

Understanding *the* Times

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF D.A. CARSON
ON THE OCCASION *of* HIS 65TH BIRTHDAY

Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger
and Robert Yarbrough

 **CROSSWAY**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century:
Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Studio Gearbox

Interior design and typesetting: Lakeside Design Plus

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-0719-9

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-0720-5

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-0721-2

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2237-6

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

XX 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Editors' Preface

At a recent lecture, a cameraman planted himself close to Don Carson's podium, palpably distracting the audience from Carson's message. With only a moment's hesitation, Carson paused and asked the man to move, explaining, "We are talking about the *gospel*. The gospel is a lot more important than media." During the same lecture, Carson also referred to an e-mail exchange he had with his daughter Tiffany, who gently chided her dad that he was the only one who sent his daughter e-mails that required the use of a dictionary. These brief vignettes reveal two vital aspects of Don Carson's life and passion: the gospel and his family.

Over the years, Carson has been a close student of evangelicalism. He has taken a keen interest in the doctrine of Scripture, which is one of the most significant benchmarks of the evangelical movement. He has engaged in a worldwide teaching, preaching, and writing ministry that has had a large impact on God's kingdom, both on a church-wide level and on many servants of God and students of Scripture individually. Don Carson truly has proved to be one who exemplifies "understanding the times," like the men of Issachar in Old Testament days, "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chron. 12:32, NIV).

Those who desire to know what the church should do today would do well to listen to Don Carson. Transcending narrow areas of specialization, Carson has not only authored numerous scholarly contributions—including commentaries on Matthew and John, with several others in various stages of production—he has also contributed significantly to a wide variety of current issues in the contemporary church. Whether the issue is gender-inclusive Bible translation, the

emergent church, or postmodernism, to name but a few, Don Carson has provided a judicious assessment of the relevant issues and has prescribed a sensible, constructive way forward.

This volume is but a small token of appreciation for D. A. Carson at the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday by some of his colleagues, former students, and friends. Our focus here—spanning only part of the vast area of Don's interests—is the state of New Testament studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The volume is divided into three parts. The first deals with New Testament studies and ancillary disciplines—Greek linguistics and lexicography, hermeneutics and theological interpretation, the church, and evangelical identity—and features essays by Stanley Porter, Grant Osborne, Mark Dever, and John Woodbridge. The second part is devoted to special topics in New Testament studies. Andreas Köstenberger conducts an in-depth study of the well-known verse John 3:16; Douglas Moo deals with justification in Galatians (against the backdrop of the “New Perspective” on Paul); Peter O'Brien contributes an essay on “the speaking God” in the book of Hebrews; and Eckhard Schnabel provides a thorough study of the language of baptism in Greek, Jewish, and Christian literature. The third part takes the reader on a tour of New Testament studies around the world: Africa, North America, Asia, and Europe, with contributions by Robert Yarbrough, Craig Blomberg, and David Pao.

An appendix discusses D. A. Carson's life and work to date, followed by a selected bibliography of his contribution to New Testament studies. We are well aware that this is but a small installment, with many significant contributions still to come.

A word on the genesis of this project is appropriate. While the idea of a *Festschrift* honoring Don Carson was an obvious one and had been contemplated for several years by both of the editors (along with others), Andy Naselli deserves credit for approaching us and making preliminary contact with Crossway and thus serving as a key catalyst for the project. Andy also compiled a comprehensive bibliography that formed the basis of the “Selected Writings” included at the end of this volume. In addition, Andy made early contributions in the form of possible authors and topics. The editors are very grateful to Andy for the important impetus he provided.

The editors wish to express appreciation to the Henry Center for Theological Understanding, its director, Dr. Douglas A. Sweeney, and

its board members. Without their support, this project would not have been possible.

The editors and contributors to this volume join in expressing our profound gratitude to you, Don, for your tireless work in God's kingdom and for your immeasurable impact on the church and on all of us. May God give you and your dear wife, Joy, many more years of fruitful labor, and may the gospel continue to spread, to God's greater glory and for the good of his people. *Soli Deo gloria.*

Andreas J. Köstenberger, Wake Forest, North Carolina
Robert W. Yarbrough, Deerfield, Illinois
May 1, 2010

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Lifting Up the Son of Man and God's Love for the World

John 3:16 in Its Historical, Literary, and Theological Contexts

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER

John 3:16 is one of the most beloved verses in all of Scripture. Its declaration of God's love for the world, its allusion to Jesus' vicarious sacrifice, and its promise of eternal life for all who respond to God's offer of salvation in Christ through faith have brought hope and comfort to many. In addition, John 3:16 poignantly encapsulates the message of John's entire Gospel and provides a window into the heart of his theology. While John 3:16 is very widely known and loved, however, the verse is often quoted and preached with insufficient regard to its original historical setting and its place in the Johannine narrative.¹

¹The remark by D. A. Carson, "One Way (Matthew 7:13–27)," in *Only One Way? Reaffirming the Exclusive Truth Claims of Christianity*, ed. Richard D. Phillips (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,

This study will attempt to move beyond a “proof text” approach to John 3:16 and examine the verse in its historical, literary, and theological contexts.² The investigation of the historical context will focus on how several other Jewish works from the period between the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 and the Bar Kochba revolt cast the relationship between God’s love and the world. The analysis of the literary context will examine how John 3:16 functions in the Johannine narrative. The study of the theological context will explore the passage’s contribution to John’s theology and to the theology of the New Testament.

