

Take the Guesswork Out of Biblical Interpretation – Part 9

“Expanding the Immediate Context”

In [Part 8](#), “The Immediate Context,” we reviewed the very immediate context of John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

We were looking for any clues that would help us discover the meaning of the word “world.” We found that Nicodemus was “the teacher of Israel” (3:10) and Jesus referenced an Old Testament story of Israel about “the serpent in the wilderness” (3:14). We will return to that in a future blog. So, **“world,” at this point, refers to the world of Israel.**

Now we ask, is there anything else in the **wider context** of the entire Gospel of John that will help us identify the meaning of “world”?

John 1:9

This verse explains that Jesus “was the true Light” who came “into the world,” was “in the world,” “the world was made through Him,” and “the world did not know Him.” During Jesus’ ministry in the first century, did He come to minister in Judea primarily? Yes. Where else did He minister? Galilee. This region was north of Judea and known as “Galilee of the nations” and was associated with “the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali” (Isaiah 9:1). These were the names of two tribes of Israel which were located in the territory of the former house of Israel before they were deported and exiled by Assyria over 700 years prior to the first century AD.

So, Jesus ministered in Judea and in the area of the northern ten tribes where many Judeans and Benjamites resided. **The “world” Jesus came to was in Israel.**

Other References in John

In addition to the world of Israel in John 1:9, Jesus ministered to Israelites, citing the Old Testament story of the **mana in the wilderness** (John 6:24-34) **which exclusively applied to Israel** and was understood to refer **solely to Israel** (Exodus 16:14).

Jesus spoke of **the Law** of Moses (John 7:19) **pertaining only to Israel.**

Jesus was received, at one point, as **“the King of Israel”** (John 12:13).

Jesus’ disciples were Israelites whom He would send “into the world” (John 17:18). Indeed, these disciples would proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom in Judea, Samaria, and to the far reaches of the Roman empire **where the scattered Israelites had gone.**

Jesus taught “openly to **the world**” and “taught in the **synagogues** and in **the Temple**” (John 18:19) all **referring to His ministry to Israelites in Judea.**

Conclusion

In no case at the mention of “world” in the Gospel of John and in the ministry of Jesus Christ did this word ever refer to any land area outside of the territory of Israel. The text of John is a wider context of Jesus’ ministry. Never was China, South America, or Africa, for example, ever mentioned or even hinted at. **Thus, “world” in the Gospel of John must necessarily be confined to the “world” of Israel exclusively. The “world” in John 3:1-21 means Israel.**

The Stay tuned for Part 10.

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