Three Rivers Fellowship

A Brief Examination of John 3:16

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1. Abstract

In this session we briefly examine the text of John 3:16. We use the King James Version[1] and the United Bible Society's Fourth Version of the Greek New Testament (USB4). Some familiarity of English grammar is assumed, at least to the degree where terms are familiar to the reader's ears.

2. Introduction

John 3:16 represents one of the greatest passages in all of Scripture carrying with it massive theological content, yet it is too often used in very simplistic or flippant ways. How often have you seen some kook with a rainbow hat with John 3:16 painted on his tee-shirt? Or sports figures painting John 3:16 on their faces and thinking they are "preaching the Gospel" and honoring Christ as Head of the Body?

Figure 1. Examples of Trivializing John 3:16

These are examples of gross trivializations of the Gospel, bringing embarrassment to the Person of Christ, with a tone of silliness that does damage to Christendom as a whole. The atonement of Christ is hardly a trivial topic nor is it to be presented in a silly manner, but rather in a very sobering, God-fearing, and Christ-honoring manner.

The goal of this session is to peel off the layers of the English KJV translation and get to the underlying inspired Greek text. As we all know the New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek and so to get to any textual or doctrinal matter we ultimately must get to the "originals". But you say, "I don't know Greek". That may be true … to which I provide a two-part response below:

1. Paul states there have been given to the local assembly teaching-pastors, responsible for rigorously guiding the assembly into the maturity of Christ (Eph 4:7-16). Each local assembly of believers is given a host of teaching-pastors (Bishops [1 Tim 31-8]) to aid in the process of maturing every believer to the "measure and stature of Christ". Today's modern local churches are far too interested in "churching the unchurched" which is not the purpose or the assembling of believers. This time is for believers. It is because of the failure of

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[1] We state that we are using the KJV only because the KJV has a remarkable number of study aids geared to it, starting with no less than a Strong's Concordance. So, if the reader is not familiar with the original languages at least they can follow Strong's numbering system and struggle through some of the discussion.

the local church that Christendom has placed itself in a position of "doctrinal immaturity" and as such has no way of defending itself against the many attacks of "the enemy". With this immaturity comes the loss of the cultural war and respect among unbelieving Christendom. It is the job and responsibility of the teaching-pastors to aid each believer within their assembly in coming to a full knowledge (epignosis) of Christ. See Eph 4:11-16.

2. There are so many study aids out there, even keyed to Strong's numbering system that there is hardly an excuse anymore for not being familiar with the study aids at least.

Not everyone has to be a teaching-pastor; the Scriptures teach that one must "desire" the office (1 Tim 3:1-8), but we are ALL supposed to "Study to show ourselves approved…" (Eph 4:3-7; 2 Tim 2:15)

So, our approach to John 3:16 will be to:

1. Establish the context of John 3:16

2. Examine the English translation and breakdown the verse into its constituent parts (Clauses)

3. Get at the original text and break it down into its grammatical parts and translate it directly

Thus, in section 5 we offer a few words on the Doctrine of Scripture.

3.   An Exegesis of John 3:16

Arguably, the most well-known passage in all of Scripture is John 3:16.

> John 3:16 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.

To properly understand the *content* of this verse we must first understand its *context*.

3.1. Establishing the Context of John 3:16

The general context begins in John 2:23, where the Savior being in Jerusalem on Passover performs miracles.

3.1.1. General Context of John 3:16 (John 2:23-25)

> John 2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

Many of the people in the vicinity of His work believed on him due to the miracles they saw Christ perform. But Christ does not commit (faith) Himself to them, because He knows what is inside of man and believing on someone because of the miracles they perform is not *necessarily* a "sign" that the audience is converted. Remember, a starving man will agree to anything to get a piece of bread and as the Savior himself states, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (Mat 12:34, see also Mat 12:39-42; Mark 8:11-38; Luke 11:29-32)

Verses 24 & 25 state that the reason Christ did not commit Himself to them is that He knew what was inside of them (e.g., not converted), and they remained in their unregenerate state. They saw the works and outwardly believed (at least for now), but the Savior knew better to align Himself with them. So, the context is literally discussing the nature of man and the nature of salvation within the confines of the nation of Israel. The general category is the doctrine of the nature of man being sinful and faithless. So, man in his "natural" state is sinful and in need of regeneration.

