

What Does John 3:16 Really Teach?

By Edward Rangel

"This is not a verse about God loving everybody. It is a verse about God providing a way out. Praise God for that!" - (Pawson, pg. 59)

John 3:16; Numbers 21:6-9

Introduction

- The “Golden Text” of the Bible
 - A book *The Gospel in 4000 Languages: John 3:16* (the book I have seen is in 875 languages)
 - John 3:16 is most tattooed Bible verse in prison, Romans 1:17 is least tattooed favored verse.
- John 3:16 is often referred to as the “Gospel in a Nutshell.” The Gideons and several religious organizations have published millions of Bibles and Bible tracts highlighting this verse as the “Message that Saves.”
- I believe this is a misused, misapplied and misinterpreted Bible verse, that has been preached and taught wrong and, unfortunately will be the cause that many people have a false sense of spiritual security.
- John 3:16 is not mean for unbelievers/not meant for non-Christians
 - Only Mark calls his book the Gospel, the others do not claim to be Gospel accounts.
 - Matthew and John are intended for those who are redeemed to build their faith, make their faith stronger, Luke and Mark are intended for non-Christians, to convert people to Christ.
 - All four gospel accounts are important and record the life of Christ. Not minimizing them at all, far be it!

1

First Mistake : John 3:16 is Presented as the Unconditional Love of God

Explanation

- Incorrectly focuses on the Love of God as the primary message for the world
 - The apostles never spoke about the “Unconditional love of God.” They never said, “All you have to do is come as you are, call on the name of the Lord. He has done everything for you. Just believe that God love the word unconditionally and sent His only Son to die for you.”
 - Jesus never spoke this way.
 - The word “Unconditional” implies that there are no conditions to God’s love. That God loves as one is without judgment, without repentance, without His righteousness (which demands that unrighteousness be exposed)...”Just as you are, no need to change.”

That’s what “Unconditional Love of God” means.

- 1st step to come to Go is to repent! (Acts 2:37-38)
 - “Men and brethren what shall we do?” “Repent and be baptized...”
 - There is nothing about God’s Unconditional Love! In Peter’s sermon he does mention God’s answer to an unrighteous, ungrateful and murderous world. REPENT!
- 31,102 verses in the Bible
 - 11 verses refer directly and explicit to the “love of God!” in the NASB 11 out of 31,102
 - All these are directed to those who were already redeemed/saved...something they had to be grateful for...
 - Jews who had been rescued from Egypt – they had experienced salvation therefore they could speak of God’s love
 - Christians who had been saved from the slavery of sin, we can speak about God’s abundant love
- Challenge to the hearers:
 - Search the scriptures like the noble Bereans (Acts 17)
 - You will not find Jesus or the Apostles preaching to the unbelievers about God’s love in an effort to bring them to obedience.
 - What you will find, like in Acts – especially Acts – the preacher talks about sin and those who are guilty of sin, and what they must do in order to make things right with God.
 - Repent and be baptized (Acts 2:36-37)
 - “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.” (Acts 22:16)
 - “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19)
 - “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them.” (Acts 8:5). “But when they believed Philip as he was preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were being baptized.” (Acts 8:12)
 - The Eunuch’s conversion began with the preaching from Isaiah 53 about Christ dying because of man’s unrighteousness and iniquities. This was done to satisfy the perfect sacrifice problem. For my guilt, my sins.

Application

What happens when you lead with John 3:16 as the Gospel message with an unbeliever? Especially someone who is hostile toward God? “If God loves the world so much then why does He allow so much injustice, the death of babies, etc.? How will you overcome that obstacle?

One cannot appreciate the love of God until one appreciates one’s own unrighteousness. I must be convicted, pierced to the heart that I am guilty of sin, not that God loves me unconditionally, but that I have sinned, I am wrong and that I am in desperate need of a Savior!

2

What is John 3:16 Teaching?

