

# Take the Guesswork Out of Biblical Interpretation – Part 8

## “The Immediate Context”

In the previous blog, we discussed “[The Big Picture](#)” context, which is critical to all of biblical interpretation from the Old to New Testaments. Unless that is correctly understood, most essential explanation of what the Bible actually says and means will be in error.

After the big picture context has been established as true, correct and certain, the next step is to interpret a section, verse or word in light of the **immediate context**.

### What Context Means

Context means what surrounds a particular passage, verse, or word. In other words, what goes before and after what is being studied. How does the context relate to the particular passage, verse, or word to help determine what that which is being studied says and means?

For example, how does the immediate context of John 3:16 help us to understand what Jesus Christ meant when He said: “For God so loved the world...”? Let’s say we were interested in what “world” means. Does it include everybody living on the planet or is it in a more limited sense?

### The Context of John 3:16

We might ask, does Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-11 help us to understand what “**world**” meant in John 3:16? The main discussion revolved around the qualifications to see and enter the Kingdom of God. One must be “born again” (born from above), that is, be “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Nicodemus admitted he did not understand what Jesus meant. Jesus confronted Nicodemus that, even though he was “a teacher of Israel” (v. 10), he did not grasp Jesus’ point. Notice the subject of “Israel” which clues us into the context. The nation of Israel was considered the kingdom of God. It was a limited context pertaining to “Israel.” Nicodemus assumed if you were an Israelite, you were already in the kingdom of God.

### Conclusion

According to the immediate context, John 3:16 and the word “world” has a limited scope of application, that is, to Israel. To extend the meaning of “world” to another people apart from Israel violates the clear context. In other words, “world” refers exclusively to Israel. So, it would be accurate to say, “For God so loved Israel ...”

The Stay tuned for Part 9.

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