As will become evident during the course of our investigation, the universal aspect of John 3:16 comes into sharper focus when the verse is understood in its historical, literary, and theological dimensions. John 3:16 commences the evangelist’s commentary on the preceding narrative, which recounts the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus and serves to draw out the universal implications of Jesus’ words. This universalization, in turn, is part of John’s emphasis on the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the one people of God, which is also affirmed elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Eph. 2:11–22).

I could not have written this essay without the seminal influence of the honoree of this volume, Don Carson, with whom I studied at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School during the years 1990–1993. Apart from many other kindnesses, Don allowed me to use his personal library during one of his Cambridge sabbaticals as I was writing my dissertation on the mission theme in John’s Gospel. Contributing to this Festschrift is both a privilege and a tribute to Don Carson’s shaping influence on many budding scholars all around the world, and I dedicate this essay to him as a small token of my gratitude and high esteem.

Historical Context

Introduction

The Gospel of John was most likely written, at least in part, in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the

2007), 133–34, is pertinent here: “Start with the structure of the sermon, and thus how it fits together. My father used to tell me that a text without a context becomes a pretext for a proof text, so when I was still quite young I learned to look at the context.”

²See the discussion of the “hermeneutical triad” consisting of history, literature, and theology in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).

year 70.³ Jesus is presented by John as the new temple, a new center of worship, in and through whom Jews and Gentiles could worship God in spirit and in truth (see esp. 1:14, 51; 2:14–22; 4:19–24; 9:38; 20:28).⁴ This christological response to the destruction of the temple came at a time when Jews throughout Palestine and the Diaspora were attempting to cope with this momentous event and to grasp the significance of what had taken place.⁵ The Jewish apocalyptic books *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *2 Baruch*, and *4 Ezra*, written within a few decades of John's Gospel, represent some of the manifold ways in which the Jewish people were coping with the loss of Jerusalem and the temple.⁶ Each of these works provides relevant background material by which the distinctiveness of John's bold affirmation of God's love for the entire world in John 3:16 comes into sharper focus.⁷

³See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 60–72, 422–35; and Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSup 220 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), for detailed support of this thesis.

⁴See the discussion of these and other passages in Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman, WUNT 2/219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 69–108 (including additional bibliographic references).

⁵Jacob Neusner, "Judaism in a Time of Crisis: Four Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple," *Judaism* 21 (1972): 313–27, provides a basic survey of the primary responses to the temple's destruction.

⁶See Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 298–300, for a series of arguments that the Gospel of John should be dated to the mid-80s or early 90s AD. R. Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), 1:683, dates the *Apocalypse of Abraham* between AD 70 and the middle of the second century and notes a broad scholarly consensus that the book was composed around the turn of the century. A. F. J. Klijn, "2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, 1:617, dates *2 Baruch* to the first or second decade of the second century. Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 9, dates *4 Ezra* during the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96) based on a widely agreed-upon identification of the third head in the eagle vision (chaps. 11–12) with Domitian.

⁷The appropriateness of choosing these three texts as a relevant background for John 3:16 rests on three factors: (1) each book functions, in one way or another, as a response to the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple; (2) each book was probably written between the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 and the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 132–135; (3) John, as the probable author of the book of Revelation, would have been keenly aware of and sympathetic to the apocalyptic genre. See Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 810–14, for a discussion of the authorship of Revelation.

The Apocalypse of Abraham

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* presents a bleak picture of God's relationship to the Gentile world. The distinction between God's people—the Jews—and the Gentiles is built into the cosmic structure of the universe from the very beginning (21:1–22:5). From the beginning of creation, God has divided humanity into two groups: the descendants of Abraham on the right and the Gentiles on the left (“the people with Azazel,” i.e., Satan, 22:4–5).

The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple is seen in a vision of a crowd of heathens from the left side of the cosmos capturing and slaughtering those on the right (27:1–6). In the coming age, the Gentiles who ruled over the Jewish people in this age will be judged:

Because I have prepared them [to be] food for the fire of Hades, and [to be] ceaseless soaring in the air of the underworld [regions] of the uttermost depths, [to be] the contents of a wormy belly. . . . For they shall putrefy in the belly of the crafty worm Azazel, and be burned by the fire of Azazel's tongue. (31:3, 5)⁸

The book ends with God addressing Abraham, making reference to a nation (Egypt) that will enslave and oppress Israel “for one hour of the impious age,” and reassuring Abraham that he is the judge of “the nation whom they shall serve” (32:1–4). Clearly, God's love for the entire world—including Gentiles—is foreign to the worldview underlying the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

2 *Baruch*

Even though 2 *Baruch* does not ground the division between Israel and the nations of the world in the cosmological structure of the universe as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does, there is no doubt as to where God's affections lie. Israel is described as those “whom you love” (5:1) and is called “a beloved people on account of your name” (21:21). In the attached letter to the twelve tribes in captivity, Baruch writes, “I remember, my brothers, the love of him who created me, who loved us from the beginning and who never hated us but, on the contrary, chastised us” (78:3). The special relationship between God and Israel is grounded in God's election: “For these are the people

⁸All quotations from the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are from Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations in this chapter are from the ESV.

whom you have elected, and this is the nation of which you found no equal" (48:20), who are blessed because "we did not mingle with the nations" (48:23).

