of His miracles as reasons to maintain trust.

**What does John 14:1 mean?** [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In the last few moments, Jesus has indicated one of the disciples is a deceiver (John 13:21) and predicted Peter will deny knowing Him at all (John 13:38; Luke

22:34). This comes in the context of frequent references to His impending death (John 12:7, 23–24).

This is why Jesus takes the time to reassure the disciples directly, telling them not to be "troubled." This comes from the same Greek root word describing Jesus' spirit in verses like John 11:33 and John 12:27. Some scholars suggest a difference between being troubled in one's spirit, as opposed to being troubled in the heart. That would suggest Jesus is not commanding anyone to "be happy," but to "be brave." Whether John intended that nuance or not, much of what Jesus is about to say involves enduring hardship without losing trust. In practice, at least, this is a call for courage more than an upbeat mood.

There is also debate over the exact meaning of Jesus' statement about belief in God and belief in Himself. This might be two individual commands: "trust God *and* trust Me." Or, it might be an expression of logic: "you trust God, therefore you also trust Me." Or, even as "if you trust God, you will trust Me." Given what Jesus is about to say, a double command seems to make the most sense. Regardless, it's clear that Christ is encouraging faith in God, and in Himself, in the face of what's about to come.

John 14:2, NIV: My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

### **What does John 14:2 mean? [[↑](#) See verse text [↑](#)]**

This verse uses the term *monai*, which most literally means "dwelling places." Translations such as the KJV have rendered this as "mansions." Many have latched onto this in a very literal way, imagining that Jesus is promising physical palaces for all Christians in heaven. While that's not entirely impossible, there's a more important meaning here. Jesus says these *monai* are in His "Father's House," using the expression *tē oikia*, which can mean a physical house or a family. In this context, it seems to mean something more family-related. Christ's meaning here is more likely a reassurance that in the family of God is room for all of them, more so than a promise for a fancy house. That's more in keeping with Jesus' later comment in this verse that He's preparing "a place" using a very generic Greek term, *topon*.

Jesus' remark here is meant to continue the reassurance He began in the prior verse. Like that verse, this one contains an expression which can be translated in more than one way. Translators have rendered this phrase as a rhetorical question, a direct statement, and either included or separated the comment about a "place" into the sentence. Which of those was John's original intent is an answer deeply buried in ancient Greek grammar and vocabulary. No matter which is ultimately the case, the practical meaning is the same: Christ has not been deceptive, there is restoration at the end of a believer's life journey, and this destiny is the result of Christ's efforts.

Jesus will use the same word for "dwelling places" in John 14:23 when He speaks about coming to make His home in those who believe.

John 14:3, NIV: And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

### **What does John 14:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In prior comments, Jesus pointed out that He was about to go somewhere others could not follow (John 7:32–34). The short-term implication was that only Jesus could walk the path of sacrifice, death, resurrection, and ascension. In making those remarks, Jesus also indicated that His critics would not "find" Him (John 8:21); this is not a restriction He mentioned to His disciples (John 13:36).

In a broader sense, Jesus continues to provide reassurance to His disciples (John 14:1). In literal terms, this verse contains a vague promise to return and bring these men to be where He is. He does not indicate that anyone will travel or arrive, but that He will be the One bringing them to the destination. This is especially interesting in that Jesus will also indicate that these men know "the way to" this place. Put together, most interpreters view this as a reference to the rapture, when Christ will take believers from earth in advance of the end times. During His later prayer, Jesus will repeat this idea of believers being in the places where He is (John 17:24).

The combined effect of this encouragement is preparation to endure hardship. The disciples are about to experience several days of fear and loss (John 20:19; Mark 14:27), followed by the chaotic joy of Christ's resurrection (Mark 16:6–8).

Afterwards, and continuing to today, those who follow Christ will be subject to persecution (John 15:20). Because of what Christ has done, and the fact that those trials are expected (John 13:19; 16:4), believers can hold to a firm trust in the promises of God.

John 14:4, NIV: You know the way to the place where I am going.'