Explanation

A text out of context is a pretext – cliché but true

- John 3:16 is not teaching God's unconditional love
- Many have been led to believe that it is teaching this and are on the wrong path that does not lead to heaven
- What the Gospel as taught by the apostles demanded was repentance (Romans 1:16-17). As a matter of fact, one of the reasons why God became so angry with mankind was because of man's ingratitude (Romans 1:21). God demands repentance, He does not love unconditionally.
- "God"
 - God of creation, of all, Father, not the Son and Holy Spirit. Later on the text speaks of the Son, but here God is referring to the God the Father.
- "Loved" Four words
 - **epithumia** – lust, promiscuity
 - **eros** – love of attraction, sexual love
 - 75% of songs are about eros love
 - God made us to have eros, we fall in and out of eros, we cannot control the matters of the eros heart...this is something that you cannot turn on or off.
 - **God does not eros the world, He has not fallen in eros with the world.**
 - **philia** – brotherly, affection like
 - God does not philia the world, He does not "bro fist bump" the world
 - **agape** love of action
 - love centered in the will, **care**
 - giving some one you **attention and action**
 - it is to do something loving on their behalf, a response to someone's need, not based on their beauty or money.
 - Example: Good Samaritan
- "World"
 - God "**agape'd**" the world, paid attention to, and took action on behalf of the world
 - World = people, human society, rebellious people
 - God's problem are rebellious children and His **attention** and **action**; agape/love
- "Begotten"
 - Not as in gave birth to, but as His one and only son. We are adopted into the family
- "Gave"
 - Gave Him in death (Isaiah 53)
 - To the unbeliever this does not make sense. I know. I've taught this to unbelievers who are hostile to the Gospel. It is a turn off.
 - But to the believer, this makes sense and encourages them to "Continue on believing." It was an aha! moment to the Ethiopian Eunuch.
- "Whoever"
 - so that all... every one who believes...

- “Believes”
 - There is a difference between believing “in Jesus” and believing “that Jesus”
 - Believing that Jesus is the Son of God does not save. That is what demons believe and still are lost! (James 2:19)
 - Believing in Jesus means **Trust and Obey!**
- “Perish”
 - destroyed, ruined, useless
 - Woman who poured out costly perfume on Jesus’ feet, Judas thought \$\$\$\$ had been ruined (John 12:3)
- “Life”
 - Opposite of perish, useful, fulfilling purpose for which one was created, meant
- “Eternal” – forever, everlasting life

Application

God, the Creator of heaven and earth, out of attention to His children practicing unrighteousness took action by sending His Son to die on the cross, so that everyone who trusts and obeys Him will not be ruined in eternal and everlasting punishment, but will be given everlasting life.

By the way, even if you have a red-lettered edition Bible, verse 16 was not spoken by Jesus. It is actually spoken by John the apostle.

3

Context of John 3:16

Explanation

- The teacher of Israel (Nicodemus, not “a” but “THE”) (**John 3:1-10**)
 - Nicodemus, Pharisee, ruler of the Jews (1) and a THE teacher of Israel (10) came to Jesus at night and confessed that he **believed in Jesus as the Son of God** (vs. 2)
 - Jesus teaches Nicodemus about the new birth (two baptisms -water and Holy Spirit) (vss. 3-5)
 - Nicodemus wonders how a grown man (being a ruler and THE teacher of Israel, coming by night indicate he had status among the Jews) can be born again – but he would have to literally crawl into his mother’s womb. Cut the man some intellectual slack. He was a bit of a dummy. What he is asking, how can I, at this age start all over again! (vs. 9)
 - That’s the point! When we come to Christ we will start all over again, no matter where we are. We leave everything behind and **TRUST AND OBEY** God. That’s what baptism with water does. We bury the old person and resurrect in newness of life!
 - Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You being THE teacher, not any teacher, but THE teacher of Israel and you don’t understand these things? (vs. 10)
- Rebuke for lack of understanding (11-12)
- Old Testament example to help him understand (Numbers 21:6-9)
 - Israel was 10 days from the Promised Land (Kadesh Barnea). They grumbled and ended up wandering for 40 years
 - Grumbled about manna, water, everything. Accused God of trying to kill them.
 - As punishment for THEIR ingratitude (cf. Romans 1:21) God sent them fiery serpents to bite them
 - As the Jews suffered and were dying they cried out to Moses to intercede.
 - God commanded Moses to set a fiery serpent on a standard and that everyone who was bitten to look at it and they would live.
 - NOTICE THAT GOD DID NOT TAKE AWAY THE SERPENTS, HE GAVE THEM A WAY OF ESCAPE, A WAY TO BE HEALED, A WAY OF SALVATION AND FOR THIS THEY SHOULD BE GRATEFUL.
- Now Jesus in **John 3:14-15** that the same thing will happen to Jesus. The world is full of sin and people are dying from sin’s poison, while the sin will not be removed from the world until the poison can be removed from the person if they **TRUST AND OBEY** God’s only begotten Son who will be lifted up on the cross.