In the future, "the nations will be thoroughly punished" (13:6). "But now, you nations and tribes, you are guilty, because you have trodden the earth all this time, and because you have used creation unrighteously" (13:11). While painting a rather dismal overall picture of the Gentiles' future, however, *2 Baruch* does offer some hope to the nations of the world who had no part in the subjugation of Israel:

After the signs have come of which I have spoken to you before, when the nations are moved and the time of my Anointed One comes, he will call all nations, and some of them he will spare, and others he will kill. These things will befall the nations which will be spared by him. Every nation which has not known Israel and which has not trodden down the seed of Jacob will live. And this is because some from all the nations have been subjected to your people. All those, now, who have ruled over you or have known you, will be delivered up to the sword. (72:2–6)

This passing glimmer of hope for the nations who did not oppress Israel, however, does not represent the overall emphasis of *2 Baruch*. In the last black waters of the book, protection is said to be provided for those who are considered part of the holy land while all other nations and peoples of the world will be devoured: "The whole earth will devour its inhabitants. And the holy land will have mercy on its own and will protect its inhabitants at that time" (70:10–71:1). As in the case of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *2 Baruch* is far removed from the notion that God's love extends to the entire world, including Gentiles as well as Jews.

4 Ezra

Fourth Ezra presents a far more complicated picture of God's relationship to the world through the interplay of Ezra's probing questions concerning theodicy and the angel Uriel's responses. Ezra is deeply concerned with the problem of evil, which is traced back to Adam's sin at the beginning of time. Adam's original sin bequeathed an evil seed to all his descendants, both Jew and Gentile (*4 Ezra* 3:7, 20–22, 26; 7:118). This universal sin problem leads to Ezra's concern that very few,

regardless of ethnicity, are righteous enough to receive salvation and that all will therefore experience judgment and punishment (7:17–18, 45–48, 62–69, 116–26). Ezra’s love for the world seems to surpass even God’s love for the world, for God seems unperturbed by the fact that the majority of the human race is doomed to destruction because of its unrighteousness (7:17–25, 45–74; 7:132–8:3, 37–62).⁹

Alden Thompson notes that one of the key interpretive decisions to be made regarding *4 Ezra* concerns the question of which perspective represents the “author’s real concern, and therefore his purpose in writing”: Ezra’s universal compassion for all humankind or God’s future deliverance of Israel and his destruction of the nations.¹⁰ While space precludes a full treatment of this question, the revelatory emphasis of the apocalyptic genre itself strongly suggests that greater authority resides in the angel’s pronouncements concerning God’s will and ways than in humanity’s questions.¹¹

What is more, the fourth vision clearly signals a shift in Ezra’s attitude by which he seems to be thoroughly converted to God’s perspective.¹² The fifth and sixth visions are typical of other apocalyptic writings and portray the destruction of the Romans (12:10–34) and God’s enemies, the nations (13:33–38), and the regathering of the ten lost tribes of Israel (13:39–50). In these final visions, the focus returns to the salvation of ethnic Israel in distinction from her enemies, the other nations of the world (13:48–50).

Ezra’s concern for the impending damnation of the peoples of the world in the coming judgment clearly indicates that some Jews, even

⁹Despite God’s declaration to Ezra that “you come far short of being able to love my creation more than I love it” (*4 Ezra* 8:47), he never responds positively to Ezra’s prayers for mercy on the unrighteous but closes the third vision with the statement, “So let the multitude perish which has been born in vain, but let my grape and my plant be saved, because with much labor I have perfected them” (9:22).

¹⁰Alden L. Thompson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra*, SBLDS 29 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 288. Thompson argues that Ezra’s concern over humanity’s moral inability to live righteously represents the motivating force of the book. While this is certainly a primary concern of the third vision, it does not seem to account sufficiently for Ezra’s “conversion” in the fourth vision and the focus on ethnic Israel in visions one, two, and five through seven. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 35–36, argues that the message of the book is tied to the destruction of Zion: “In an essential way, the response to the underlying issues is given in the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem which comforts Ezra for Jerusalem’s present destruction and by the two dream visions which promise the destruction of Rome and the redemption and vindication of Israel” (36).

¹¹See John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20.

¹²Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 31–32.

following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, were deeply concerned for the salvation of those outside ethnic Israel. The problem remained, however, that this concern for humankind was not incorporated into the reigning paradigm, which emphasized God's exclusive love for, and election of, Israel and the future salvation of Israel and judgment of the Gentiles.¹³

The two concerns—that for the salvation of those outside ethnic Israel and that for the future salvation of Israel and the judgment of the Gentiles—sustain an uneasy coexistence, and Ezra, despite his compassion, comes out in full support of the reigning paradigm in the final four visions. The result is that even though *4 Ezra* evinces a spiritual concern for the nations of the world, it lacks the needed theological building blocks to translate this compassion into a concrete message of salvation for the nations.

