

**FOR WHOM DID
CHRIST DIE?**

TOM WELLS

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In closing, let me remind you of this: there are texts that we will understand five years from now, that we do not understand now. Later we will grasp still others. But we who believe the Bible to be the Word of God must stand firm at one point: no difficult text will ever overthrow the truths that are firmly established in the plain texts of God's Word. Because it is God's Word it cannot contradict itself. If there are verses that puzzle you they cannot overthrow these plain propositions taught throughout the Bible: first, whatever God purposes to do He shall accomplish; second, God has purposed nothing less than the salvation of His people in the death of His son. It follows, then, that Christ did not die to make all men's salvation possible, but He died to make certain the salvation of His own elect.

DEAR FRIEND: May I ask a question? You have read this message on the question: Did Christ die for all men, or just for some men? Were you able to feel that your own eternal interest is bound up in this question? Did you long to be enabled to say, "I AM HIS: CHRIST DIED FOR ME?"

The Lord has nowhere told you to speculate on whether or not Christ died to you. Instead, He commands you to repent. He commands you to believe in His Son and to believe the gospel message that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). If you know yourself to be a sinner in need of the Savior, and if you come to the Savior in penitence and faith, casting yourself as a broken rebel upon His mercy, He will not turn you away. He died for every one that comes. Here are His very own words: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT!" (John 6:37) Can you continue to turn your back on such a gracious offer?

For whom did Christ die? This important question has been answered in two ways by devout believers in Christ. One group has said that Christ died for each and every man who has ever lived or will ever live. Such people are called by theologians "General Redemptionists." They believe that Christ died for men in general, hence the name.

Another group of believers hold that Christ died only for those whom God intended to save, His elect. These people are called "Particular Redemptionists," that is, people who believe that Christ had in mind particular individuals, and that He died for them, and them only. From this brief description I think you will see that the two ideas are mutually exclusive; all believers fall into one camp or the other. Either you and I believe that Christ died for all men without exception, or we believe that He died for some men to the exclusion of others. There is no third possibility.

At first glance, it looks as if this whole question could be resolved by a look at one or two New Testament texts. For instance, I John 2:2, where John says, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." This text certainly seems to say that Christ made a general redemption, as effective for one man as for another. We might add Hebrews 2:9 where the Lord Jesus is described as the One who by the grace of God "should taste death for every man." Other texts could also be cited that say similar things. Why then would anyone hold that Christ died only for some men? If a man believes the Word of God, why would he not be content with these plain statements? Isn't it presumption to look beyond the plain statements of Scripture for our doctrine?

Those of us who believe in a particular redemption are agreed with our opponents in this: all Christian doctrine must be drawn from the Word of God, and from the Word of God alone. We believe that we are not free to form our own doctrine in any way. Our opponents believe the same thing.

Why then do we disagree? We disagree with them because we believe that the teaching of the Word of God throughout cannot be reconciled with the idea that Christ died for each and every man. We believe that important scriptural truth about God cannot be maintained if we hold a general redemption. In addition, we believe that such texts as I have quoted above may be fairly interpreted in another way than the way the General Redemptionists take them.

To understand the difference between us, I must make one or two things clear. Briefly our position is this: the Bible teaches that God always accomplishes what He purposes to do, and that God's purpose in Christ's death was to save sinners. You will see at once that I have stated two propositions:

1. That God always accomplishes what He purposes to do, and
2. That God's purpose in Christ's death was to save sinners.

General Redemptionists fall into two classifications. There are those who deny my first proposition. They say that God has determined to do many things which He has not been able to carry out. In that case, you see, God might have determined to save everyone for whom Christ died, but He was not able to do it for various reasons. Historically, men who deny particular redemption on these grounds are called Arminians. They hold that God's purposes are frustrated by man's free will.

Calvinists, on the other hand, are agreed that God always carries to completion what He purposes to do. They believe that once God has set His mind to do something no power in heaven or on earth can stop Him in any way. Some Calvinists, however, have also denied particular redemption. These Calvinists deny my second proposition. They say that the purpose of the death of Christ was not to make the salvation of anyone certain, but to make all men savable. They say that God determined to make possible the salvation of all men, and God succeeded in doing just that; He carried out His purpose exactly, as He always does.

By now, I think, you will see the issues clearly. If God's purposes can be frustrated, then it is possible that Christ died to save men who nevertheless

that "no man receiveth his testimony"?

John 26:13 "The Spirit... will guide you into all truth!" How much truth? Can the saintliest, most mature believer know as much as one one-thousandth part of what God knows? All truth, indeed!