### **What does John 14:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

It's no accident that Jesus indicates the disciples know "the way to" their destination, rather than the destination itself. In the prior verse, He specifically said He would be the one to return and bring them to a prepared place (John 14:3). This idea contrasts what Christ said to His critics: that they would not find Him (John 7:32–34). Those who reject Christ cannot expect to be where He is going (John 8:21).

The natural desire of human beings is to know everything—or at least the end results—before we commit. Following instructions without knowing the exact ends takes trust. Jesus is not telling the disciples to look at some goal, and work to achieve it. Rather, He's telling them they know "how" to get where they want to be, which is enough. Thomas will express confusion in the next verse, asking Jesus how it's possible to know "the way" if they don't even know where they're going.

John 14:5, NIV: Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

### **What does John 14:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In reassuring the disciples (John 14:1), Jesus has reminded them that He has their fate in His hands. Confidence should come from knowing "the way to" where Jesus will one day take them (John 14:3–4). Here, Thomas expresses a question which makes perfect sense, at least from an earthly point of view. How can someone know "the way" when they don't know where they're going? Since

these men are not sure of where Jesus plans to go, they aren't sure they will be able to get there.

That, of course, is part of the point Jesus is making. His promise is to bring them to be where He is—ultimately, in the presence of God the Father (John 14:2, 28). This is not somewhere any person can "go," in the sense of making the journey according to their own efforts (Romans 3:20; 11:6). No amount of good deeds or effort will get them there (Titus 3:5). Rather, "the way" to be reconciled to God is not a process; it's a person (John 14:6; 2 Corinthians 4:6).

John 14:6, NIV: Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### **What does John 14:6 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

Few verses are cited as often as this Scripture. Jesus is preparing His disciples with reassurance, in advance of His arrest and death (John 14:1–4). These words also broadly encourage believers to maintain faith in the face of hardship. Confidence comes to Christians, in part, from knowledge that Jesus is preparing to take us to be with Him. Travel home is usually much less stressful than the outbound trip, since we're so much more familiar with the destination (Romans 8:18; Hebrews 12:2).

In the prior verse (John 14:5), Thomas asked a reasonable question: if we don't know where we're going, how can you say we know the way there? Christ's answer reinforces a doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, as well as denying there are "many paths" to God. Prior to the label "Christians" (Acts 11:26), faith in Jesus was often referred to as "the way" (Acts 24:14).

Thomas' question (John 14:5) assumes the normal pattern of human accomplishment: we determine an end goal and work accordingly. But salvation cannot be accomplished by good works (Titus 3:5). Our sinful natures make it impossible to behave in a way that reconciles us to God (Romans 3:20). Jesus did not tell the disciples they knew the destination—in fact, He said He would come to get them (John 14:3)—but they know "the way" there (John 14:3–4). This is true because the means of salvation is not a process, it is a person. It is

through—and only through—the person of Christ. We cannot strive to earn heaven, we can only seek to follow Christ. That is how we are meant to know God (John 14:7).

Paul memorably restates that salvation comes through a person in 2 Corinthians 4:6. Rescue from sin comes through Jesus, not rituals, or accomplishments, or personal virtue. The disciples know how to arrive where Jesus is going because they know Him—they know "the Way" because that Way is Jesus. Eventually, men like Thomas will connect this declaration to Jesus' other teachings, and fully realize the meaning of salvation by grace through faith (John 3:16; 10:10; 11:25–26; 12:44–46; Matthew 16:15–17).

Each component of this statement is given a definite article; both Greek and English refer to "the" way, "the" truth, and "the" life. There is no possibility of translating this comment as Jesus being "one way," or "a truth," or just "life." He doubles down on the idea, in fact, by emphasizing that *nobody* comes to God "except through [Christ]." Rarely does anyone object to the idea that those who believe in Christ will be saved. What offends many is the suggestion that *only those who believe in Christ* find salvation. Yet that is the clear teaching of Scripture (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5–6).

This is the sixth of seven moments in John's gospel where Jesus invokes the "I Am" terminology. This echoes God's self-identification to Moses (Exodus 3:14). The seventh, and last, "I Am" statement will come later in this same discourse (John 15:1).

