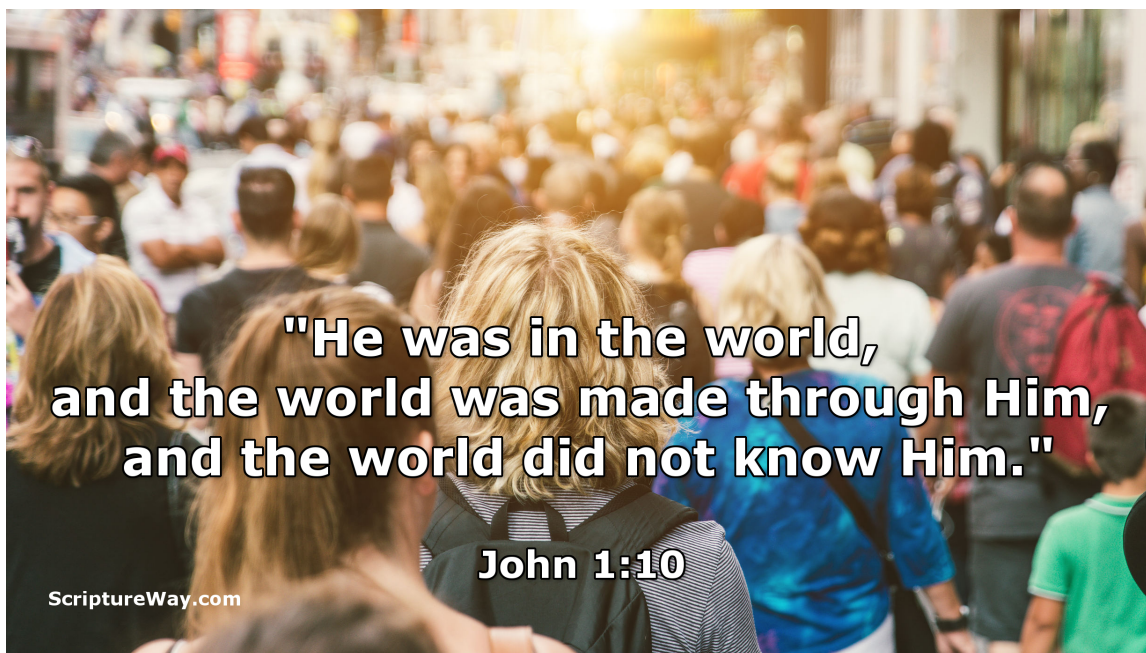


“Biblical Definition of ‘The World’ ”

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The World Did Not Know Him - John 1:10 - Photo 123RF.com - Used under license

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." (John 1:10)

This lesson is the first in the series on "Christians and the World." This lesson explains the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words for "the world" in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Consider. What does the expression, "the world," mean to you? Do you think of just the physical earth which God created? Or, do you think about the people of the world? Does the world described in the Bible include people who know Christ as well as those who do not know Christ?

(continued next page)

"The World" - Old Testament Definition

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word used most often for "the world" is *tebel* (pronounced as tay-bale'). "The world" (*tebel*) is *the earth as moist and therefore inhabited* (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, Ref. 1). So, the word for "the world" in the Old Testament refers to the earth and by implication to the inhabitants of the earth (Ref. 1). The first mention of "the world" (*tebel*) in the Old Testament occurs in 1 Samuel 2:8. *Tebel* occurs 36 times in the Old Testament (Ref. 1).

The Old Testament describes "the world" in these four main ways:

- **God established the world by his wisdom** (Jeremiah 10:12, Jeremiah 51:15)
- **God firmly established the world, and the world will not totter, or deviate from its course** (1 Chronicles 16:30, Psalm 93:1, Psalm 96:10). In these verses, the writer says the world will not be moved. The Hebrew word for *moved* is *mot* which means *totter, shake, slip* (Ref. 2).
- **The whole world belongs to God. He made it, and he remains its sole Owner and Master** (Psalm 24:1, Psalm 50:12, Psalm 89:11, Ref. 3, Ref. 4). David wrote, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Psalm 24:1). God's claim on the earth includes not only its animals, vegetables, and minerals, but also its people. "All belong to God, and He has a right to claim them for His service" (Ref. 3).
- **God will judge the world with righteousness** (Psalm 9:8, Psalm 96:13, Psalm 98:9). The Hebrew word for *judge* in these verses is *shaphat*. *Shaphat* means not only *to pronounce sentence* but also *to govern* (Ref. 5). For those who are in Christ, the fact that Christ will come and judge, or govern, the world is cause for joy and praise to God. We sing about Christ's coming to rule the world when we sing Isaac Watt's hymn, "Joy to the World." Isaac Watts had Psalm 98:4-9 in mind when he wrote, "He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness, and wonders of his love" (Ref. 6).

"The World" - New Testament Definition

In the New Testament, the Greek word used most often for "the world" is *kosmos*. *Kosmos* means an "ordered system" (like the universe, creation) (Ref. 7). *Kosmos* also refers to the inhabitants of the world and to worldly affairs. *Kosmos* occurs 186 times in the New Testament (Ref. 7). "The world" (*kosmos*) occurs more often in the Gospel of John than in any other New Testament book (more than 70 occurrences in John).

The New Testament writers use "the world" (*kosmos*) in three main ways:

- **The world which God created through Christ**
-- "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him ..." (John 1:10)
- **The inhabitants of the world** -- "The world" (*kosmos*) includes:
-- *All the people of the world* -- "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16)
-- *People who do not know Christ* -- "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:10). Also refer to John 14:16-17.
-- *People who are hostile to Christ and to Christ's followers* -- "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Also refer to John 17:14. I plan to address in future lessons the world's hostility to Christ and God's role for Christians in the world.
- **The affairs of the world which seduce us from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ**
-- "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1 John 2:15-16)
-- "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

The Hebrew and Greek words for "the world" in both the Old and New Testaments include not only the physical world which God created but also the people of the world. Even though God loves all the people of the world, some people know and love Christ, and others do not know Christ. Some

people are hostile to Christ and to those who follow Christ. I plan to discuss God's love for the world in the next lesson in this series.

Apply. John, Jesus' disciple, wrote about Jesus, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:10). If you do not know Jesus Christ, put your faith and trust in him. Ask him to forgive your sins, and he will cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Ask Jesus to come into your life. You and he will begin a new relationship, and you will know him better each day. If you already do know Jesus, ask him to show you what steps you can take to help other people know him as their Savior and Lord.

References

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