John 17:14 "The world hath hated them." Notice how the disciples and the world are separate groups. The "world" is a frequent name for part of mankind, the part which hates God. But notice the next verse I shall cite.

Romans 11:15 "For if the casting away of them (the Jews) be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be?" Here the contrast is between unbelieving Jews and saved Gentiles. The saved Gentiles are called "the world"!

These few instances will show how universal terms are regularly used in Scripture. They show us that instead of reducing the force of the terms that describe what Christ did in dying, we ought rather to understand the words "all" etc., in the way they are regularly used in Scripture. They are regularly used, not for each and every man but, for a portion of mankind.

Other verses to investigate:
Romans 3:23 (including Jesus?)

I Corinthians 15:27 (this verse explains the use of limited terms by showing how they are normally understood.)

Colossians 1:6

Romans 4:16,17 (father of us all="father of many nations")

Acts 9:35

And you need not limit yourself to this list. You will find some kind of limitation in almost all verses that use universal words. Try it and see for yourself.

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You must believe that each and every man shall be saved, or you must reduce the force of these terms. If you cannot believe that all shall be saved you have no other choice. But evangelical Christians have never been able to believe that each and every man who has ever lived will be saved. The force of the terms, then, must be reduced.

Now, what will we reduce? We have two choices. We may reduce:

1. The terms that describe what Christ has done, or
2. The terms that tell us for whom He did it. Which shall it be? How can we tell what to do? The answer is: the Scriptures must tell us. How? By showing one set of these terms regularly reduced in Scripture.

The Scripture regularly reduces the force of universal terms, such terms as "all", "every", and "world". (We also regularly do this in English.) It is necessary to show this in a sufficient number of instances to convince the open-minded observer. I will cite a number of examples, and list the references for others. In that way men may draw their own conclusions.

Acts 2:17 "I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh." Is "all flesh" comprehensive? Does it include the flesh of animals and birds? Does it mean each and every man in the world? Doesn't it mean "some men and some women?" Or, as we say in idiomatic English, "All kinds of people," meaning some of many different groups?

I Timothy 6:10 "The love of money is the root of all evil." Was it the root of Satan's fall? Or Adam's sin? Or is it the root of some evils?

James 1:14 "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust." Was Jesus?

John 3:32 (Concerning Jesus's ministry) "No man receiveth his testimony." Was Jesus's ministry an entire failure? What then shall we make of the next verse, "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true"?

John 3:26 (spoken to John the Baptist) "Rabbi, he that was with thee,...the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." What is this? Did Jesus baptize "all men?" How can John say, then, six verses later

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will never be saved. Likewise, if God's whole purpose in the death of Christ was to make men savable, then men could be lost for whom Christ died.

If, on the other hand, my two propositions are taught in the Word of God, we will be forced to a different conclusion. If God always accomplishes what He purposes to do, and if God's purpose in Christ's death was to save sinners, then we will be forced to admit that everyone for whom Christ died will actually be saved. Since the Bible does not teach the salvation of all men individually, we will have to admit that Christ died for some men in particular, and not for all men in general. It seems clear to me that this is exactly what the Word of God teaches.

Let us look more closely at my two propositions, one at a time. First, is it true that God always accomplishes what He purposes to do? Or are some of His purposes frustrated though He earnestly desires to carry them out? What does the Bible teach about this?

In Ephesians 1:11 Paul says: "We have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." Note how Paul describes God. God is the One "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." In Paul's view God does what He wills to do, and everything that happens in this world is an expression of that will. Nothing is left to chance. Nothing is outside His control. God works "all things," and He works them in the way that pleases Himself. In the eyes of Paul, this sovereign action on God's part is the reason for our hope as Christians. It is God's determination to work everything according to His own will that assures us of our inheritance. We will receive our inheritance because long ago God determined to give it to us, and nothing can stop Him from carrying out His purpose. So certain is God's purpose that Paul says "we have obtained an inheritance," as though we already had it in hand! How can Paul be so certain? His certainty rests on God's strength of purpose; He is the God who always accomplishes what He purposes to do.

DEFINITE OR "LIMITED" ATONEMENT

This additional brief paper is an effort to show why the question of the extent of the atonement has been raised. I hope it will help you and those with whom you may discuss this issue. The paper is divided into two short sections and a somewhat fuller conclusion.

I. WHAT DID CHRIST DO IN DYING?

In the scriptures Christ's work in dying is described in these ways:

1. He "redeemed" by His death.
2. He "reconciled" by His death.
3. He "propitiated" (i.e., "turned away wrath") by his death.

II. FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DO THESE THINGS?

The Scripture answers:

1. For "all".
2. For "the world".
3. For "the whole world".

Putting these things together we get the following arrangement:

Christ redeemed	all
Christ reconciled	the world
Christ turned wrath away from	the whole world

III. WHAT CONCLUSION MUST WE DRAW FROM THESE SCRIPTURES?

If we believe these Scriptures, we must draw one of these two conclusions:

1. All men shall be saved, or
2. The force of these expressions must be reduced.

If the Lord Jesus redeemed (i.e., bought out of bondage) each and every man, then each and every man will escape the bondage of sin and Satan.

If the Lord Jesus reconciled each and every man to God by His death, then someday there will be none unreconciled.

If the Lord Jesus turned the wrath of God away from every man, then none shall have God's wrath fall on them.

This doctrine of the sovereignty of God is taught all through the Word of God. God does what He pleases: neither men nor devils may interfere with His purposes. Quite the opposite! - both men and devils, though unwilling servants, do the work of God. Satan, for example, hates Job and seeks to destroy him. Instead, God uses Satan to bring Job to better knowledge of himself and God. Joseph's brothers hate Joseph and seek to be rid of him, but in sending Joseph into Egypt they do the work of God. The godless king Cyrus does not seek God's glory, yet the Lord says of Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28, "He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure." The Psalmist exalts the Lord in these words: "Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Psalms 115:3). Psalm 135:6 declares the greatness of God: "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, and in the seas, and all deep places." God's rule extends beyond nature to the hearts of men: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Proverbs 21:1). Such is the God of the Bible! What He purposes He performs!

Christians everywhere have drawn comfort from Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." But how can this be? How can those who love God have all things work for their good? A little reflection will show that only a sovereign God, controlling all the infinite details of life, could bring this to pass. Nothing here is left to chance. Nothing here is left to the whim of man or Satan. It is God who works all things together for our good, the very same God who works "all things after the counsel of His own will." This God is King, in the fullest sense of that word!

We see, then, that those who deny that God always accomplishes what He purposes are not on Biblical ground. Far from it! - they are missing a chief emphasis of the Word of God. They fail to see what God has plainly revealed about Himself. They cannot use God's failure to carry out His purposes to prove that Christ died to save all men, for no such failure

of this promise of our Lord in Revelation 7:9, where John sees "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" standing before the Lamb and the throne of God.

Hebrews 2:9 speaks of Christ tasting "death for every man." What can that mean if He did not die for each and every sinner? In this case the answer lies in the translation of the words "every man." In the Greek text there is no word for "man" here. Some Bibles show this by putting "man" in italics. You could as readily translate this as "each one" or "every one." And that is how it should be translated. In the context God is said to be "bringing many sons unto glory" (vs. 10), and sanctifying them (vs. 11), and allowing Christ to call them "brethren" (vv. 11,12). In verse 13 Christ says, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given Me." Now, where did these children come from? How did these children come into these wonderful privileges? By the death of Christ! He tasted death for each and every one of them. It is each one of them that is spoken of in Hebrews 2:9.

One final principle will help you in other passages. Keep in mind that in scripture men are often spoken of according to what they profess. For instance, Paul in writing to the Romans in Romans 8:12,13, says: "Brethren ... if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." Shall men who are true brethren perish? Certainly not! But professed brethren shall perish. Paul simply, in Christian charity, gives men the name they claim for themselves. Perhaps this is why Peter warns against professed believers who will deny "the Lord that bought them" (II Peter 2:1). None whom the Lord Jesus has bought will deny Him, but many who once claimed to be "blood-bought" will no doubt prove to be false in the day of judgment.

on God's part exists. What He purposes He performs!

Once we are clear that God always accomplishes what He purposes to do we are ready for a second question: What did God purpose to do in sending Christ to the cross? We do not have to guess the answer. God has told us in many places in His Word. All we must do is look at the plain statements of His Word. They will tell us what His purpose was in sending His Son to die. Then we will be able to say whether Christ died for each and every man, or whether He died only for those who would come to faith in Himself.

Let us make a survey of the New Testament teaching on this subject. First, look at II Corinthians 5:21 where we read: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." This familiar verse says clearly that God's purpose in placing our punishment on Christ was that His righteousness might be given to us. There is nothing here about removing some legal barrier to the salvation of all men. There is nothing here about making all men equally savable. Instead, we see that Christ died in order to effect a change for those for whom He died. Since God's purposes are always accomplished, it follows that Christ died only for those for whom this change takes place. If this change takes place for each and every man, then it would be fair to say that Christ died for each and every man. But since we know that Christ does not become the righteousness of each and every man, but only the righteousness of some men, it follows that Christ died only for those particular men, whoever they may be.