Conclusion

The Jewish literature examined above, written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70, focuses on God's love and election of Israel with particular attention on Israel's final vindication and the judgment of her enemies.¹⁴ The immediate difference, apart from genre, that surfaces when these responses to the destruction of Jerusalem are compared with John's Gospel is christological.¹⁵ John was convinced that Jesus represented God's decisive intervention in the affairs of the world to bring salvation to *all* who believed, whether Jew or Gentile. John's christology provided him with the theological material necessary to bring together the apparently conflicting ideas found in documents such as *4 Ezra*, which speak of compassion for all the people of the world while maintaining God's special concern for national Israel.¹⁶

¹³Compare the emphasis on God's election of and exclusive love for Israel in *4 Ezra* 5:23–27, 33.

¹⁴Josephus represents an additional literary response to the destruction of Jerusalem, but because of his Roman sympathies and life in Rome he can hardly be considered representative of broader Judaism. Likewise, scholars debate whether or not Pseudo-Philo should be dated prior or subsequent to the year 70. Regardless of the date, Pseudo-Philo's narrative emphasizes the themes noted above of God's election and special relationship with Israel (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 6, 7, 11). Cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 267; and D. R. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, 2:299.

¹⁵Cf. Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 66.

¹⁶In a certain sense, it could be said that John 3:16 provides an answer to the burning question of theodicy represented in Ezra's third vision, a question that is never adequately answered in

In John, the Jews are not given special privilege but are subsumed under all of humanity, without, however, losing their distinctiveness as a people.¹⁷ The question of their salvation or judgment is dealt with in John's Gospel, but allegiance to Jesus replaces ethnicity as the determining factor.¹⁸ The above survey of John's historical setting reveals the stark contrast between the worldview underlying John's Gospel and other Jewish perspectives from roughly the same time period. While, in response to the horrific Jewish war, many Jews in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora longed for revenge and divine vindication, which would consist in the destruction and punishment of the nations, John 3:16 rings forth loud and clear as an affirmation of God's love for the entire world, expressed in the sending of his Son for the salvation of all who believed.

Literary Context

Introduction

Now that we have investigated John 3:16 from a historical vantage point, we move on to an exploration of the passage's literary dimension. In so doing, it will at times be helpful, if not inevitable, to anticipate later findings in our study of the theological message conveyed by this verse. With regard to boundary markers, the spatial changes in geographical setting at 2:13 (from Capernaum to Jerusalem) and 3:22 (from Jerusalem to the Judean countryside) delimit the immediate narrative context for reading 3:16 to 2:13–3:21, the first recorded Passover in John.¹⁹ This section is further subdivided into 2:13–22 (the temple clearing) and 2:23–3:21 (the Nicodemus narrative). Apart from the joint spatial and temporal setting of Jerusalem at the Passover, 2:13–22 sustains several links with 2:23–3:21. The “sign” of the temple clearing (cf. 2:18) is most likely included in the global references to Jesus' signs in 2:23 and 3:2, and Jesus' statement concerning the temple's destruction and the raising of

⁴*Ezra*. God loves the entire world and has acted decisively in history in and through the Messiah to provide eternal life for all who believe in him.

¹⁷Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 65, observes that “God is at work through Jesus' death and resurrection to bring in a new family to God (1.12; 20.17) through faith in Jesus Christ.”

¹⁸See, e.g., 3:18, 36; 5:24–30; 6:40; 8:24; 11:25–26; 12:48–50; 20:31. For a fuller treatment, see Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, chap. 10.

¹⁹This Jerusalem narrative (2:13–3:21), in turn, fits within the broader Cana cycle (2:1–4:54), which begins and ends with Cana as a geographical *inclusio*.

Jesus' body in 2:19 (cf. 2:20–22) anticipates the reference to the “lifting up” of the Son in 3:14.²⁰

The Nicodemus Narrative

The Nicodemus narrative can be divided into three primary sections: an introduction (2:23–25); the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus (3:1–15); and the evangelist's commentary (3:16–21).²¹ The recurrence of the words “man” in 2:25 and 3:1 (γὰρ ἐγίνωσκεν τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ. Ἦν δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων) and “signs” (τὰ σημεῖα) in 2:23 and 3:2, along with the fact that the antecedent for the pronouns in 3:2 (αὐτόν . . . αὐτῷ) appears in 2:24 (Ἰησοῦς), clearly suggests that 2:23–25 is intended as the introduction to 3:1–15.²² Nicodemus was one of the people who “believed” on account of Jesus' signs, but one to whom Jesus did not entrust himself because he knew what was in all people.²³ The introductory section also serves as a narrative link between the temple clearing and the Nicodemus narrative. The Jewish leadership responds with hostility to Jesus' ministry (2:18, 20); the general population reacts with a degree of superficial belief based on Jesus' signs (2:23); and Nicodemus, as a leader of the Jews (3:1; cf. 2:18, 20) and as a “believer” (cf. 2:23), represents a character who embodies elements from both responses. As the dialogue

²⁰See Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 196–97, 323–35, for a detailed argument for the inclusion of the temple clearing among the Johannine signs.

²¹Opinions are divided as to where the Evangelist's commentary begins. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 90, maintains that Jesus' words continue through 3:21. Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 99, contends that the Evangelist's comments begin in 3:12 or 3:16 at the latest. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 1:360, argues for 3:13 as the transition to the Evangelist's reflections. Several points support 3:16 as the beginning of John's commentary: (1) Jesus alone uses the expression “Son of Man” (3:15) in the Gospel (12:34 is no real exception); (2) the introductory phrase of 3:16, οὕτως γάρ, signals a transition (cf. the use of γάρ to introduce the Evangelist's comments or clarification in 3:24; 4:8, 9, 44, 45; 6:64; 13:11, 29; 19:31, 36; 20:9; 21:7); (3) the cross is spoken of as a past event; (4) John alone uses μονογενής in the Gospel (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18); and (5) a similar transition occurs between 3:27–30 and 3:31–36. Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 185, 203; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 202; Gary M. Burge, *John*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 113, 117–18; and Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, NAC 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 180.