3.1.2. Immediate Context of John 3:16 (John 3:1-15)

> John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
> 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

The immediate context of John 3:16 begins in verse 1, where we are introduced to one of the folks who "saw the miracles". Nicodemus ("conquer of the people"), a leader & teacher of Israel comes to Christ by night, arguably so as to be careful about being perceived to be too close to this One claiming to be the Messiah (this attitude of course changes later). In line with the audience in Chapter 2, Nicodemus admits that Christ has come from God, solely on the empirical basis of the Savior's miracles and that the miracles He performs are not a product of witchcraft or sorcery (as the Rabbinic Literature claims). This is both interesting and sad. Nicodemus admits to the acts of Christ being from God based on empirical rationale <u>not</u> from Scripture. While this is good, "the good is often the enemy of the best". As a teacher of Israel and Pharisee[2], Nicodemus should have been sufficiently familiar with Scripture to determine that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah of Israel, based on Scripture alone. Nevertheless, Nicodemus recognizes the authority of the Savior.

> John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
> 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?
> 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
> 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

If we fail to recognize the context from Chapter 2, we miss the reasoning for why Christ addresses the nature of man and how he is to be saved. Here we see that Nicodemus is drawn toward the miracles, but Christ address the underlying issue, namely the fallen nature of man. Christ's reaction to Nicodemus may seem to be almost a non-sequitur, if it were not for the general context established in chapter 2. The Savior is discussing the nature of man in general and the nature of the Second Generation of Israel[3] (the generation who sees Messiah) in particular, concluding that they are all sinful and in need of regeneration and redemption.

Because man is physically born into a complete state of spiritual sin, he must be reborn out of that state. The phrase for "born again" is (γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν) "gengethei anwthen", more correctly translated "born from above". The Savior is getting to the heart of the matter by stating that it is man's nature that must be cleansed, and the only way that is going to happen is to have heaven do it, which is of course a way of stating that God must cleanse the sinner if that sinner is to be saved. Nicodemus does not understand the concept that Christ is teaching, whereby Christ as the great teacher attempts to clarify and put the concept on simpler ground. The Savior tells Nicodemus that fallen man must be spiritually born if he is to enter the Kingdom of God. He continues discussing this with Nicodemus and telling him how this process of spiritual rebirth is performed.

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[2] It is beyond the scope of this outline, but it can be shown by examining the personal pronouns of John 3 that Nicodemus was saved BEFORE he came to Christ by night.

[3] For a detailed discussion on the Prophetic Generations of Israel see, R.E. Walsh, The **Prophetic Generations of Israel**, Trinity Grace Fellowship, 1997 and

> John 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
> 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.
> 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?
> 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?
> 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.
> 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you *of* heavenly things?
> 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.

Addressing Nicodemus' confusion, Christ tells him not to marvel at the concept of being "born from above" where verses 8-13 provide a concrete discussion of this concept.

Verse 8, a very poorly translated verse, explicitly states that "the Spirit breathes where He desires". By translating pneuma as "wind" has done a great disservice to the readers of the KJV. The random nature of wind is not the point here, but rather the sovereign regeneration of each fallen person who God desires to be saved.

> John 3:8 τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει· οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος
>
> John 3:8 To pneuma hopou thelwi pnei kai ten phonwn autow akoueis, all ouk oidas pothen erxetai dai tou hupagei outws estin pas ho gegennemenos ektou pneumatos

Better translated,

> The Spirit breathes where He wills (desires) and you (speaking of Nicodemus) hear His sound, but you do not know where He is going and where He is coming from; so is each born out of the Spirit.

Verse 8 specifically tells us that it is the Holy Spirit, who regenerates those of fallen humanity and to whom is to be regenerated solely the desire of His (the Holy Spirit) will. The Spirit regenerates from among unregenerate people whom He desires, but we are ignorant of whom that desire will fall upon. Verse 8 completes the total picture of God's plan of redemption and how *He accomplishes it!* First, the Father choses, second the Son redeems, and third the Spirit regenerates. This is the great trinal axiom of a saint's salvation. It begins and ends with the triune God.

Though Nicodemus now understands a bit he is still confused. It is in this context that Christ questions him as one of the teachers of Israel…. "You have a PhD in theology, and you still don't get this simple concept". Kind of like saying to a mathematician… "You have a PhD in mathematics, and you still don't understand the law of integers (m = n + 1) [e.g., 3=2+1]?"

The point here being that Christ includes the doctrines of election, redemption, and regeneration in with the simple theological concepts we as Christians are to master … I am afraid that most of modern-day Christendom are under-educated; or perhaps a better word would be under-edified!

It is interesting to note that the Savior essentially complains about the Sanhedrin, not believing that He is Messiah. In verses 11-12, Christ asserts that He only says those things which He knows are true, but that the Sanhedrin does not believe Him and yet He is the One Who has come down from heaven to testify of the Father.

