

# Does Matthew 27:25 refer to all Jews for all time?

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Version 1.0

"... for salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:22, ESV)  
"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16, ESV)  
"So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!" (Romans 11:11-12, ESV)

## Introductory Remarks

The Scripture under discussion should be read in context:

"So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." **And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"** Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified." (Matthew 27:24-26)

This passage has often been cited to collectively blame "the Jews" (not merely Roman authorities or individual leaders) for the death of Jesus. It has been interpreted as a self-imposed curse on all Jewish individuals and their descendants, which has justified centuries of persecution, pogroms, and the belief that Jewish suffering was a form of Divine punishment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church eventually denounced the notion of collective guilt in *Nostra Aetate* (1965), admitting that the events surrounding Christ's pre-death period "cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today."

### Research proves hyperbole:

The verse under discussion is unique to this Gospel as the other Gospels recount the crowd's demand for crucifixion but omit this self-accusation.

Most Biblical scholarship dismisses the idea of a perpetual 'blood curse' affecting all Jews throughout history. Rather, the verse is most accurately interpreted within its first-century context.

The expression 'on us and on our children' pertains to a generation after that time: probably those who experienced the events firsthand and their immediate descendants who bore the war and upheavals of the First Jewish-Roman War (66-73/74 AD). This was a major rebellion by the Jews against the Roman Empire, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 AD.

The crowd acknowledges their accountability or guilt for the shedding of innocent blood (reflecting blood crying out, such as Abel in Genesis 4:10 or Zechariah in Matthew 23:35).

I am no expert of figures of speech in the Bible, so one has to turn to those that specialise in this area. One immortal book on the subject is Ethelbert Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* [available free online](#). In this case it is a hyperbole:

"The figure is so called because the expression adds to the sense so much that it exaggerates it, and enlarges or diminishes it more than is really meant in fact. Or, when more is said than is meant to be literally understood, in order to heighten the sense." (p. 423)

The term "crowd" or "people as a whole" (*pas ho laos*) is an example of dramatic hyperbole, referring to *those* in Jerusalem who were incited by the chief priests and elders and *not* every Jew who has ever lived, *nor* all Jews throughout history *nor* to every descendant of the crowd.

"Anti-Judaism has been defined in this article as an idea that has four manifestations: a portrayal of the Jews as being eternally rejected by God, a replacement of the Jews with the Church, an inherited guilt upon all followers of Judaism for the crucifixion, and a demonizing of those who follow Judaism. Under that definition, and with the considering the textual and cultural contexts of the Gospel of Matthew guiding this interpretation, it can be asserted that the phrase "His blood be on us and on our children!" was not originally anti-Jewish, and that neither was the entire Gospel of Matthew." (Jason Hensley, "His Blood Be On Us And On Our Children!": A Contextual Study And Reevaluation of the Infamous Blood Curse," *American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Vol. 21, No. 18 (3 May 2020), p. 18).

Ann Conway-Jones book "*Matthew's Gospel and Jewish-Christian Relations*" (2023) analyses Matthew 27:25 in its historical and literary context and emphasises that the

phrase “all the people” (πᾶς ὁ λαός) has been widely misunderstood. She argues that it is a hyperbole and although the verse seems to present “the people as a whole” taking responsibility for Jesus’ death, historically and narratively, this cannot literally refer to *all Jews everywhere*, since only a specific crowd present at the trial is in view! Apparently modern scholarship (including this article) treats such language as *rhetorical generalisation*, not literal universal guilt.

In other words: the phrase “all the people” functions like exaggeration which is consistent with hyperbolic Semitic style of that time.

“Thus, when reading the Gospels, we view Jesus as a walking, talking holy of holies, encapsulating the presence of God. This makes it very difficult to treat both sides of his debates with Pharisees equally. As Son of God, Jesus must be right! Those who disagree with him are presumed to be thwarting the will of God.” (p. 453)

Another academic item is David Knight’s “Anti-Semitism and the Cry of ‘All the People’ (Mt 27:25),” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 40 (1965), pp. 623-640. The study highlights that the expression has been historically overextended beyond its original meaning. Knight examines how the wording functions within the immediate and wider context.

“one sees that the main purpose of the verse is not per se condemnatory. It was not the Evangelist's aim to point his finger at all the Jews of his own period - much less at the Jews of all ages since - and brand them as déicides. His shift from "the crowd" to "the people" has rather the purpose which we have tried to set forth above.” (p. 671)

### **Scholarly research:**

Counter-arguments can easily be made to the assertions that “this is why there was a Holocaust” or “the reason for why the Jews were persecuted during the Middle Ages.”

The idea that Matthew 27:25 directly led to Jewish persecution over the centuries, and the Holocaust is an oversimplification at best and serves as victim-blaming. It disregards historical facts and has been consistently dismissed by many historians and religious researchers.

First of all the verse was misused for centuries to incite religious antisemitism (deicide allegations, blood libels, pogroms). This goes back a long way: the Greco-Roman anti-Judaism that existed prior to Christianity; followed by medieval economic scapegoating and Catholic persecutions.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Nazi ideology was *not* fundamentally Biblical yet the Nazis selectively utilised Christian antisemitism for propaganda purposes but were frequently anti-Christian or inclined towards paganism (e.g., Alfred Rosenberg, Heinrich Himmler).

Thankfully, the various churches (both Catholic and Protestant) rejected this notion of collective Jewish guilt or that “the Jews brought it upon themselves”. This response came in the aftermath of the horrors of World War 2 to address such misconceptions.

Other academic books and papers I have seen but not read which refute the causal link between Matthew 27:25 to the holocaust etc are:

- Claudia Setzer, "Sinai, Covenant, and Innocent Blood Traditions in Matthew's Blood Cry (Matt 27:25)" in *The Ways That Often Parted: Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus* (2018).
- Francois Viljoen, "Matthew, the Church and Anti-Semitism", *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2007).
- John Kampen, *The Gospel of Matthew and the Challenge of Antisemitism* (2018).
- Jonathan Hili, 'His Blood Be on Us and on Our Children!' *Matthean Irony and the Ratification of Covenant Through Blood* (2024, thesis/paper).
- Ronald Allen & Clark Williamson *Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews* (1999).
- Timothy Cargal, "'His Blood be Upon Us and Upon our Children': A Matthean Double Entendre?" *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (1991).

## Conclusion

A casual reading of the passage in question without anti-Semitism or any other interpretation in mind does not lend its support to the negative usage of the verse. Rather it contains hyperbole as we have seen.

Scholars have deeply investigated the narrative and have come to the view that the statement is best read as *dramatic narrative speech*, not a literal claim about every individual and incorporates *hyperbolic* language.

There is nothing in this text, anywhere else in the Bible or historically that can be used to interpret the verse in such a negative manner. Unfortunately, it has been used to either find justification to persecute the Jews or to argue that the Jews are to blame for their torment over the centuries.

## Recommended Reading

- *Jewish Origins* by Craig M White
- *Notes on the Bible and Genetics* by Craig M White.
- *The Sanctity of Nationhood in the Bible* by Craig M White.
- *The True Roots and Origin of the Scots* by Craig M White.
- *Where are the 'Lost' Tribes of Israel in the Modern World? An Introduction* by Craig M White.

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