John 14:7, NIV: If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

### **What does John 14:7 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

Scripture uses the concept of "knowing" in several different ways. As with the English term, the Greek word for "knowledge" implies different ideas depending on the context. Here, the context is that of relationship and intimacy. Jesus is not speaking of people who have memorized facts about God, or those who have somehow interacted with Him. He's referring to those who have a personal, deep

connection to Him. This knowledge comes through a single, exclusive means: belief in Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

As with other statements in this chapter, the Greek structure allows for subtly different meanings. That applies to both halves of this verse. One option is that Jesus is making a statement of logic: "to know Me is to know God." The other possibility is scolding: "how can you not know who I am by now?" To be fair to the disciples, many of Christ's teachings were only going to be understood once the complete picture was in view (John 13:7). These men might not entirely grasp what's being said, yet, but they know enough to express trust. Either interpretation leads to the same application: reinforcement of Jesus' claims to be God in human form (John 14:9) and the sole means of salvation (John 13:16–18).

The second statement also has many possible meanings. Jesus' expression might be immediate, indicating that at this very moment the disciples have crossed the crucial point of "knowledge" of Christ. Another is that Jesus is speaking of the future, looking ahead to when these teachings become clear (John 14:26). A third option is that Jesus is explaining the mechanics of salvation: that once a person "knows" Christ, they come to "know" God. Here again, applications are identical despite subtle questions about Greek grammar. Christ is the means by which we come to know God (2 Corinthians 4:6).

This verse continues a response to Thomas's earlier question. There, he'd asked how it was possible to know "the way" when one does not know the destination (John 14:5). In the following question, Thomas will pursue this idea of seeing God.

John 14:8, NIV: Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

### **What does John 14:8 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

After giving some dire predictions, Jesus has spoken to encourage the disciples (John 14:1–4). Thomas responded to that with a reasonable question (John 14:5), to which Jesus answered with a claim to be "the way, and the truth, and

the life" (John 14:6). As part of that response, Jesus indicated that to know Him was to know the Father (John 14:7). The last phrase in Jesus' statement referred to "seeing" God. Here, Philip latches onto that idea.

What's described here is not a moment of stupidity. Philip is not being dense—Jesus referred to "knowing" God, then switched to a comment about "seeing" God. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus took three of the disciples along to see the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–2). There, Jesus openly displayed a divine appearance. Philip was not one of those three men, so this might be his way of asking to see the same thing. Or, he might have been hoping for something like the experiences of Moses (Exodus 33:18–23) or Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–7).

Jesus will reply with a claim that is astonishingly direct: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

John 14:9, NIV: Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

### **What does John 14:9 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

After Jesus promised to come and bring the disciples to be with Him (John 14:1–4), Thomas had asked how it was possible to know "the way" there when they didn't know where "there" was (John 14:5). Christ responded by claiming to be that way: that the means to salvation was through Him, not through human effort (John 14:6). He also mentioned seeing God (John 14:7), something which Philip was eager to do (John 14:8). Philip's question might have been a request to see something like Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:1) or the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–2).

Jesus starts with a gentle scolding, something He seems to have needed to do often for His inner circle (Matthew 16:9; Mark 8:21). The question itself is probably rhetorical, like asking someone "do you have no brain?" Jesus is not actually implying that Thomas does not know Him—He's making the point that Thomas *does* know Jesus, and for that reason he should understand what's being said. This figurative way of speaking continues into the next verse, as well.

This leads to a clear, unambiguous statement: to see Christ is to see God. They are One (John 14:7, 10–11). Philip is looking for some miraculous sign, but Jesus indicates His purpose is to be the revelation of God to mankind (2 Corinthians 4:6). In context with His other comments (John 10:30; 17:5), including frequent uses of "I Am" (John 8:58), there's no doubt whatsoever that Jesus confidently claimed to be God.

John 14:10, NIV: Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

### **What does John 14:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

These two verses echo remarks Jesus once made to His critics (John 5:30–40). There, Jesus pointed to human testimony, evidence of miracles, and the written Scripture as proof that His claims were true. In response to Thomas's confusion about "seeing" God (John 14:8), Jesus remarked that to see Him is to see God. He now expands on that idea by listing reasons why others should accept the idea that Jesus is God (John 10:30).