> John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
> 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

In this context Christ refers back to a well-known Old Testament event that directly addresses the heart of man. While wandering in the wilderness, God deals the Canaanites into the hands of Israel, and almost immediately Israel begins to complain and murmur about the manna from heaven and wilderness wandering forgetting that Jehovah had just given the Canaanites into the hand of Israel.

> Num 21:5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.
> 6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.
> 7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, we have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he takes away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.
> 8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.
> 9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

Interestingly, God uses the brazen serpent to "particularize" the ones bitten by snakes. Only those who saw the brazen serpent were saved from the snakes' venomous bites,

all others die. It is this "particularizing" imagery that Christ uses in establishing the context of John 3:16.

The Savior Himself states that many within Israel have been bitten, complained, and murmured, but only those who see the brazen serpent will be saved. It is in this context of "limitation" that Christ begins verse 16. But there is more to this limiting of persons being revived from the snake's bite. Those being revived are precisely those whom the Spirit breathes upon (John 3:8) and revives (born from above). That is to say, whom the Holy Spirit *desires* to regenerate. That is the point of the discussion that begins in John 3:8. This limitation or particularizing by the Savior Himself forms the context of His discussion of the Father loving the world (not without exception) and offering His Son for THAT world… the context drives us to conclude the world of the "limited", specifically those who analogically speaking "see the brazen serpent, indeed those whom the Spirit of God breathes upon.

The context of John 3:16 is the recording of the conversation between the Savior Himself and Nicodemus, a righteous teacher of the Jews and it is in this context of being "born from above" Christ introduces the lifting of the brazen serpent in the wilderness.

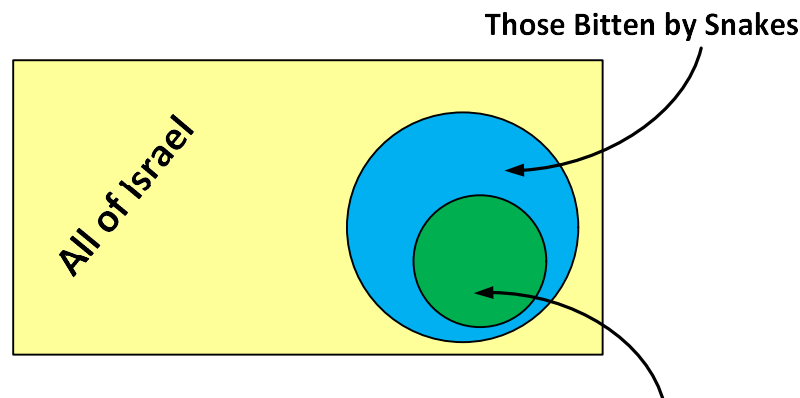In John chapter 3 the Savior discusses the means of salvation of <u>elect Israel</u> alone (sola elect Israel).

Figure 2. The Venn Diagram of the Kosmos of John 3:16

The figure above shows the limiting of the context of John 3:16. The Savior's atonement only addresses the green circle in the Venn diagram above. The Savior's atonement does not apply to the blue circle, outside of the green circle. He only died for the green circle. This limiting of context is one of the driving forces on our word "world" in verses 16 and 17 discussed below.

3.2.   The World of John 3:16
Our English word "world" is of Germanic origin and comes from the Frisian dialect "warld". Our modern German word would be "Welt". Sadly, the KJV Translators chose to translate the underlying Greek word with the English word "world". In many respects

this is unfortunate since "world" does not necessary reflect the consistent meaning of the underlying Greek word.

The underlying word in the original Greek text is the famous word "kosmos". This word is a qualitative word emphasizing the nature or characteristic defining the group under discussion. It rarely means as big or as universal as possible, which the usage (especially its modern usage) does not normally warrant.

Kosmos refers to an *orderly* arrangement of objects, where the emphasis is generally on the "orderliness" of the set of objects. Indeed, the objects themselves are often defined by the *orderliness* (characteristics) they exhibit. We still have this sense in English when we say the World of Walt Disney, where we are only concerned about those items related to Walt Disney; we would not be concerned about the War of 1812 or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Another example would be the World of Jacques Cousteau, where we are not interested in the moons of Jupiter, only in those things that apply to Jacques and his ship "Calypso".

"kosmos" is a word having its emphasis on the *quality* and not *quantity* of its objects. We still see this intention through our English word "cosmetics". Cosmetics are items which address order and emphasis thereby bringing additional beauty to a woman's appearance. If cosmetics made a woman as large as possible the cosmetics industry would long be out of business!

Its "adjectival form" is also used in Scripture to address a woman's manner of dress. In a way that emphasizes her honor and beauty and not in a *slutty* manner. In 1 Tim 2:9 the adjectival form "kosmew" is used by Paul.

