

THE DEFINITE MANY | DR. RANDY WHITE

INTRODUCTION

- **Observation:** Some biblical words seem ordinary yet spark deep theological debate, such as "many."
- **Problem:** No agreed method exists for identifying "many" in Scripture; interpreters often import theology rather than follow textual scope.
- **Impact:** Differences affect doctrines like atonement, election, covenant, prophecy.
- **Purpose:** Establish a consistent, text-driven method to identify "many."
- **Hypothesis:** When "many" appears without explicit definition, it refers to Israel, unless the text itself clearly expands the scope.

RULES FOR IDENTIFYING "MANY" IN THE BIBLE

RULE 1 — LOOK FOR AN EXPLICIT DEFINITION

- **Principle:** If the verse tells you who "many" are, accept that definition.
- **Examples:**
 - Gen 37:3 — Many colors of Joseph's coat.
 - Esther 8:17 — Many of the people of the land.
 - Acts 18:8 — Many of the Corinthians.
 - John 12:11 — Many of the Jews.
 - Zech 2:11 — Many nations.
- **Why it matters:** Prevents importing meaning from outside the verse.
- **Note:** Covers over 95% of "many" occurrences.
- **Summary:** Explicit definitions always override assumptions or frameworks.

RULE 2 — START WITH THE COVENANT DEFAULT

- **Statement:** When no explicit definition exists, default to Israel before the "middle wall" is broken (Acts 10–15). Break default only if verse or context clearly names another group.
- **Why warranted:**
 - Covenant structure from Gen 12 onward focuses on Israel.
 - Gentile inclusion is rare, explicit, and marked in the text.
 - There is a "middle wall of partition" that separates Jew from Gentile.
 - OT, Gospels, and Acts pattern shows Israel-first orientation.
- **NT examples:**
 - Matt 10:5–6 — Go to the lost sheep of Israel.
 - Matt 15:24 — Sent only to Israel.
 - Rom 15:8 — Jesus as minister of the circumcision.
 - Rom 1:16; Acts 13:46 — To the Jew first.

- **Connection to “many”:** If Israel is default audience, untethered "many" naturally refers to them.
- **"Many" as covenant descriptor:**
 - Gen 15:5 — Seed as stars.
 - Exod 1:7 — Multiplied greatly.
 - Exod 5:5 — Pharaoh: "now are many."
 - Deut 1:10 — Stars of heaven for multitude.
 - 1 Kgs 4:20 — Many as sand by the sea.
 - Ezek 33:24 — "We are many."
- **Two key points:**
 1. Numerical greatness is covenant marker.
 2. "Many" can stand alone as shorthand for Israel.
- **Method:** Let clearest case in a section set scope for untethered occurrences.
 - Example: Dan 9:27 anchors Dan 11–12.
- **Examples:**
 1. Prophets — Isa 53:11–12, default to Israel; nations marked when intended.
 2. Gospel kingdom discourse — Matt 20:16; 22:14; 24:5, 10, 12; default Israel.
 3. Supper sayings — Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; default Israel.
 4. Historical — Dan 8:25; Mal 2:6.
 5. Pauline — Rom 5:18–19 narrows scope; 1 Cor 10:17–18 default Israel, connected to John 6.
- **Background passages:**
 - Ps 3:2; 4:6; 40:3 — Many as Israelite public.
 - Jer 42:2 — Few of many.
 - Dan 11:33–34 — Many within Israel.
- **More examples:**
 - Neh 7:2 — Feared God above many (fellow Israelites).
 - Matt 19:30 — Many first shall be last (within Israel).
 - Rev 3:19 — Many defaults to Israel; applies to future Jewish assemblies.
- **Summary:** Default to Israel unless explicit scope-breaker. Maintain text-first, covenant-aware interpretation.

RULE 3 — DON'T TURN "MANY" INTO "ALL"

- **Principle:** "Many" ≠ "all" in Hebrew, Greek, or English; choice of word is deliberate.
- **Application:** Don't collapse "many" into "all" or build theology on one passage to explain all.
- **Example:** Matt 20:28 — Ransom for many = Israel in covenant-default. Does not imply limited atonement; other texts (1 John 2:2; Matt 26:28) show broader reach.
- **Why:** Preserves inspired precision; prevents theological flattening.