²²See the analysis of the pericope by Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 278–87.

²³I.e., the sinful condition of unbelief. This notion is conveyed by the play on words in the Greek original (ἐπίστευσαν . . . ἐπίστευεν).

progresses, however, it becomes evident that Nicodemus functions in the narrative as a representative of the unbelieving world's inability to recognize Jesus' true identity.²⁴

Jesus' interchange with Nicodemus centers on entrance requirements for the kingdom of God.²⁵ Nicodemus's comments steadily decrease as the conversation progresses and reveal a consistent lack of understanding. The double reference to the kingdom of God in 3:3 and 3:5 constitutes the only use of that phrase in John's Gospel (cf. "my kingdom" in 18:36) and serves as a strong indication of the historicity of the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus.²⁶ It is quite possible that the scarcity of the phrase in John (in contrast to the Synoptics) reflects life between the destruction of Jerusalem and the Bar Kochba revolt, where retention of "kingdom" language could easily be interpreted in terms of political sedition (cf. the concern expressed in 11:48).²⁷ John most likely retains the use of "kingdom" language here because it represents the historical content of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Theologically, the emphasis on the necessity of spiritual regeneration for entrance into God's kingdom in the Nicodemus pericope serves as an explanation for the antagonism of the Jewish leadership and

²⁴Craig Blomberg, "The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation: A Test Case—John 3–4," *BBR* 5 (1995): 5–7, cogently argues in favor of seeing John's portrait of Nicodemus as "substantially more negative." See also the discussion in Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 118–20.

²⁵Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, 284–85, draw attention to how Jesus sets the topic of conversation after rejecting the possible topics offered by Nicodemus.

²⁶On the historical reliability of John's Gospel, see especially Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2002); Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story*, WUNT 123 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); D. A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyn-Bul* 33 (1982): 59–91; Martin Hengel, "Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle für die Geschichte des antiken Judentums," in *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana: Kleine Schriften II*, WUNT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 293–334; Köstenberger, *John*; Köstenberger, "John," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 2:1–216; Eugene Lemcio, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels*, SNTSMS 68 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000); and Leon Morris, "History and Theology in John's Gospel," in *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 65–138; contra Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²⁷John 2:21–22, likewise, most likely indicates an intentional desire on John's part to differentiate between a historical account and post-Easter reflection.

the shallow belief of the people. Entrance into the kingdom of God is dependent not on ethnicity but on the new birth (3:3, 5–7). This confirms that old-style Judaism—represented preeminently by the temple that would soon be destroyed, but also by the half-hearted belief of the people and Nicodemus—was in desperate need of personal spiritual renewal. John 3:14–15 represents the climax of the Nicodemus narrative and Jesus' answer to the question as to how this new birth would be accomplished (cf. 3:9).

Jesus' answer concerning the *how* of the new birth in 3:14–15 centers on a typological comparison between himself and the bronze serpent in the wilderness, featured in the account of Numbers 21:8–9.²⁸ Upon Moses' intercession, God provided a way of salvation in the form of a raised bronze serpent, so that whoever was bitten and looked at the serpent survived. By way of typological fulfillment, Jesus prophesies his own "lifting up," so that whoever "looked" upon him by believing would in him have the life of the age to come (i.e., eternal life, ζῶην αἰώνιον). Jesus here presents himself as the source of salvation, entrance into the kingdom of God, and bringer of the life of the coming age (cf. John 14:6).

John 3:16, as mentioned, most likely marks the opening words of the evangelist's commentary, taking on a function similar to that of a narrator who directly addresses the audience following a scene in a play. Specifically, John helps his readers understand the significance of Jesus' words to Nicodemus by pointing out their universal import (3:16). Because belief in Jesus is the sole requirement for entrance into eternal life, "whoever" believes—whether Jew or Gentile—will not perish but have eternal life. The universal scope of the gospel is grounded in God's love for the world (κόσμος), which led him to give his one and only (μονογενής) Son.

"World" (κόσμος) in John's Gospel typically refers to sinful humanity and only rarely to material creation.²⁹ It embraces all of

²⁸For a detailed analysis, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 434–37.

²⁹As Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 122–23, writes, "closer inspection shows that although a handful of passages preserve a neutral emphasis the vast majority are decidedly negative. There are no unambiguously positive occurrences. The 'world,' or frequently 'this world' (e.g., 8:23; 9:39; 11:9; 18:36), is not the universe, but the created order (especially of human beings and human affairs) in rebellion against its Maker (e.g., 1:10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18–19; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14). Therefore when John tells us that God loves the world (3:16), far from

humanity, both Jew and Gentile, which sets itself in opposition to God.³⁰ “One and only” (NIV, *μονογενής*) accentuates the greatness of God’s gift and, here as well as in its other instances in John’s Gospel (1:14, 18; 3:18), recalls Abraham’s similar sacrifice of his son Isaac (Genesis 22).³¹ God’s “giving” of his Son in 3:16 should be interpreted in light of the Passover theme and its fulfillment in Jesus, an important Johannine motif pervading the Gospel.³² Jesus’ fulfillment of Passover symbolism, in turn, is related to John’s presentation of Jesus as the new temple.