Conclusion

- We are blessed that God has loved us so much that He gave us the Gospel whereby we can be saved.
- Just as Peter preached that those in Acts 2 were guilty of murdering the Christ, so are we. We are guilty of sin.
- The wages of sin is death, separation from God and eternal damnation. (**Romans 6:23, 5:8**)
- In order to be in a right relationship with God we must repent of our sins and be baptized for the remission of our sins, trusting and obeying in Jesus every day. (Acts 2; John 3:16)

Reference Works Consulted

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Bryant, Beauford H, and Mark S Krause. *John.* Joplin, Mo., College Press, 1998.

Cottrell, J. (1996). *Romans (Vol. 1).* Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co. 1:17 In v. 16 Paul says the gospel is God's power unto salvation. In v. 17 he answers the question as to why this is so. For the third time in this section he uses the particle γάρ (gar), meaning "for" or "because." The gospel is God's power unto salvation, For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is revealed by faith from first to last.... That is, the source of the gospel's saving power is "the righteousness of God." This is the heart of the gospel. The Greek text does not literally say, "in the gospel." The text says "in it." But since the antecedent of "it" (v. 17) is "the gospel" in v. 16, the NIV just spells it out: "in the gospel." In any case the gospel is what reveals the righteousness of God, and this is why it has the power to save sinners. This righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, says Paul. The word reveals refers here to divine activity; it means "to disclose, to uncover, to unveil, to make known." Interpreters agree that this righteousness of God is revealed not just in the gospel as it is preached, but primarily in the gospel as it is enacted by Jesus Christ on the stage of history itself. That is, the very deeds of which the gospel speaks are the revelation of this divine righteousness that brings salvation. The revelation is not just a verbal disclosure to the mind, but is accomplished "in action and operation" in the historical arena (Murray, 1:29). It is "the 'uncovering' of God's redemptive plan, as it unfolds on the plane of human history" (Moo, 1:64). Of course, the gospel message also reveals this righteousness of God to all those who hear it; thus the present tense is used: the righteousness of God "is revealed"; it continues to be revealed through the ongoing preaching of the gospel (Moo, 1:65). Certainly, whatever gives the gospel its power should be considered the heart of the gospel, and that is identified here as "the righteousness of God." To understand what this means, we must define the term righteousness. First of all it is a mistake to translate this Greek word (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosyne) as "justification" in the sense of acquittal or forgiveness, as do Lard (39–45) and Moo (1:70). Righteousness and justification are very closely related, and the justification of sinners may well be regarded either as being included in the righteousness of God (as the term is used here) or as being the direct result of it. As used here, though, the righteousness of God is a broader and richer term than simply his act of justifying sinners, as is shown in 3:25–26 especially.

Keener, Craig S. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary : John. Volume 2A. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2019. So loved (3:16). The term often translated “so” means not “how much” but “in this way,” yielding the sense: “This is how God loved the world: he gave his Son.” The Old Testament also emphasizes God’s immeasurable love (e.g., Ex. 34:6–7; Deut. 7:7–8; Judg. 10:16; Isa. 63:9; Hos. 11:1–4, 8–11; cf. Isa. 16:11; Jer. 48:36). Despite ancient Jewish literature’s mention of God’s love for humanity and its emphasis on God’s special love for Israel, nothing in non-Christian literature compares with this sacrifice, especially not for “the world,” which in John normally means those not yet following God’s will. God gave his Son by Jesus being lifted up like the serpent (see comment on 3:14–15)..

