

## John 3:16

Written by K B Napier

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John 3:16 is constantly quoted in support of Arminianism. This is very strange, for this text supports the exact opposite – predestination and God’s sovereignty.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This text appears to tell us that Jesus Christ died for everyone in the world so that they could know salvation. You might retort that there is no other way to read it. Friend, if that is the sum total of your understanding of this text, may I exhort you to read it again, but this time using a proper method of interpretation. ***The text says that God loved His elect and that only the elect will be saved!***

Forget your traditionally-acquired knowledge and look again at the text, this time using the faculty of your mind, given by God. Look at what the Greek text says, because in it is the very key to understanding this passage which, properly perceived, is very easy to accept.

### **The World?**

If you have never come across, or been taught, the proper way to interpret scripture, then you can be excused for thinking it has only one meaning. However, you now have an opportunity to think Biblically. Once you understand how to do this, it will revolutionise the way you read and understand scripture! I will not go into the full details here, but will limit what I say to this text.

Firstly, we must look at the underlying Greek text. This will give us a number of different options or meanings for the words under examination. If you cannot obtain a fixed meaning from this, then you must look at the words in their text, and if this still does not give you a clear understanding, you must look at it in its context. Sometimes even this will not yield a meaning, so you must examine similar texts in the whole of scripture. If, after all that, you cannot find an exact meaning, then you must leave it.

However, in this case, the matter is very easy to discern, for the whole thing rests on the meanings of just two words: ‘world’ and ‘whosoever’. Let us look at ‘world’...

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God loved the 'world'. First note that He does not say the 'whole world' but only the 'world'. Why is this important? Well, often in scripture the meaning of a word is qualified (given its meaning) by the word preceding or proceeding (either side of it). Here, we are simply told that He loved the 'world'. If He had said the 'whole world' I can guarantee that this would have given a very clear meaning to 'world'. But, He says 'world', so we must look to see what it means. In both Greek and the Hebrew texts, each word can usually have one of many possible meanings. Some words have only the one meaning. The word 'world', though, does not necessarily mean what you think it means!

In the Greek the word is ***kosmos*** and it can have one of a large number of meanings. To show what I mean, let me give a list of them. 'World' or *kosmos* can mean: the world itself, or something that adorns. It can refer to an harmonious arrangement or order of things, or even well-run government. It can mean an ornament, including the stars in the night sky. It can also mean the entire universe. 'World' can refer to the human inhabitants of the earth, the ungodly masses who are hostile to God and His word. It can speak of world affairs and everything we can call 'earthly', including riches, pleasures, etc. It especially refers to what seduces men away from God. 'World' can refer to any collection of things, details, etc. It can refer to the Gentiles and not the Jews. Or, it can refer to believers only.

(If you are that interested, the word *kosmos* has a root word, from which it probably comes. It is ***komizo***, which means, amongst other things, to take back what belongs to one. We can see how this can pertain to predestination, in which God calls people to be His own).

Now, maybe this long list of possible meanings has completely surprised you. I hope so, because I want you to think seriously. Seeing as how 'world' can have so many different meanings, why do you particularly apply just one meaning to it *without* bothering to check-out the others? For that meaning (i.e. the whole world; everyone) to hold water, you must make very sure that the meaning you have chosen fits the rest of the text, and that the whole text fits the context or passage, and that the whole section fits the whole of scripture. If it fails this test, then you may as well scrap the meaning you gave to it! I will now go on to show why 'everyone' is an incorrect meaning for 'world' in this text.

### Who is 'Whosoever'?

The word can certainly refer to everyone, ***but only if*** the rest of the text and context supports such a meaning. Let us, then, look at the meaning of 'whosoever' or

**ho**

(this short, masculine word, includes two other words, the feminine

**he**

and the neuter

**to**

). Its meanings are: which, who, the things, the son, this, that, these, and so on. We cannot glean a meaning from this, so we must look to see if the word has been qualified in any way by a word before or after it. It is qualified by the word after it: 'believeth' or

**pisteuo.**

This word, too, has many possible meanings in the Greek. However, its primary meaning is to place trust in, or to be persuaded by. In the New Testament the word is used to refer to those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It can be trust in salvation, or in facts, or in any other thing. We can say, then, that 'believeth' means to trust in the salvation given through Jesus Christ.

Now, if we put both terms together – 'world' and 'whosoever believeth' we see that they mean '*those who believe*'.

If we paraphrase the whole verse in modern English, it would therefore read:

**'For God so loved those He predestinated, that He gave His only child, so that they would not perish, but have everlasting life.'**

### The Rest of the Text

In verse 15 we are told: **"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"**.

This is repeated in the very next verse, and in between comes the phrase 'For God so loved the world'. Why should He suddenly introduce the 'whole world' (i.e. *everyone*, saved or not, elect or not) into His word when He is only talking about those who believe?

In verse 17 we see that **"the world through him might be saved."** The text is just continuing the same theme – that those who are elect will be saved. There is no mention of those who are not elect. Verse 18 reinforces this fact, for it again repeats that those who believe are not condemned. Others are condemned because Jesus (the light; verse 19) came into the world, but men loved darkness (evil) instead. Those who hate the light will remain in the darkness and will never be saved. These are people who have not been elected to salvation. They cannot come to the light, because they are creatures of the darkness, whose father is Satan, and they are *not elect*.

The whole text, then, speaks of those who are elect. That is how we know that the 'world' here means the elect. Jesus cannot die for 'everyone', because everyone will not be saved.

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Therefore, we *must* choose 'those who are saved' as the meaning for 'world'. The other options simply do not make sense, and are not supported by the rest of scripture, which tells us that God predestinated some to heaven and others to hell. It does not matter whether or not we like the idea, for God says it, and that is that. He is the mighty Potter, Who chooses some to glory and others to hell.

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