> 1 Tim 2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn (kosmew) themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;
> 10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

By translating "kosmew" as adorn the KJV Translators are much closer to Paul's intent.

See also Mat 12:44; 23:29; 25:7; Luke 11:25; 21:5; Tit 2:10; 1 Pet 3:5

We also see how the participial verb form is used for New Jerusalem where the city itself is *adorned* (kosmew) as a bride dresses for her husband on her wedding day. If the kosmos word family meant "being as large as possible", then brides "adorning" themselves for their husbands should mean that they present themselves grossly overweight.

> Rev 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned (kosmew) for her husband.

See also Rev 21:19

> Rev 21:19 And the foundations of the wall of the city *were* <u>garnished with</u> (kosmew) all manner of precious stones.

In its adjectival form it brings with it the sense of *order* and hence *beauty*.

In each of these cases the emphasis is on the characteristic of *orderliness* and not on the size or sheer number of objects. Because our modern usage for kosmos is so often applied to the "universe" we think of its usage to apply to something as large as possible. Something that is unlimited in scope, but in fact, the Greek usage is quite different, and the context must establish the usage of kosmos when used in a universal manner (not the other way around).

It is this qualitative presupposition that we want to bring to the context of John 3:16 because this is how the original audience would have understood the normal usage of the "kosmos" word family. Then the "kosmos" or "order" in which the Savior is discussing with Nicodemus is that order, that set of people whom the Spirit of God breathes upon. Namely, those of His own choosing! This is the world of God's Elect, specifically here in John 3 the elect of Israel.

3.3.   An Exegesis of John 3:16
In this section we breakdown John 3:16 into its various clauses and examine their specific meaning as would a reader of the original Koine Greek.

Our textual breakdown includes:

- English Translation (KJV)
- Actual Greek Text
- Transliterated Greek Text

The discussion below will be with respect to the Transliterated Greek Text for those not familiar with the Greek text.

3.3.1. Clause One (The Statement of God's Love)
In this section we examine the first of the three clauses of John 3:16.

> **For God so loved the world,**
> οὕτως **γὰρ** ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον
> houtos **gar** agapasen ho theos ton kosmon

John 3:16 is introduced to us using the conjunction (connective word) "gar". The purpose of this conjunction (our first of three in this verse) is to connect us to what came before thus establishing the context of verse 16. The *serpent being lifted up* is the context that John is bringing in to verse 16. Note too as stated above, those who are to look upon the serpent *have been ordained to do so by the Spirit of God* ("blowing

(breathing) where He desires" vs. 8). So that each person of "bitten Israel" who gazed upon the brazen serpent was ordained to do so by the will of God's own Spirit.[4]

Our word "so" is from the Greek word "houtos", an emphatic word and used to show the remarkable *intensity* of love being discussed … that God would love such people to sacrifice His own Son. This is an amazing thing within the Godhead. One could also paraphrase … "So great is God's love that He gave…"

Our word for God is the standard Greek word "theos" with the article "ho". In this context it is a specific reference to the Father, who is the source of all deity and first among equals within the Godhead. All *desire* and *will* comes *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *by* the Spirit. So that the entire Godhead is active in the salvation of sinners.

"Loved" is the English word translated from the Greek word "agape". Here we see it in the Aorist tense, where the entire act of God's love toward his saints is viewed as a singular point. As a runner running a race and referring to his action as "Yes, I ran the race", where all of the action of running is viewed as a single point. So, the entire plan of salvation lies within this chapter. This can only be the case if the love of God is a sovereign love and cannot be thwarted in time. The grammar is important and describes much of the nature and character of God's love for his saints (here we are talking specifically about Jewish believers). *Agape* refers to God's self-sacrificial love, a love that is by choice, not by feeling.

As stated above, the "world" to which John is referring comes from our Greek word kosmos (with the article "ton") and is the object of this sentence. It is analogically defined by what came before, namely the order of bitten-Israel who see the brazen serpent. This means our "kosmos" here is precisely the elect among the nation of Israel.

As we examine our context then, our first conjunction "gar" establishes our context by linking us to the limiting of our world's defining audience, namely those who were bitten by the fiery serpents **AND** saw the brazen serpent. Both characteristics need to be fulfilled if one is to be part of the *world* under discussion here in John 3:16. Thus, we are speaking specifically of the elect of Israel. This limiting of our audience (e.g., world) will become even more sharply focused as we continue to Clause Three.

