

FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

Christ died for all people.

I would like to prove this from the Bible.

The Bible quotations in this English edition are identified by their Scripture references. Where the original document quotes a passage at length, the English wording below is a faithful rendering of the meaning of the passage rather than a reproduction of the copyrighted NKJV text. The references are intended to allow the reader to consult the NKJV.

Genesis

“And in your Seed (Christ) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Genesis 22:18; see also Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14; Psalm 2:7–8; Psalm 22:28–30; Psalm 72:17; Zechariah 8:23, etc., where God makes similar promises).

God promises Abraham that all nations will be blessed in Christ: the Jewish people and all non-Jewish, Gentile nations. He does not speak about certain people from every nation, but about all nations, and therefore about all people from all nations. God does not yet explain here how all nations will be blessed in Christ, but we know that this happened through Christ’s death and resurrection. He died on the cross for the sins of all people from all nations, rose again, and in this way blessed them.

Paul says this in Galatians 3:13–14: Christ redeemed us (the Jews) from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, and so that we (the Jews) might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Leviticus

In Leviticus it can already be seen that the promise to Abraham applies to one of all the nations, namely the nation of Israel.

On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest of the people of Israel made atonement for the sins of the whole nation (Leviticus 16:16–17). He made atonement for the sanctuary because of the uncleanness and transgressions of the Israelites, and for the tabernacle among them. No one else was to be in the tabernacle while he entered the sanctuary to make atonement until he came out. Thus he made atonement for himself, his household, and the whole assembly of Israel (Hebrew: qahel = assembly, gathering, company)—that is, the whole nation of Israel.

The high priest did this with the blood of animals, and that blood pointed to the blood of Christ. Christ’s blood therefore also accomplished atonement for the sins of the whole people of Israel (Hebrews 9:11–12).

Isaiah

Christ was therefore not mistreated and killed for His own iniquities, but for the iniquities of the whole people of Israel, of all the Jews. He took upon Himself and bore the iniquities of all Jews.

Thus the following verses in Isaiah also say this (Isaiah 53:6–8): We (Jews) all went astray like sheep; we (Jews) each turned to his own way. But the LORD laid upon Him the iniquity of us all (the iniquity of all Jews). When payment was demanded, He was oppressed, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and, like a sheep silent before its shearers, He did not open His mouth.

He was taken away from anguish and judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of My people (the Jewish people) He was stricken.

When Isaiah speaks of “we” and “us,” he is speaking about the Jews:

- Isaiah directs his message to the Jews.
- He speaks about “My people” (Isaiah 53:8).

When God speaks in the Old Testament about “My people,” He speaks about the nation of Israel. See Exodus 3:7; Exodus 5:1; Exodus 7:4; 1 Samuel 2:27, 29; 1 Samuel 9:15–16; Psalm 50:7; Isaiah 1:3, and many other passages.

But how can it then be that later it says that Christ will bear the iniquities of “many” (Isaiah 53:11–12)? To understand this, we have to go back to the end of the previous chapter, Isaiah 52:13–15.

There Isaiah says that God’s Servant will be exalted and highly lifted up. His appearance will have been marred more than that of any man, yet He will sprinkle many nations; kings will shut their mouths because of Him. Those who had not been told will see, and those who had not heard will understand.

The Hebrew word *rab* means many, numerous, or mighty/important persons, rulers. The Hebrew word *asum* likewise carries the ideas of many, numerous, mighty, or powerful. Isaiah is therefore speaking about the many Gentile nations—all the Gentile nations—with their rulers and kings. Christ will also bear the iniquities of all those Gentile nations and their kings.

The Hebrew words *rab* and *asum* are often used together in the Old Testament, frequently in connection with peoples, crowds, mighty men, kings, and leaders. *Asum* occurs 31 times in the Old Testament and, apart from a few exceptions, is used in connection with peoples and powerful persons. Examples include Genesis 18:18; Deuteronomy 7:1; Exodus 1:9; Numbers 14:12; Deuteronomy 9:14; and Isaiah 8:7.

Finally, there is an Old Testament passage that demonstrates that the Gentiles, the many Gentile nations, are intended here. Paul quotes Isaiah 52 in Romans 15 and applies it to the Gentiles (Romans 15:15–21). He says that his ministry is to the Gentiles and quotes Isaiah 52:15: those to whom He had not been announced will see, and those who had not heard will understand.

Mark

The Lord Jesus of course knew the Scriptures and Himself used the word “many”—the Greek word *polys*—in the same context as leaders, powerful people, kings, and nations. He also means the many, powerful Gentile nations with their kings.

In Mark 10:42–45 Jesus explains that those regarded as rulers of the Gentiles exercise authority over them, and their great ones exercise authority. But it must not be so among His disciples. Whoever wants to become great must be their servant, and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

See also Matthew 20:20–28 and Luke 22:24–30.