Concerning the clearing of the temple, Porter writes, “Then, through a series of interchanges with the leaders who interrogate him, Jesus is depicted as transferring himself by reference to his own body into the equation as the substitute for the temple sacrificial system, that is, the temple system oriented toward the Passover sacrifice.”³³ The setting of John’s reference to God’s giving of his Son (3:16) in the context of Jesus’ first Passover in Jerusalem and clearing of the temple is significant. The significance of Jesus’ Passover sacrifice, however, is extended beyond the borders of ethnic Israel. Jesus is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the entire world (1:29) and thus be the Savior of the world, reaching beyond the confines of Israel (4:42; cf. 3:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:14).

being an endorsement of the world, it is a testimony to the character of God. God’s love is to be admired not because the world is so big but because the world is so bad.”

³⁰Carson (*ibid.*, 205), states, “From this survey it is clear that it is atypical for John to speak of God’s love for *the world*, but this truth is therefore made to stand out as all the more wonderful. Jews were familiar with the truth that God loved the children of Israel; here God’s love is not restricted by race” (emphasis original).

³¹See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, AB 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 147; and N. A. Dahl, “The Atonement—An Adequate Reward for the Akeda? (Ro 8:32),” in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, ed. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 28.

³²For a detailed development of this theme, see Köstenberger, *Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 414–20. See also Gerald L. Borchert, “The Passover and the Narrative Cycles in John,” in *Perspectives on John: Method and Interpretation in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Robert B. Sloan and Mikeal C. Parsons (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 303–16; Paul M. Hoskins, *That Scripture Might Be Fulfilled: Typology and the Death of Christ* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2009); Stanley E. Porter, “Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel? An Examination of the Old Testament Fulfillment Motif and the Passover Theme,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and William R. Stegner, JSNTSup 104 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 396–428; and Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

³³Porter, “Traditional Exegesis,” 412. Porter discusses the following instances of Passover symbolism in the John’s Gospel: 1:19–36; 2:13–25; 6:1–14, 22–71; 11:47–12:8; 13:1–17:26; and 19:13–42 (esp. vv. 14, 29, 31, 36–37).

It is in light of the destruction of the temple that the universal significance of Jesus as the replacement of the temple and the fulfillment of the Passover can be seen. In the year 70, Judaism lost its ability to access God through the Jerusalem temple and through the Passover sacrifice. John presents Jesus as the answer. This new temple and final Passover sacrifice, not dependent on a particular geographical location (John 4:21–24), embodies God's love for the entire world. Allegiance to Jesus, demonstrated through believing in him, produces the new birth that enables entrance into the kingdom of God. This emphasis on Jesus alone, the fulfillment of the Passover and replacement of the temple, as the sole requirement for entrance into God's kingdom provides the theological rationale in John's Gospel for the universal proclamation of the gospel regardless of racial identity (20:31).

Conclusion

The universal significance of Jesus' words would not have been understood by Nicodemus in the original conversation. He would have understood the "kingdom of God" in nationalistic, ethnic terms. The typology presented by Jesus in 3:14–15 would have been limited to ethnic Israel. Just as the national people of Israel looked to the serpent for healing, so the national people of Israel would look at the exalted Son of Man for the life of the age to come.³⁴ Nicodemus would likewise not have thought of the "whoever" in 3:15 as extending beyond the borders of Israel. Yet a noticeable shift of perspective occurs from 3:15 to 3:16, where John's commentary on the preceding narrative functions to broaden the scope of the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus to make it clear that "whoever" refers to the entire world, Jew as well as Gentile.

Theological Context

The exploration of the theological context surrounding John 3:16 will proceed by examining several important themes from the surrounding narrative (2:13–3:21) through the Gospel as a whole and briefly through the broader context of New Testament theology. The three themes that will be examined in John's Gospel are (1) the new birth, (2) the lifting up of the Son of Man, and (3) God's love for the world.

³⁴"Lifting up" would not have been understood as crucifixion at this point in the narrative; see below.

The Johannine Context

The New Birth

John 1:11–13 foreshadows the emphasis in the Nicodemus pericope on the necessity and universality of a new birth.³⁵ The Word, the true light, came to his own (the Jews), who did not receive him (1:11). In contrast to his rejection by his own, whoever received him—that is, believed in him, whether Jew or Gentile—would become a child of God (1:12–13). This supernatural birth from God is contrasted with natural birth from blood or the will of man (1:12; cf. Nicodemus’s confusion in 3:4). In 1:11–13, the prologue introduces both the necessity of a new birth and its universal availability (cf. 3:16).

This contrast between birth from God and natural birth resurfaces in the conflict between Jesus and the Jews in 8:31–59. Jesus emphasizes that the Jews’ rejection of him proves that God is not their Father (8:42), despite their status as descendants of Abraham (8:37, 56). Their rejection of Jesus indicates that their true descent is from Satan, the prototypical liar and murderer (8:44). Although the language of new birth is not used, it is clear that being a child of God, that is, calling God “Father,” is dependent on allegiance to Jesus and not physical descent or ethnicity.