First is the idea of God being "in" Jesus. In this context, the meaning is that of character—in other words, Jesus acts perfectly according to the will of God (John 8:18; Hebrews 1:3). Nothing Jesus says or does contradicts the idea that He is God (John 8:46; Hebrews 4:15), and His actions confirm that He is acting according to the Father's will (John 9:4). For the disciples, this ought to be an obvious point, which is why Jesus again poses a rhetorical question.

The second point Jesus makes is that of His words: what He says are the statements of God (John 7:16; 12:49–50). As with His actions, Jesus' speech only further supports that what He says is true (Mark 1:22).

The third piece of evidence are the "works" of God, by which Jesus partly means miracles (John 5:36). That idea will be expanded in the next verse. This reference to "works" also connects to the idea of other, more mundane actions. Supernatural or natural, everything Jesus does is consistent with the nature of God.

Another concept expanded in verse 11 is the scope of who ought to "believe" in Christ. In this verse, Jesus' question "Do you not believe" here is the Greek singular. His references to "believe" in the following verse are in the Greek plural, implying "you all" ought to believe.

John 14:11, NIV: Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

### **What does John 14:11 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

Philip asked to see God (John 14:8), to which Jesus responded with a claim to be God (John 14:9). Jesus then backs up this claim with three specific points—this is like His interaction with critics earlier in this gospel (John 5:30–40). Jesus specifically points to His character, His words, and His miracles (John 14:10). In the prior verse, the reference to belief was singular, aimed only at Thomas. Here, the verbs for "believe" are plural, expanding the instruction to everyone.

In this verse, Jesus repeats His reference to the character of God. Hebrews 1:3 refers to Christ as "the exact imprint of [God's] nature." That verse uses the Greek term *charaktēr*, which originally referred to a stamp or engraved mark. When Jesus says that He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him, He's implying that same relationship: they are identical (John 10:30).

Jesus also makes another reference to "works." Depending on the context, Jesus' use of this idea most often means miracles (Matthew 13:58; John 7:21). However, it can also refer to behaviors and actions in general (Matthew 5:16; 23:3). John's gospel often calls supernatural acts "signs," since they are meant to point towards belief in God (John 2:11; 6:2; 7:31). Acts of divine power are the most obvious proofs that Jesus is operating with divine approval. However, miracles are not the only acts Jesus performed by the will of God. In the next verse, He will point out that those who follow Him have the opportunity for "works" even Jesus did not perform.

John 14:12, NIV: Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

## What does John 14:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The word "works" in Greek most literally means "actions," or "deeds." Just as in English, exactly what "works" are in mind is determined by context. Jesus' list of proofs for His critics referred to "works" in the sense of divine miracles (John 5:36). His instruction to do good in the name of God implied everyday behaviors (Matthew 5:16), as did His criticism of religious hypocrites (Matthew 23:3). In the last few verses, Jesus seems to have meant both in His explanation for why the disciples ought to embrace the truth that He is God (John 14:9–11).

Full biblical context is incredibly important when attempting to interpret this verse. Some of Jesus' "works" were displays of unspeakable power, such as resurrecting the dead (John 11:43–44). Other miracles demonstrated His sovereignty over nature, including weather (Mark 4:38–40), matter (John 2:7–9), and the body (John 9:6–7). In other cases, His "works" were accurate teaching (Matthew 4:23), and righteous intervention (John 2:14–16).

Jesus' promise here is not that all who claim to be believers will be endowed with the power to raise the dead or transmute matter. Nor does Jesus mean to imply that future Christians would have widespread supernatural powers. The following verses include two crucial qualifiers: "asking" and "in My name," clearly indicating that God does not sign a blank check for miraculous power to anyone. In part, this prediction of "works" refers to the early days of the apostles, who were granted miraculous signs (Acts 3:1–6).