3.3.2. Clause Two (The Result of God's Love)
In this section we examine the second of the three clauses of John 3:16.

> **that he gave his only begotten Son,**
> ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν
> hoste ton huion monogene edken

We are introduced to our second clause by our second conjunction in this remarkable verse. "hoste" is a subordinate conjunction to our first conjunction "gar" and used to

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[4] Note that the entire Trinity is involved with the salvation of the "kosmos". This is not to be taken lightly.

show the *result* of God's love … namely the giving up of His Son. So, God's love is so remarkable toward His elect that He gave up His Son to save <u>His</u> "world" (kosmos), in context the elect of Israel

Our phrase "he gave" refers to the Father giving His son to be incarnated, grow up in human form, be crucified, resurrected, glorified, and eternally ordained to sit on the Father's throne. For tear-jerking details of this remarkable act of love (agape) compare Pro 8:22-30 with John 17 (the true Lord's Prayer).

3.3.3. Clause Three (The Great Purpose Clause of God)
In this section we examine the final of the three clauses of John 3:16.

> **that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.**
> ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ᾽ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον
> **hina** pas ho pisteuwn eis auton me apolytai all exw dzeen aiwon

Our third clause is introduced to us by the using of the Greek <u>conjunction "hina" and the subjunctive mood</u> associated with *believing*, *perishing*, and *having*. The Subjunctive Mood is used to show a weak condition or "possibility". However, when used with our conjunction "hina" it forms a strong condition called a "Purpose Clause" indicating the purpose of what came before, namely God's love for His kosmos and His giving of His Son for that kosmos. As is observed when connected with God's purpose, the purpose clause generally maps to a positive volition ... that is God's purpose will not be thwarted.[5] Thus, everyone part of the kosmos in this verse will in fact be saved.

Also, the third clause is formed in a very interesting way, using a participial phrase describing the *nature* of the elements of the kosmos… namely, they *believe* (see Acts 13:48 for the same idea for Gentile saints). That is to say, their nature is to believe (because God has changed their nature (will)).

The word "pas" means *each* or *every* referring to each individual making up the kosmos.

The word "ho" is so badly translated as "whosoever" I hardly know what to say on this score. There is NO notion of "whosoever" in the Greek text. In fact, "ho" is the <u>definite article</u> used to *definitize* the individual under discussion, namely the one believing.

The participial phrase is formed by the Greek word "pisteuwn" which maps to the entire participial phrase as:

> πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν

> each-believing-upon-him-one

So that the first part of our third clause ought to have been translated as:

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[5] See Daniel Wallace, **Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics**, Zondervan Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, pp.473-474.

"… that He gave His only begotten son, that each-believing-upon-him-one…" emphasizing the nature of the member of the kosmos and not their action.

This was a poor choice for translating the third clause. It is addressing the "nature" of the individuals within the kosmos, NOT their action of believing.

Then we come to phrase of opposition "should not perish". A result of the salvation of the individual is that they do not perish.

Concluding our third part of our third clause as to "having eternal life".

Each of these subjunctives belong to our conjunction "hina" and therefore will actually come to be.

HINA
- Belief in Messiah
- Not perishing
- Has Life Eternal

4.   Conclusions

Pulling this together, we conclude that John 3:16 is better translated:

For God so loved the (elect) kosmos, that He gave His only begotten Son, that "each-believing-upon-him-one" shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Several things are to be gleaned out of this exegesis.

1. No uncertainty is intended here in the teaching of Christ.
2. The kosmos is limited to believing Israel
3. The kosmos will be saved and have everlasting life

God's work of salvation is infinitely efficacious and will in fact come to be. There is no uncertainty within God's decree to save. The notion of "whosoever" and its inherent uncertainty has generated a mass of confusion within the evangelical community since the KJV translators penned the translation. It ought to be tossed and fixed.

Thus, John 3:16 is actually teaching Particular Redemption and not a murky ill-defined universal redemption that is taught almost everywhere today. The finished work of Christ has actually accomplished the Fathers will of desiring to save specific people. Had HE died for more or less than the Father desired then the work of the Trinity would be broken, but the Savior came to fulfill the will of the Father perfectly, and perfectly He did!

The object of Christ's atoning work are precisely those Jews who see the brazen serpent, NOT EVERY JEW around! The same can be said of all other believers (Kingdom Gentiles, Body of Christ)… the Savior's Finished work is specifically for His elects.