Leedy, R. A. (2020). SBL Greek New Testament Sentence Diagrams. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

Lukaszewski, A. L., Dubis, M., & Blakley, J. T. (2011). The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament, SBL Edition: Expansions and Annotations. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press. $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (Root: $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$, LN: 61.10; adverb)in this way, thus Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Correlative adverb $\kappa\alpha\iota$ (Root: $\kappa\alpha\iota$, LN: 89.23; conjunction, logical, explanatory)for Contained in: Sentence Syntactic Force: Explanatory conjunction $\pi\alpha\sigma\epsilon\iota$ (Root: $\alpha\pi\alpha\sigma\epsilon\iota$, LN: 25.43; verb, aorist, active, indicative, third person, singular)to love Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Finite verb $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$ (Root: $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$, LN: 92.24; article, nominative, singular, masculine)the Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive article Words Modified by $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$ • articular relation: The word $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$ modifies $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (noun) in Jn 3:16, word 5 ($\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ is within the current clausal unit, after $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$). $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$ (Root: $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$, LN: 12.1; noun, nominative, singular, masculine)God Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Subject Words That Modify $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$ • articular relation: The word $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$ is modified by $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (article) in Jn 3:16, word 4 ($\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ is within the current clausal unit, before $\theta\epsilon\circ\varsigma$). $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (Root: $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$, LN: 92.24; article, accusative, singular, masculine)the Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive article Words Modified by $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ • articular relation: The word $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ modifies $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (noun) in Jn 3:16, word 7 ($\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ is within the current clausal unit, after $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$). $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (Root: $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$, LN: 9.23; noun, accusative, singular, masculine)world Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Direct object Words That Modify $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ • articular relation: The word $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ is modified by $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (article) in Jn 3:16, word 6 ($\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ is within the current clausal unit, before $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$). $\sigma\tau\epsilon$ (Root: $\sigma\tau\epsilon$, LN: 89.61; conjunction, adverbial, result)so then, therefore, so that Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Correlative conjunction $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (Root: $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$, LN: 92.24; article, accusative, singular, masculine)the Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive article Words Modified by $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ • articular relation: The word $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ modifies $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (noun) in Jn 3:16, word 10 ($\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ is within the current clausal unit, after $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$). $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ (Root: $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$, LN: 10.42; noun, accusative, singular, masculine)Son Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Direct object of the dependent

clause Words That Modify תָּהָא • articular relation: The word תָּהָא is modified by הַ (article) in Jn 3:16, word 9 (הַ is within the current clausal unit, before תָּהָא). • adjectival relation: The word תָּהָא is modified by מְהַרְהֵרֵה (adjective) in Jn 3:16, word 12 (מְהַרְהֵרֵה is within the current clausal unit, after תָּהָא). הַ (Root: הָ, LN: 92.24; article, accusative, singular, masculine)the Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive article Words Modified by הַ • articular relation: The word הַ modifies מְהַרְהֵרֵה (adjective) in Jn 3:16, word 12 (מְהַרְהֵרֵה is within the current clausal unit, after הַ). מְהַרְהֵרֵה (Root: מְהַרְהֵרֵה, LN: 58.52; adjective, accusative, singular, masculine)one and only Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive adjective Words Modified by מְהַרְהֵרֵה • adjectival relation: The word מְהַרְהֵרֵה modifies הַ (noun) in Jn 3:16, word 10 (הַ is within the current clausal unit, before מְהַרְהֵרֵה). Words That Modify מְהַרְהֵרֵה • articular relation: The word מְהַרְהֵרֵה is modified by הַ (article) in Jn 3:16, word 11 (הַ is within the current clausal unit, before מְהַרְהֵרֵה). הַדֹּתֵהֶם (Root: הַדֹּתֵהֶם, LN: 57.71; verb, aorist, active, indicative, third person, singular)to give Contained in: Correlative Clause Syntactic Force: Finite verb Words That Modify הַדֹּתֵהֶם • subordinate-conjunctive relation: The word הַדֹּתֵהֶם is modified by וְ (conjunction) in Jn 3:16, word 14 (וְ is outside of the current clausal unit). וְ (Root: וְ, LN: 89.59; conjunction, adverbial, purpose)in order that, so that Contained in: Subordinate Clause Syntactic Force: Purposive subordinate clause Words Modified by וְ • subordinate-conjunctive relation: The word וְ modifies הַדֹּתֵהֶם (verb) in Jn 3:16, word 13 (הַדֹּתֵהֶם outside of the current clausal unit). הַ (Root: הָ, LN: 59.24; adjective, nominative, singular, masculine)everyone Contained in: Participial Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive adjective Words Modified by הַ • adjective-to-verb relation: The word הַ modifies הַשֹּׁמֵרִים (verb) in Jn 3:16, word 17 (הַשֹּׁמֵרִים is within the current clausal unit, after הַ). הַ (Root: הָ, LN: 92.24; article, nominative, singular, masculine)the Contained in: Participial Clause Syntactic Force: Attributive article Words Modified by הַ • articular relation: The word הַ modifies הַשֹּׁמֵרִים (verb) in Jn 3:16, word 17 (הַשֹּׁמֵרִים is within the current clausal unit, after הַ). הַשֹּׁמֵרִים (Root: הַשֹּׁמֵרִים, LN: 31.85; verb, present, active, participle, singular, nominative, masculine)to believe Contained in: Participial Clause Syntactic Force: This word functions as Substantival participle and Finite verb and Subject of the dependent clause. Words That Modify הַשֹּׁמֵרִים • adjective-to-verb relation: The word הַשֹּׁמֵרִים is modified by הַ (adjective) in Jn 3:16, word 15 (הַ is within the current clausal unit, before הַשֹּׁמֵרִים). • articular relation: The word הַשֹּׁמֵרִים is modified by הַ (article) in Jn 3:16, word 16 (הַ is within the current clausal unit, before הַשֹּׁמֵרִים). • prepositional relation: The word הַשֹּׁמֵרִים is modified by לְ (preposition) in Jn 3:16, word 18 (לְ is outside of the current clausal unit). לְ (Root: לְ, LN: 84.16; preposition)in Contained in: Prepositional Phrase Syntactic Force: Preposition direction Words Modified by לְ • prepositional relation: The word לְ modifies הַשֹּׁמֵרִים (verb) in Jn 3:16, word 17 (הַשֹּׁמֵרִים is outside of the current clausal unit). הַ (Root: הָ, LN: 92.11; pronoun, personal, third person, accusative, singular, masculine)he Contained in: Prepositional