What does He mean here? I will explain it step by step:

1. God is, as Creator of the whole earth, King of the whole earth (Psalm 47:2–3, 8). All nations are called to clap their hands and shout joyfully to God, because the LORD Most High is a great King over all the earth.
2. God was, in particular and in a covenantal sense, King of the people of Israel because He had made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:5–6). Israel would be His special treasure among all peoples, for all the earth is His, and Israel would be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Israel accepted this proposal. God became their King and they were, in this sense, sanctified and set apart from the other nations of the earth, the Gentile nations.

3. When God (the Son) became flesh, He therefore came as King to His own people, His covenant possession.

4. He rules over that people by serving them and going to the cross for them. He is exalted/lifted up as King on the cross, while at the same time serving them through it (Matthew 27:37).

5. His disciples know that He is the King of the Jews and acknowledge Him as such (John 1:49–50).

6. They also know that in the future they will reign with Him over the people of Israel. Jesus says in Luke 22 that He appoints a kingdom to them just as His Father appointed one to Him, so that they may eat and drink at His table in His kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29–30).

7. They argue several times about which of them should be regarded as the most important leader (Luke 22:24).

8. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, also wanted the most important positions (Matthew 20:20–21).

9. But they did not understand that Christ rules by serving and that, as Servant and King, He would go to the cross. They also did not understand that this final form of ruling by serving was not assigned to them. They could not be a substitute in the way Jesus could (Matthew 20:22).

10. They thought about ruling as the Gentile nations did, whose kings ruled by exercising authority over them. Jesus rebuked this and taught them that they could rule only by serving. In their case, this meant serving the people of Israel (Mark 10:42–44).

11. Jesus, however, would not only be servant of all, of all the subjects of the Jewish people, but also of “many,” the many Gentile nations. Compare this again with Isaiah 52–53, where “all” and “many” occur in the same broad context (Mark 10:45).

12. How does He serve those many Gentile nations? By giving His life as a ransom. The word “ransom” translates the Greek word *lutron*, which means the price paid to release a slave. Christ purchased the many Gentile nations with His blood from slavery to the devil, sin, and their kings who ruled over them. He thereby also became their Owner and King, and they became free because He always rules by serving.

As the God-man, He was already their King by virtue of creation. He also acquired them covenantally as His possession and thus became their King. He purchased them with His blood, the blood of the New Covenant. He said: “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many” (Mark 14:24).

13. This becoming the Owner and King of the Gentile nations was already predicted in Psalm 2:6–8 and Daniel 7:13–14. God appointed His King over Zion, His holy hill. The King asks and receives the nations as His inheritance and the ends of the earth as His possession (Psalm 2:6–8). Daniel sees One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is everlasting (Daniel 7:13–14).

The next passage in Mark in which “many” is mentioned is Mark 14:24–25. Jesus says that His blood, the blood of the new covenant, is shed for many. He then says that He will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until He drinks it new in the kingdom of God.

Here too, the word “many” means the many Gentile nations. The Bible often speaks in this way when referring to the Gentile nations.

Luke

Luke records the same event. Jesus says that the cup is the new covenant in His blood, which is shed for them. He then says that He appoints the kingdom to them as His Father appointed it to Him, so that they may eat and drink at His table in His kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:20, 29–30).

Here Jesus says that He sheds His blood for the disciples, that is, for the Jews. He therefore speaks not of “the kingdom of God” in the same sense, but of “My kingdom,” the kingdom of which He was King by virtue of the Old Covenant—the kingdom of the people of Israel.

Matthew

Matthew 1:20–21 says that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the Child conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit. She would bear a Son, and Joseph was to call His name Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins. This fulfilled what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: the virgin would conceive and bear a Son, and His name would be called Immanuel, meaning “God with us.”

Jesus would save His people from their sins. Here the people of Israel are meant:

- We have already seen that “My people” in the Old Testament refers to Israel.
- We are still dealing here with the Old Covenant period, because the Gospels, although placed in the New Testament in our printed Bibles, still belong chronologically to the period before the New Covenant had been inaugurated. Christ had not yet died (Hebrews 9:15–17).

Hebrews explains that Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant, and that His death took place for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant. A testament becomes effective only upon the death of the one who made it.

I will mention several other passages which, like Leviticus 16 and Isaiah 53, indicate that the iniquities of the whole people of Israel would be borne by the Lord Jesus:

- a. Psalm 130:7–8: Israel is to hope in the LORD, because with Him is mercy and abundant redemption; He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.
- b. Jeremiah 23:5–6: The LORD will raise up for David a righteous Branch who will reign as King and execute justice and righteousness. In His days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell safely. His name will be called THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.
- c. Daniel 9:24: Seventy weeks are determined for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy.

Matthew does not mention the sins of the Gentiles. There may be two reasons:

- The Gospel of Matthew is, according to many Bible scholars, primarily written for Jews.
- The Gospel itself was first directed to the Jews. It went to the Gentiles only after the Jews rejected Christ.