5. Comments on the Doctrine of Scripture

The original autographs of the Biblical Scriptures were not written in English, but in Ancient Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek. Whereas the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Syriac, the New Testament was written in Koine[6] Greek. When we look at any of our English Bibles, we are looking at "translations", none of which (including the KJV) are without translational errors. As regenerated students of Scripture it is our job to identify and "clean up" those translational problems and come to a better understanding of the text (2 Tim 2:15). At the simplest level, one can use a host of English translations to aid in "filtering out" any translational issues by comparing as many of the English translations as available to the reader. While this is a "good" method, we must remember that "the good" is often the enemy of "the best". The best method is to be sufficiently familiar with the original languages to be in a position to make textual decisions on your own and with all of today's study aids available at our computer finger tips, if we have the time in our lives, there is no excuse for being unable to pursue this level of expertise. We do not have to become so-called scholars, but I have never met a healthy regenerated person who is not capable of "learning the text".

Each of the subsections below could comprise their own volumes, here we provide mere summaries of what could be said on each of these inter-related topics.

5.1. The Doctrine of Scripture

Having a proper view and definition of Scripture is crucial for a successful Christian walk.

> *In their original autographs the Scriptures are the Word of God, infallible and inerrant in all that they affirm, both in the whole and in the part. The Scriptures constitute the necessary and sufficient rules for doctrine and practice.*

We need to glean several items from our definition of Scripture above.

1. We define the Scriptures within the context of their *original autographs*. This has the practical benefit of not having to defend against the myriad of translations, and places us into a position where we can make certain conclusions about the transmission process of the Scriptures that make up the translations. This process allows us to essentially recover the original text.[7]

2. Not explicitly part of our definition above, but "heavily" presupposed is the doctrine of *Inspiration*. Inspiration refers to the Holy Spirit using the personalities and experiences of the men writing the Scriptures and causing them to write down the very words to which He intended. The Scriptures were not dictated to

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[6] Koine Greek was the *lingua franca* of the ancient Alexandrian world that dominated the area of Alexander's empire for 600 years (300BC to 300AD). This was the Greek spoken by all the New Testament writers.

[7] The notion of the transmission process is beyond the scope of this outline and will not be dealt with here. It is however an especially important issue when discussing the Inerrancy of the Scriptures and the so-called *recovery* of the original text.

the writers. Thus, we can say that while men are the writers of Scripture, God is the Author of Scripture.

3. When we talk of the Scriptures being *infallible*, we are talking about the content to which they contain. This means that the doctrine, history, science, mathematics, etc. discussed in Scripture are done so without content error.

4. When we talk of the Scriptures being *inerrant*, we are talking with regard to the <u>words</u> making up the Scriptures; that the men who penned them, by Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote down perfectly *the very words* intended by God without error. The Holy Spirit used the personalities, experiences, and abilities of the writers of Scriptures to pen the text as He wanted them to be.

5. In our definition of Scripture, we state that the Scriptures *affirm* something. This presupposes a *methodology* by which we can determine what the Scriptures affirm. We briefly discuss this methodology under - 5.6.   Hermeneutics: Modulating and De-Modulating the Word of God.

5.2. Inspiration

Inspiration means, by using the writers' experiences, worldviews, writing style, abilities, and personalities, the Holy Spirit enabled men to pen the precise words down on paper to record exactly <u>what the Holy Spirit intended</u>.

The Scriptures were not dictated like claimed for the Koran or like a business letter dictated to a secretary to write down every little word. Rather, God used the personalities of the writers to pen His text and He did so infallibly and inerrantly with all the quarks of the writers.

In this way, while men are the writers of the Scriptures, God is the Author of the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are a result of the process of inspiration, a work of the Holy Spirit. Men were inspired by God to infallibly write down the Word of God. Thus, *inspiration* has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit operating <u>directly</u> upon the men who wrote the Word of God <u>not</u> the Scriptures themselves. How often have we heard the phrase concerning the Scriptures, "the Inspired Word of God"? While this phrase is not wrong in the sense that the Scriptures are the <u>result</u> of the process of Inspiration, it is not quite accurate to say that the Scriptures are inspired in the sense that they wrote themselves. When we want to discuss the state of the Scriptures and what exactly they are we need to examine one of our topics below – *Inscripturation*.

5.3. Infallibility

When we speak of *infallibility*, we speak of the Scriptures as they relate to and communicate <u>doctrine</u>. We are not talking about whether a wrong word is used in a sentence. When we speak of infallibility, we are stating that the doctrinal content

presented in Scripture is without error.[8] The Scriptures contain no error of reason, presentation, or logic. It is precisely the <u>doctrine</u> that God intends to communicate in His Word.

For examples, the Creation and the Flood (Gen 1-11) are doctrines that present true history and science and are not myths or fairy tales, but rather doctrines which are knowable and are to be articulated, believed, obeyed, and used in our thinking, thought forms, and daily life. We form our worldview from the doctrines contained in Scripture. We do our science within the doctrinal framework contained in Scripture. Within Scripture then there is a doctrinal framework to which we are to aspire, discover, and articulate with joy.