Phrase Syntactic Force: Personal pronoun functioning as Prepositional object. $\mu\text{?}$ (Root: $\mu\text{?}$, LN: 69.3; adverb, negative)not Contained in: Predicate Syntactic Force: Negative Words Modified by $\mu\text{?}$ • adverbial relation: The word $\mu\text{?}$ modifies $\text{?p?}?ta\text{?}$ (verb) in Jn 3:16, word 21 ($\text{?p?}?ta\text{?}$ is within the current clausal unit, after $\mu\text{?}$). $\text{?p?}?ta\text{?}$ (Root: $\text{?e?}???$, LN: 20.31; verb, aorist, middle, subjunctive, third person, singular)to perish Contained in: Predicate Syntactic Force: Finite verb Words That Modify $\text{?p?}?ta\text{?}$ • adverbial relation: The word $\text{?p?}?ta\text{?}$ is modified by $\mu\text{?}$ (adverb) in Jn 3:16, word 20 ($\mu\text{?}$ is within the current clausal unit, before $\text{?p?}?ta\text{?}$). ???? (Root: $a\text{????}$, LN: 89.125; conjunction, logical, contrastive)but Contained in: Subordinate Clause Syntactic Force: Adversative conjunction ??? (Root: $e\text{??}$, LN: 57.1; verb, present, active, subjunctive, third person, singular)to have Contained in: Predicate Syntactic Force: Finite verb ???? (Root: ?a? , LN: 23.88; noun, accusative, singular, feminine)life Contained in: Predicate Syntactic Force: Direct object of the dependent clause Words That Modify ???? • adjectival relation: The word ???? is modified by $a\text{????}???$ (adjective) in Jn 3:16, word 25 ($a\text{????}???$ is within the current clausal unit, after ????). $a\text{????}???$ (Root: $a\text{???}$, LN: 67.96; adjective, accusative, singular, feminine)eternal Contained in: Predicate Syntactic Force: Attributive adjective Words Modified by $a\text{????}???$ • adjectival relation: The word $a\text{????}???$ modifies ???? (noun) in Jn 3:16, word 24 (???? is within the current clausal unit, before $a\text{????}???$).

Maximilian Zerwick, and Mary Donald Grosvenor. A Grammatical Analysis Fo the Greek New Testament. Roma, Ed. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996. “so much,” and “begotten” 16 $\text{????}???$ aor. $\text{????}???$. $\text{????}???$... $\text{????}???$ so much ... that (consec.) w. indic. emphasizing the actuality of the consequence §350. $\text{????-????}???$ only (child). $\text{?-????}???$ aor. $\text{????}???$. $\text{??-????}???$ aor2 subj. mid. $\text{-????}???$..

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