The universal emphasis on the children of God is reiterated in John’s commentary on Caiaphas’s advice that it would be better for one man to die in place of the entire nation (11:50). John indicates that Caiaphas spoke better than he knew, for Jesus would indeed die for the Jewish nation, yet not for the Jews alone, but also for the scattered people of God, in order to make them one (11:51–52).³⁶ John here interprets the significance of Jesus’ death primarily in terms of bringing unity between the Jewish nation and the Gentiles as the universal children of God.³⁷

³⁵On the new birth, see the discussion in Köstenberger, *Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, chap. 12, sec. 28.

³⁶The emphasis on the unity between the Jewish nation and the scattered people of God (Gentiles) in 11:52 likely informs Jesus’ prayer for the unity of those who would believe in him through the message of his disciples (17:20–23). The unity he prayed for is the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the one people of God.

³⁷See also Jesus’ affirmation in 10:16, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd,” on which see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor,” *BBR* 12 (2002): 67–96.

The Lifting Up of the Son of Man

In addition to the emphasis on the new birth, the lifting up of the Son of Man (3:14) significantly conveys this universal message. It was noted above that Jesus presents himself as the typological fulfillment of the raised serpent of Numbers 21:8–9. The physical life of the Numbers account corresponds to eternal life,³⁸ while the lifted-up serpent corresponds to the lifted-up Son of Man. Jesus presents himself as the means to new spiritual life (cf. 1:12). “Lifted up” (ὕψωθῆναι) carries the double meaning of Jesus’ exaltation and elevation in crucifixion on the cross (cf. 8:28; 12:32, 34). The phrase most likely draws on Isaiah’s account of the suffering servant who would both suffer and be lifted up (ὕψωθήσεται) and exalted (Isa. 52:13–14).³⁹ Although Nicodemus would not have understood the “lifting up” to involve crucifixion, this double meaning becomes evident as the Johannine narrative progresses (see 8:28 and especially 12:33).

The reference to the lifting up of the Son of Man in 12:32 is particularly important for infusing the concept with universal significance. It is through being lifted up that Jesus will draw all people (πάντας) to himself. Similar to John’s interpretation of Caiaphas’s remarks, Jesus’ crucifixion is presented as the indispensable prerequisite for him to draw all people, both Jew and Gentile, to himself. It was thus a salvation-historical necessity for the offer of salvation to go first to the Jews but then also to the Gentiles. The typological interpretation of Numbers 21:8–9 thus expands the boundaries of the people of God. In Numbers 21, it was *the Jewish people* who looked with faith upon the serpent for healing, while in John 3:16 it is *the entire world* that must look to Jesus in faith for salvation.

God’s Love for the World

God’s love for the world provides the third major theme that serves to universalize the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus. John 15:13 well expresses the connection between love and sacrifice. Jesus, sent by God because of the greatness of his love for the world he has made, is the one who willingly laid down his life for his friends. The

³⁸John 3:15 is the first reference to eternal life in the Gospel; see later 3:16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2–3.

³⁹See Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 136–37; and C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 247.

limitation of Jesus' love to his "friends" stands in apparent tension with the universal scope of God's love in 3:16.⁴⁰ Does God love the entire world of sinful, hostile humanity or only his own people who are in the world? Don Carson is right to point out that "all believers have been chosen out of the world (15:19); they are not something other than 'world' when the gospel first comes to them. They would not have become true disciples apart from the love of God for the world."⁴¹ There is thus a direct line of continuity extending from God's love for the world to his special love for the disciples and to those who believe in Jesus for salvation.

The world-encompassing extent of God's love in Jesus is practically expressed through John's Trinitarian mission theology.⁴² Divine mission pervades the entire Gospel. God, in divine love, sent Jesus for the purpose that he might be "lifted up"—crucified and subsequently exalted—in order to bring salvation to all who believe. The Spirit witnesses with believers in Jesus the Messiah (15:26–27) and empowers the community's proclamation (20:22–23). Jesus' prayer in 17:20 foresees the spread of salvation to those who will believe through the message of the original followers. In 20:21, Jesus' mission to bring salvation to a hostile and lost world is explicitly extended to include his disciples. God's love for the world is concretely expressed through the Trinitarian mission to bring salvation to the entire world in which believers are made active participants.

Two historical events, in particular, shaped John's interpretation of Jesus' words in John 3:16. The first, as mentioned, was the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple. With Jesus as the new temple and the center of worship, access to God was no longer limited by geography (4:21–24), ethnicity, or ritual ceremonies. The second significant historical event was the Gentile mission, which, by the time of John's writing, had already long been underway (cf. the book of Acts). The Gentile mission, for its part, represented the church's involvement in God's Trinitarian mission to the world. Since God himself was on a

⁴⁰Cf. Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 204, for a discussion of the more typical restricted circle of love between the Father, the Son, and the disciples throughout the Gospel.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 205.

⁴²See chap. 8 in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, NSBT 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); and Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John's Trinitarian Mission Theology," *SBJT* 9 (2005): 14–33.

mission to the entire world—not merely the Jews—the church must participate in that mission.