5.4.   Inerrancy

Inerrancy refers to the <u>words</u> of God used to make up Scripture and that they were used and placed in the text without error. The proper words were used, in their proper accidental forms (word formation), proper syntax and grammar (sentence and paragraph construction), and with the proper genre.

This means that within the original languages the Scriptures were penned *without error*.

Whereas *infallibility* addresses the <u>state of doctrine</u> in the Scriptures, *inerrancy* addresses the <u>state of the words</u> making up the Scriptures.

5.5.   Inscripturation

Inscripturation refers to the process by which the Word of God is placed into written form. God used the experiences, personalities, talents, and capabilities of the writers of Scripture to precisely use the proper words and grammar, perfectly communicating the Word of God. In other words, the words of Scripture are perfectly placed and designed to perfectly communicate the Word of God (the message of God). Therefore, *Inscripturation* is defined as

> "… the act of placing the Word of God into the words of God."

Using more of a theological tone, Inscripturation is defined as

> "… the act of placing the Logos (Message) of God into the Rhemata (words) of God."

Using a more technological tone, Inscripturation is defined as:

> "… the act of *modulating* the <u>Word</u> of God, using the <u>words</u> of God"

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[8] As stated above this also includes the historical, scientific, mathematical, etc. content of the Scriptures.
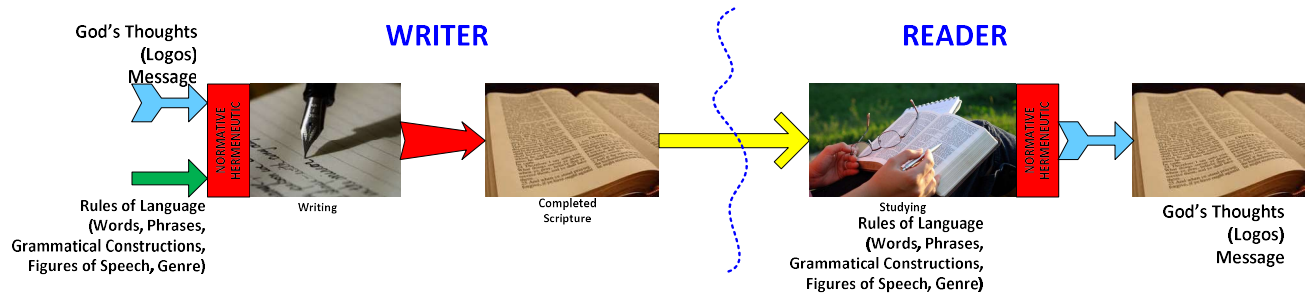
Figure 3. Inscripturating the Logos of God

Step 1: The *writers* using the words of the original language, place their "inspired" thoughts into printed form using the rules of language (called the Normative Hermeneutic [see below]) to form a combined text containing the words of God in such a pattern for us to be able to decipher the message at the other end (the reader). This process is performed in all communications (emails, text books, works of fiction, poetry, etc.).

Step 2: The *readers* using the same rules of grammar and syntax used by the *writers*, unravel the words of God, and discover the Word of God. The readers apply the same rules of grammar and syntax as did the original writers. These rules are called the **Normative Hermeneutic** (see the section below).

When we read the Scriptures, we are looking at a set of symbols (called words) that are in such a pattern to communicate the Author's thoughts. The Word of God is "modulated" with the words of God to form the Scriptures. It is our job to use these rules of language to ascertain (or get at) the message of the Scriptures. The message is the Word of God. While the writers *modulate* the Word of God using the words of God, the readers *de-modulate* the *words* of God to get at the *Word* (doctrine) of God.

5.6.   Hermeneutics: Modulating and De-Modulating the Word of God
Hermeneutics is often referred to as *the science of interpretation*. "Hermeneutics" is a compound word comprising the Greek word "Hermes", who was the Greek god responsible for communicating the will of the gods to the people, and therefore familiar with the rules of the people's written and verbal communication; and "Tekne", which means *craft*, *skill*, or *art*, from which we get our English word "technique". Thus, the compound word means *the technique of Hermes*. In this regard, Hermes is the pagan corruption of Christ as Christ is the Logos (Word) of God.

Hermeneutics refers to the methodology by which the writers used to modulate the Word of God into the words of God and the methodology by which the readers use to de-modulate the words of God to recover the Word of God.

In examining the definition of Scripture used in Section 5.1.   The Doctrine of Scripture we state that the Scriptures affirm doctrine. This presupposes that there exists a *method* by which we can ascertain the doctrine of Scripture. We define this method as follows:

The Scriptures can *only* be properly read, interpreted, understood, and applied when using the *same* rules of accidence, syntax, and grammar that the writers used when writing the original autographs.