Now let us look together at Galatians 1:4. Here Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus as the One "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." Here again the purpose of the death of Christ is plainly stated. Paul says nothing about His making it possible for all men to be saved. God's purpose in the death of Christ was "that He might deliver us from this present evil

world." Since God's purposes cannot fail, those who are delivered from this present evil world are those for whom Christ died. What Christ died to perform He does perform. If He delivers each and every man from this present evil world then we may conclude that He died for each and every man. If He delivers only some men from this present evil world, then we must conclude that He died only for those whom He delivers. His own purpose in His death cannot fail. What He set out to do He will do, though all earth and hell oppose Him. What a great Savior!

Turn with me to Galatians 3:13. Here Paul says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.'" Now note the Holy Spirit's thought in this verse. Christ, while hanging on a tree (i.e., on the cross), became a curse for us. What is the effect of His being made a curse for us? We are redeemed! Paul says nothing about the possibility of redemption for those for whom Christ died. Instead He says, "Christ hath redeemed us!" But has Christ redeemed all men? Or will Christ redeem all men? Surely not, since some will go into their graves unredeemed and spend eternity unredeemed. But every one for whom Christ died shall be redeemed. Their redemption was accomplished at the cross, and it will be applied to them as they turn to Jesus Christ. Therefore Christ could not have died for each and every man who ever lived. What He did on the cross was something far more glorious than the mere making of salvation possible for all men. He redeemed His people. He took their punishment from them! He did not do something to make their salvation possible. He laid down the price and made their salvation certain!

Let us look further at Ephesians 5:25-27. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." In this passage Paul states plainly the purposes for which Christ died. Christ died for

in other passages. For instance, in Romans 11:15 Paul tells us that the temporary casting away of the Jews resulted in "the reconciling of the world." He means that God in turning from the Jews, began to pour out the riches of His grace on Gentiles. It is clear, however, that not each and every Gentile was reconciled by this display of God's grace. The "world" that was reconciled was some Gentiles, that is, those who came to Christ. Quite clearly the word "world" here means "the elect from nations other than Israel."

We may also look at II Corinthians 5:19, where we read: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Unless we believe that all men will have their sins forgiven we must see that "world" here cannot mean each and every man. A host of mankind will have their sins held against them at the judgment. The man who does not have his sins imputed to him is the Christian, the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul makes this plain in Romans 4:7,8 where he says: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin!" So the word "world" in II Corinthians 5:19 must mean "men from every nation" or "the elect from every nation." Hence, when John writes, "He is the propitiation for...the sins of the whole world," it does not strain scriptural usage in any way to say that he means Christ died for "men from every nation" or for "the elect from every nation." That is exactly what John means to assert.

A second class of passages that give difficulty are those where the words "all men" or "every man" or some similar words occur. In such passages "all men" means the same as the word "world" meant above. "All men" often means "men of all kinds" or "men out of every nation." Look at John 12:32, for example. Jesus says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." But not every man will be drawn to Christ; not all men will even hear of Him. What He is saying is: He will draw all kinds of men to Himself, men from every nation of the earth. The Book of Revelation reveals the fulfillment of

Only the conjunction of two miracles convinced them. Peter told first how God had given him a vision that God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile as candidates for salvation. Then he related that a second miracle took place as he preached. The Roman soldier and his companions were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other languages, much as the apostles had done on the day of Pentecost.

All of this simply amazed the early church. Peter, who was as much surprised as any of them, defended his action by saying, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). The wonder of the whole episode is summed up in the next verse: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, 'Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'" Without the miracles they would have never come to this conclusion on their own!

In speaking to Jews, then, the emphasis on Christ's love and sacrifice for the world was necessary. In this way the Bible asserts that Christ did not offer Himself for Jews alone, but for men of every nation.

A second problem in the early church demanded a statement like I John 2:2. Gentiles coming into the church might suppose that Jesus was the sacrifice for the sins of Christians, but that if they went back to their old religions there would be other sacrifices to take His place. The natural man finds it well nigh impossible to believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, the only sacrifice for sins, the only Savior for mankind. In that case they needed an emphatic statement that "He (and He alone) is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." In the words of another writer, if we reject Him "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain looking for of judgment" (Hebrews 10:26,27). Any man who turns his back on Christ, supposing that he will find a sacrifice for his sins elsewhere, has made a fatal mistake!