The New Testament Context

God's love for the world and his action, in the giving of his Son, to save sinful humanity is a central theme in New Testament theology.⁴³ Paul celebrates this love by proclaiming how "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8; cf. Eph. 2:4–5; 2 Thess. 2:16). Both John 3:16 and Romans 5:8 emphasize how the death of Christ, as the supreme and all-sufficient manifestation of God's love, is directed toward sinners (the world). Even though Christ's death is directed toward sinners, those who respond by looking to the lifted-up Son of Man in faith experience new birth, that is, regeneration and new spiritual life (John 3:3, 5; Gal. 6:15; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23).

The universality of God's love and the resultant mission to the entire world, both Jew and Gentile, likewise constitute a primary theme of New Testament theology. The "Great Commission" provides a clear expression of the universal significance of Christ's coming: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19; cf. Matt. 24:14; Luke 24:47). In Christ, the dividing wall, the barrier that separated Jews from Gentiles, has been broken down (Eph. 2:14–15), and the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ is being proclaimed to every nation (cf. Gal. 3:28–29; Col. 3:11).

The "Gentile mission," preeminently associated with Paul, receives different, but complementary, theological support in John and in Paul. Paul grounds his proclamation to the Gentiles particularly in his interpretation of the Abrahamic narrative (Rom. 4:1–25; Gal. 3:6–9, 14–18). He draws attention to the fact that Abraham was justified by faith (Gen. 15:6) before the law was given or circumcision commanded (Rom. 4:9–15), that God's original promise of blessing included the nations (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; Gal. 3:8–9), and that the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, Jesus Christ (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7; Gal. 3:16). Interpretation of specific texts in representative portions of the Hebrew Scriptures, whether in the Law or in the Prophets (primarily Gen. 15:6 and Hab. 2:4; cf. Rom.

⁴³See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

1:1–2; 3:21) provides Paul with the theological justification for his proclamation to the Gentiles (see esp. Rom. 1:16–17).

John, on the other hand, does not derive the universal significance of Jesus' messianic mission from the Abraham narrative or a specific text from the Hebrew Scriptures. Instead, he portrays Jesus' mission more broadly against a wider salvation-historical backdrop, presenting Jesus as the fulfillment and replacement of the major Jewish festivals and institutions.⁴⁴ Salvation-historically, the evangelist draws heavily from antecedent theology in the Hebrew Scriptures, including creation, the exodus, the revelation of God's glorious presence in the tabernacle and the temple, the exile, and Davidic typology.⁴⁵

God's giving of his Son out of love for the world is connected with every major aspect of Israel's history and provides the fulfillment toward which that history pointed. Since the festivals and institutions had been fulfilled and replaced by Jesus, no ethnic or cultural barriers remained that hindered the universal proclamation of God's love and his provision of salvation in his Son. In this way, John 3:16 transformed the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus over the question of entrance into the kingdom of God into a universal declaration of God's love for the world and the sufficiency of Jesus' "lifting up" to enable anyone who believed not to perish but to have the life of the age to come.

In his proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles, Paul is careful not to deny or minimize the importance of the Jews as God's covenant people (e.g., Rom. 1:16; 9–11). Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, movingly pleaded, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39). John, likewise, emphasizes Jesus' words that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22), while at the same time refusing to limit the scope of salvation to ethnic Israel. Without denying that the Jews are God's chosen people, both Paul and John are emphatic that the message of salvation in God's Son, Jesus, extends to the entire world.

⁴⁴For a thorough discussion of salvation history in John's Gospel, see Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 403–35. See also John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992). D. A. Carson, "John and the Johannine Epistles," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honor of Barnabas Lindars SSF*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 254, rightly observes that, "What is perhaps most noteworthy is not how many of the themes and institutions converge on Jesus, but how they are so presented as to make Jesus 'fulfill' them and actually *replace* them."

⁴⁵See Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 403–12, for a fuller development of these themes.

Conclusion

The study of John 3:16 in its historical, literary, and theological contexts not merely confirms but even enhances the theological significance of this beloved verse in Scripture. As we have seen in the preceding study, the returns of a thorough exploration of this passage are rich indeed. The investigation of the historical context focused on how, in response to the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple by the Romans, John 3:16 issues a universal proclamation of God's love for the entire world. This proclamation sets itself starkly apart from other Jewish responses to Jerusalem's destruction during the same period, which looked forward to the salvation of ethnic Israel and the destruction of her enemies, the Gentile nations.

The examination of the literary context drew attention to the function of John 3:16 as a commentary on the interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus. John's emphasis on Jesus' fulfillment of Passover symbolism in his replacement of the temple (cf. 2:13–22) finds deeper meaning in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus concerning the new birth, entrance into the kingdom of God, and the typological fulfillment of Numbers 21:8–9. In Jesus as the new temple, there are no particular ethnic, cultural, or religious requirements for being granted access to God. God, in his love, gave Jesus as the final Passover Lamb to provide atonement for all the people of the world so that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life.

Finally, the investigation of the theological context traced several of the important themes surrounding John 3:16 through the Gospel and demonstrated the commonality it sustains with other voices in New Testament theology, particularly Paul. The Jewish nation was not set aside but is rather viewed as part of the larger people of God from every nation of the world. The atonement provided by Jesus' death carries universal significance and is not limited to one group of people. In his theological genius, John grounded this universal perspective in a salvation-historical understanding of Israel's history that is poignantly expressed in the message of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."⁴⁶

⁴⁶I would like to acknowledge the help of my research assistant, Alex Stewart, in writing this chapter. In this, Alex went beyond the call of duty, and his competent work is greatly appreciated.