This method (set of rules) we shall call the **Normative Hermeneutic**.

We have already read above the meaning of the word *Hermeneutics*, but why use *Normative*? The reason we attach the modifying term "Normative" to the term "Hermeneutics" is because the fundamental rule of communications assumes a "normal" meaning to a word, sentence, Figure of Speech, etc., unless the context demands otherwise.

Within the detailed definition of the Normative Hermeneutic, there exists everything from word usage rules, grammatical construction rules, rules for Figures of Speech, genre and to the characteristics of the doctrinal framework contained in Scripture. We shall focus on the word usage rules and expect the reader to go to the sources referenced in this brief outline for their own edification.

Word Usage Rules
There are four-word usage rules that are relevant to our discussion here. These are repeated below.

1. Unless something in the context demands otherwise, a word is assigned the *meaning* that is consistent with its biblical usage elsewhere in similar contexts, its usage in parallel passages, its usage in the LXX, its secular usage, its root meaning, etc.

2. A *greater burden of proof* is <u>required</u> to justify a *rare* meaning than a common meaning.

3. A word otherwise <u>fixed</u> in meaning *shapes* the context of and hence the meaning of a word otherwise <u>variable</u> in meaning.

4. If a word is found to be <u>quite variable </u>in meaning in *previously* considered contexts, then its meaning in future considered contexts is considered on a "context-by-context" basis. The <u>burden of proof</u> rests upon the shoulders of <u>each</u> proposed meaning.

For our current brief discussion on John 3:16 we shall focus on Word Usage Rules 1 & 3.

Comments on Scripture's Doctrinal Framework
In all of the years that we have been using the term "Normative Hermeneutic" we have unfortunately been remiss on providing a more detailed discussion on *discovering* the

doctrinal framework in Scripture and how to ascertain this framework beyond word and phrase rules. The figure below illustrates the framework in a very simplified manner.
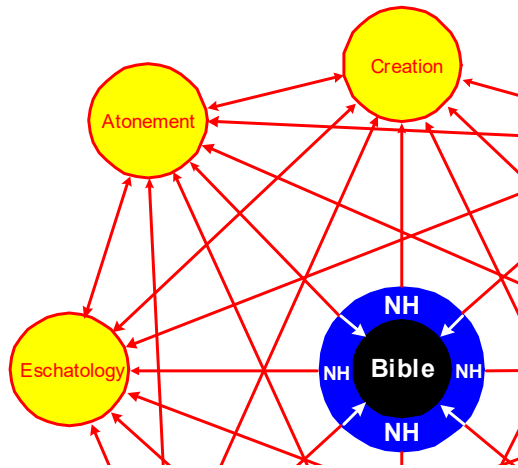

Figure 4. The Doctrinal Framework Contained in Scripture

As a regenerated student of Scripture exegetes the text and gleans various doctrines from the text, these doctrines will begin to intertwine and show their inter-relationships. In many respects one doctrine will modify or provide boundary conditions on related topics. For example, in order to have a complete view of Eschatology, one must have a good handle and view of the "Days of Noah" – *As it was in the Days of Noah, so shall it be in the Days of the Coming of Son o Man*. So, the doctrines of Scripture are designed as a mosaic that perfectly fit inside the glove of God's written revelation. It is the duty of every regenerated student of Scripture to ascertain to the best of their ability the doctrinal framework contained within Scripture.

6. Reading Material

1. John Gill, **The Cause of God and Truth**, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980. Too interesting to put down.

2. John Owens, **The Death of Death and the Death of Christ**, Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA. Remains unanswered.

3. Murray J. Harris, **John 3:16: What's It All About?**, Cascade Book, Wipf & Stock, 2015, This work is a prime example of the errors that can be made when not checking one's exegesis against the underlying original text.

4. Stephen E. Rodabaugh, **An Examination of John 3:16: A Defense of Limited Atonement**, Pittsburgh, PA 1983. Details many of the word usage rules not covered elsewhere. Superb unpublished reference.

5. Gary Long, **Definite Atonement**, Gary Long Publishing, 1977 (Now on CreateSpace). One of the best defenses of Definite Atonement.

6. A.A. Hodge, **The Atonement**, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, Philadelphia, PA. Need to have some familiarity with the original languages. Written from the future Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

7. Dana & Mantey, **A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament**, Macmillan Co., New York, NY, 1942. One of the best Intermediate Grammars from a generation ago.

8. Daniel Wallace, **Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics**, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996. Arguably the best Intermediate Grammar of the current generation.