Matthew 15:21–24 records the encounter with the Canaanite woman. Jesus initially tells His disciples that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

John’s Gospel, according to many Bible scholars, was written more broadly for Jews and non-Jews. This seems credible to me because John begins his Gospel with the deity of Jesus and with the fact that He is Creator of all people.

John therefore says that Jesus bore not only the sins of the people of Israel, but of the whole world (John 1:29).

John

1. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The word "world" in this chapter, John 1, is translated from the Greek word kosmos. This Greek word has several meanings, such as universe, world, earth, all things (everything created), all people, all Gentiles, and so forth.

The meaning of "world" in John 1 must therefore be determined from the context.

"In the beginning was the Word (God the Son), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... This Word was the true Light, which comes into the world and enlightens every person. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:1–3, 9–10).

The first time "world" is used, it means the earth. This is clear from the way it is used: the Word, God the Son, the Light, comes into the world. The only specific meaning it can have there is the earth.

The second use has essentially the same meaning. The Light was in the world, that is, on earth.

The third use means everything, all things, everything that was created. The context, the opening verses of John 1, says that God the Son, the Word, created everything, and this is repeated here in different words: the world, meaning everything, came into being through Him.

The fourth and final use means all people, because:

- the world did not know Him, and only people can know;
- "the world" is used together with "the world" meaning everything created. Thus it does not mean merely some people, but all people.

This is the context of John 1:29: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Because of this context, and because "world" is being applied to people who sin, it means all people.

2. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16), so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Here too "world" means all people. This is clear from the context:

- John 1:29 uses "world" in the sense of everyone, as shown above.
- The following statement says that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Therefore, if God gave His Son in death so that whoever believes may live, the Son must have been given in death for everyone.

3. "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33).

Here too "world" means all people, because the context of chapter 1 has shown that John uses "world" to mean all people when he applies the word to human beings.

This says essentially the same thing as John 3:16. God sent His Son from heaven to earth and gave Him in death for all people. Whoever believes this has everlasting life. John 6:26–35 develops this teaching by presenting Jesus as the Bread of Life and calling people to come to Him and believe in Him.

4. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

5. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

This is a passage from John 10. Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd in contrast with the bad Jewish shepherds and teachers, the hirelings and Pharisees who were unwilling to give themselves for their sheep and who even fled when danger came. They were so bad that they wanted to kill Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath. They did not want their sheep to be delivered on the Sabbath.

Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep. He knows His own and is known by His own, just as the Father knows Him and He knows the Father, and He gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11–15).

Jesus, unlike these Jewish shepherds, is such a good Shepherd that He gives Himself over to death so that His sheep may live. He came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10–11).

Does this mean that the Good Shepherd does not give His life for everyone? Does He not give His life for the world? Yes, He does. But those who do not believe refuse to be His sheep. They do not come to Him, and therefore He cannot give them eternal life. They exclude themselves. As Shepherd, He does not lead them to eternal life.

Jesus therefore gave Himself to all people as the Lamb of God, as the One who offered Himself for all people:

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

But He gave Himself as Shepherd only for His sheep. He is such a good Shepherd that He even gives His life to save His sheep. David fought a lion and a bear to save his sheep (1 Samuel 17:34–35). That already goes a long way. But Jesus gave His life.

6. Caiaphas said that it was better for one Man to die for the people than for the whole nation to perish. John explains that he did not say this from himself, but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also to gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad (John 11:50–52).

Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would die for the whole Jewish nation, not merely for certain Jews within that nation. They are called the children of God here.

In the Old Testament, the Jews and the Jewish people are regularly called the children of God:

- Exodus 4:22 calls Israel God's son, His firstborn.
- Deuteronomy 14:1 calls Israel children of the LORD their God.
- Jeremiah 3:12, 14 speaks of Israel as God's backsliding children.

Paul also uses this language in Romans 9:3–4, where he speaks of his fellow Israelites and says that to them belong the adoption, glory, covenants, giving of the law, service of God, and promises.

Some of these children of God were among other nations, the Gentile nations, because they had not returned from the exile in which God had placed them. They had become part of those other nations while still remaining Jews.

John 7:35 refers to Jews scattered among the nations. Acts 2:5–11 likewise describes Jews dwelling in Jerusalem from many nations under heaven, including Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete, and Arabia.

Caiaphas therefore prophesied that Jesus would die for the whole Jewish people, both in the land and abroad, including Jews who had become dispersed among the Gentile nations.

7. "And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (John 12:47).

1 John

1 John 2:1–2 says: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

I have explained that John uses the word “world” in the sense of all people (although that also speaks for itself in this passage).

John therefore says: Children, you who have been made God’s children through new birth, Christ has not only reconciled you to God by dying on the cross for your sins; He has reconciled everyone to God by dying on the cross for everyone’s sins.