The idea that anyone could do "greater" works than Jesus also helps explain the context. Scripture not only associates Jesus with miracles in the Gospels, it credits Him with creation itself (John 1:1–3). In terms of power, it's logically impossible to suggest anyone could do something beyond what Jesus accomplished. The meaning, therefore, ought to be taken in some other way.

The area where Christians can exceed what Jesus did is not "quality," but "quantity." His earthly ministry lasted only about three years—as He says here, He is soon to end this phase of God's plan. Jesus preached without modern communications, or modern travel technology. In contrast, modern evangelists can spend decades preaching to hundreds of thousands of people. Missionaries can serve the furthest reaches of the globe. As of this writing, this website is

accessed by more people *every week* than lived in Jerusalem during Jesus' era. In a year, some bible-related websites speak to more people than populated the Roman Empire in the first century.

John 14:13, NIV: And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

### **What does John 14:13 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Jesus makes a promise in verses 13 and 14 which is routinely abused by well-meaning believers, ignorant critics, and cynical abusers. Key to understanding this statement is the context of Jesus' other comments about prayer and the will of God. It's also crucial to note the actual words stated, and not the mutations seen in pop culture. These remarks come in the middle of reassurances given to the disciples (John 14:1–11). They are especially tied to the comment Jesus made about His followers doing "greater" works that He did (John 14:12).

The cornerstone of interpreting this verse is the qualifier Jesus provides: that requests must be made "in my name." This implies someone who is acting according to the will and authority of someone else. A cliché from old movies involves police officers shouting "Stop, in the name of the law!" The implication is they are speaking with the approval of a greater power. When a foreign ambassador says, "I agree to these terms in the name of the king," it means his ruler has given him the authority to make such a bargain.

On the other hand, people would probably laugh if a police officer said, "buy me coffee, in the name of the law!" Merely using that phrase does not guarantee the person to get whatever they want. They can only use that authority—and expect results—when they act according to the will of the law. And the law does not demand that random people purchase food for the officer. Anyone who says differently is either sadly mistaken, or an abusive fraud.

In exactly that sense, Jesus does not say, "I will give you anything you ask for." Nor does He say, "as long as you include the magic words 'in Jesus' name,' I will grant your request." Christ promises He will do anything that is asked "in my name." That implies that the person is asking something consistent with the will

and nature of Christ. This, in turn, means such a request is consistent with the will and nature of God (John 14:10).

Likewise, Jesus notes the purpose for this promise, which is to glorify God. That also implies that requests which dishonor Him, or defy His will, are not expected to be granted. The following verse adds critical context to the situation: those who love God obey God (John 14:15). It stands to reason that those who love God will seek to ask according to His will, not in defiance of it.

Among the worst diseases infecting the church are those who preach God as a genie or wish-granting robot. Christ promises to meet our needs, and to grant requests that are legitimately "in His name." That does not mean we can redefine what we want as if it was something we need. Nor does it mean Christ vows to do as we tell Him, or as we see fit.

John 14:14, NIV: You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

### **What does John 14:14 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

This is a concise summary of the prior verse (John 14:13). Despite being widely misinterpreted, Jesus does not give a blanket promise to do whatever we want, whenever we want it. The context is reassurance to the disciples (John 14:1–11), and encouragement to hold fast in the face of hardship. It's also tied to Christ's promise that those who follow Him have opportunity to do "greater" works (John 14:12).

A key condition here is asking "in [His] name." To act "in the name of" someone means to invoke their authority and their will, rather than your own. An ambassador who offers an agreement "in the name of the king" is enacting the decision of that king. A police officer who says, "stop, in the name of the law!" is—or should be—acting out the will of the government, not their own opinions.

To pray "in Jesus' name" is not evoking a magical spell, as if the words themselves have power. It is possible to use that phrase and not, in fact, be praying "in the name" of Christ. This is just the same as a police officer who demands a bribe can't do so "in the name of the law." Those who refuse to offer a

bribe can't be legitimately arrested. Anything we ask for in prayer must be according to the character of God, and in the will of God, if it is to be granted.

This condition connects to the statement Jesus makes in the next verse: that those who claim to follow God prove it by their actions (John 14:15).