This use of the word "world" is easily seen

the church in order to "sanctify and cleanse it," and in order to "present it to Himself," and in order that "it should be holy and without blemish." There is nothing here about the bare possibility of the church's salvation. What we have here is a plain statement of the purposes of Christ's death. Those purposes include dramatic changes in those for whom Christ died. Those purposes include the presentation to Himself of all of those for whom He died. But will all men have their lives dramatically changed by the death of Christ? Will He present to Himself, as His bride, all men, or only some men? Since His purposes cannot fail He will present to Himself every one for whom He died. Therefore He could not have died for those whom He will not present to Himself. Christ died to carry out these purposes in some men, not in each and every man who ever lived.

Let us look at one last description of the death of Christ, this time in Titus 2:14. This description also has a clear statement of His purpose in dying. Paul says He "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Now, keeping in mind that no purpose of God can fail, for whom did He die? He died for those He redeems; He died for those He purifies; He died for those whom He makes zealous of good works. If He died for any others then His plainly stated purpose in dying failed in their case. But He cannot and will not fail! Jesus Christ is God! Whatever He purposes to do He accomplishes. What a great Savior!

Since it is true that Christ died for some sinners, and not for all, we would expect to find statements in God's Word that say that He died for groups smaller than mankind at large. And that is just what we find. Let me show you several of these statements. First, let us look at Matthew 1:21. Here the angel of the Lord is telling Joseph of the child about to be born of Mary. The angel commands: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins." Saving His people was the announced purpose of His coming.

In Mark 10:45 the Lord Jesus explains His own

mission in these words: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." The conscious choice of the word "many" points to a group smaller than all mankind, and the use of the word "ransom" confirms this conclusion. A ransom is the price that secures the release of a man from bondage. So Jesus says that He came to die in order to actually secure the release of "many" from sin and death. Since His purpose cannot fail it is not possible to identify the "many" with all mankind.

In John 10 the Lord Jesus discusses His sheep and what He does for them. John 10:11 says, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." Again in verse 15 He says, "I lay down My life for the sheep." The sheep that Jesus speaks of in these two verses cannot include each and every man in the world for two reasons:

1. In the context Jesus is discussing His own sheep, in contrast to other sheep which do not follow Him.
2. In addition, He says specifically to unbelieving men who heard this discourse, "You are not of My sheep" (10:26). Beyond dispute it was His own sheep for whom He laid down His life, and His own sheep was a smaller group than all mankind.

Let me call your attention to one final text that we have already looked at. Did you notice who it was for whom Christ gave Himself up to death in Ephesians 5:25? I did not call your attention to it before, so it may have slipped by unnoticed. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." Here again we have mention of an entity smaller than mankind for which He died; He died for the church, a statement absolutely in keeping with the doctrine that Christ died for some sinners and not for others.

In fact, it seems clear that the argument of this passage demands a sacrifice especially for His bride. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Are husbands expected to love their wives just as they love all other women? Certainly not! Paul's point is clear:

Christ has a special love for His church that led Him to make the extreme sacrifice for her, and husbands are to have a similar special love for their own wives which will lead to special self-sacrifice for their wives. The very special love, reserved for special objects, is the whole point of the passage!

At the beginning of this article I called attention to texts that have been thought to teach that Christ died for each and every man who ever lived. I believe these texts can be fairly interpreted in other ways, ways which uphold the Biblical teaching that Christ died for some sinners who were the special objects of His love. Of course, I cannot hope to cover every text that someone might allege against this teaching. I will, however, show you the principles by which various texts should be interpreted.

Let us start with I John 2:2. Here John writes: "He (Jesus) is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." The question is: If Christ died "for sins of the whole world," how could He have died for some sinners and not for all?

Two problems that the early church faced contain the answer to this question: It seems obvious to us today that there can be only one sacrifice for sins to which all men must come if they are to find forgiveness. But what seems so obvious now was not at all clear to the world in the first century.

First, many of the Jews fully expected that any provision for sin would be for them and for them alone. They held that God was the God of the Jews. He was not interested in Gentiles unless they would first become Jews. Against this attitude Christ taught that God loved the world, not just the Jews. The point was not that He loved each and every man - though in a sense that is true - the point was that His love reached Greeks and Latins and Syrians and all other nations just as really as it reached the Jewish nation. The question was about national groups, not about individuals.

Even the apostles were not clear about this at first. When word reached them that Peter had preached in the house of a Roman soldier they were upset. They demanded that Peter explain himself.