

“For God So Loved the World...”

John 3:16–4:4

Introduction

When John 3:16 is quoted by itself, one naturally assumes that its meaning is: “For God loved the world so much...” But the word “so” (Gr., *houtos* <3778>) means *thus; in this way; in this manner*, etc. See if you can find *houtos* in these passages:

Matt. 1:18

Matt. 2:5

Matt. 3:15

Matt. 5:16

Matt. 6:9

As you read John 3:16–4:4, consider whether verses 16–21 are a continuation of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, or whether they are John the apostles’ comments to you, the reader. Similarly, are verses 31–36 a continuation of John the Baptists’ comments, or are they the apostle John’s comments you, to the reader (cf. 20:31–32)? Some of the questions are designed to help you decide.

Questions

Verses

1. *In what way did God love the world?* (Note, “For (because) God in this way loved the world...”)
2. *What two “opposites” are featured in these verses?* (Hint: they are also presented in chapter 1)
3. *What did Jesus come to earth to do? What did He **not** come to do?*

Can you think of some passages where Jesus demonstrated why He came (both positive and negative)?

Does that mean He won't ever do it? (Hint: Acts 17:30–31)



4. *According to vs. 18, How are people judged? Does this statement seem to be more valid at the beginning, end, or after Jesus' earthly ministry?*

5. *According to vs. 19, why did people not believe? At what point in Jesus' ministry would this be most applicable?*

6. *Why do people in darkness hate the light?*

7. *Why do people in the light love the light?*

8. *Which comes first: doing the deeds (good or bad) then coming into light or darkness; OR coming into the light or darkness then doing the deeds?*

9. *Which do you think more likely: that verses 16–21 are a continuation of Jesus' words to Nicodemus, or the writer's comments about what was said in verses 1–15?*

3:22–4:3 Jesus and His disciples begin baptizing

Compare the two statements about Jesus baptizing in 3:22 and 4:1–2. Notice that the “credit” for the action goes to the master, even though the followers were performing the action and NOT the master. This is helpful for you to remember, especially when dealing with issues in the Old Testament such as Moses and the burning bush: was the angel speaking to him or was God? For further study on this kind of “representative” authority, compare Acts 7:38 (the an-

gel was giving Moses the oracles on Mt. Sinai, whereas the text in the Old Testament says it was Jehovah).

10. *If you didn't know anything about the method of baptism, would verse 23 suggest that it was a sprinkling of water, a pouring of water over someone, or someone being immersed into water?*

11. *What do you think the "discussion about purification" was, in vs. 25? (Hint # 1: "therefore;" hint #2: they go to John and ask). Who were involved in this discussion?*

12. *What was John's first answer? What does this show about both his and Jesus' preaching and ministry?*

13. *What does John remind his disciples about?*

14. *How does John's metaphor about the bride, the bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom illustrate his answer?*

15. *Based upon John's answers to this "controversy," what do you think would be his expectation and attitude toward imprisonment and even death?*



Verses 31–4:4

16. *How are these verses similar in structure to verses 16–21? (Hint: two different “opposites” are used in these verses.)*

17. *In verse 31, who is he who comes from above? Who is he who is of the earth?*

18. *Who is the one who “bears witness” in verse 32? (Note: the phrase “from above” is the same as in vs. 4, where it is translated “again.”)*

19. *How is it that “no man” received (past tense) the witness of the one “from above” (vs. 32) and yet at least some did receive the witness in vs. 33?*

20. *Which time during Jesus’ earthly ministry do these comments best fit: beginning, end, or after?*

21. *Which do you think more likely: that verses 31–36 are a continuation of John the Baptist’s comments, or the writer’s comments about what happened in the previous verses?*

Which is better?

3:1–21 The story of Jesus’ response to Nicodemus.

OR

3:1–15: Story and teaching

3:16–21: The writer’s comments on the previous verses.

3:22–26: The story of John the Baptist’s response to the “controversy.

3:22–30: Story and teaching

3:31–36: The writer’s comments on the previous verses.

If you chose as your answer that verses 31–36 were a continuation of John the Baptist’s comments, then you would naturally end the discussion and the chapter at verse 36. But if you considered those verses as John the apostle’s comments about what happened in vv. 22–30, then you might view 4:1–3 more as part of that story than an introduction to the next. And even though 4:1–3 can be viewed as belonging to *both* stories (to end the first and to introduce the next), the chapter break can easily cause us to miss that connection.

22. *In 4:1–3, why should the fact that Jesus was “making and baptizing” more disciples than John, be a reason for Jesus to leave Judea to go back to Galilee?*

Closing thoughts

When you read the book of John, it will be helpful to you if you keep reviewing the opening statement of chapter one (1:1–18). The interaction between light and darkness and between heaven and earth starts in the those opening verses of chapter 1 and begins its development here in chapter 3 where He who is from heaven is contrasted with he who is of the earth and the one who loves darkness is contrasted with the one who loves the light. That contrast continues to its climax in chapters 14–16 (Jesus’ last instructions to His apostles before His crucifixion) and culminates in His crucifixion.