

The **WORLD**, the Son of Man, and Propitiation

First John 4

Jim van Heiningen

We read a lot in John's writings about the **World**. For example, in John 15:19 – in just one verse -, as He highlights the world's hatred, Jesus mentions "the world" – the 'kosmos' – five times. Our world is basically exactly the same as John's, and it seems to me that, in his first epistle - chapter 4 - John is especially thinking of the world's craving after political and military greatness. In our days the leaders of the 'great' nations, year after year, like to get together in one of their great countries – shelving their great ambitions and rivalries for a few days - to contemplate how they may achieve greater greatness still...; Psalm 2, the rebels' psalm, is played out before our eyes.

John had available all of the Old Testament and most of the New, and he would be familiar with the great empires of the past. A forerunner of these was Assyria, whose conquests were greatly feared because of their utter ruthlessness. Assyria was located more or less where present Iran is situated.

But then came the series of four empires that were announced to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Dan. 2). What was shown to the king was this immense statue, divided into four parts. Daniel, originally a prince in Jerusalem, but exiled and made a eunuch at Nebu's royal court, became God's prophet in Babylon. As he prayed, he was allowed to see the statue for himself, so he could tell its meaning to the king.

The four parts (all empires) were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Through the centuries, as these came on the scene, their reach became vast, conquering all around them, yet, eventually, they too were conquered in turn, with the scepter continuously changing from the one to the other... Into the last empire mentioned, which was Rome, described as mainly of iron, but mixed with clay, was born the Son of God, who, then and there, became the Son of Man. In Nebu's dream, the Son of Man was revealed as the future "**Stone cut without human hands**", the One who would be, in due course, God's answer to the **World**! All of its might, strength, wisdom, ingenuity, wealth, prowess and greatness; all of it would be totally wrecked in seconds.

We must realize that the future empires (after Rome) were all going to be in the same basket, and that includes the Byzantine Empire, the Mongolian, the Habsburg Empire, the Napoleonic, the Russian, the Islamic, the Austrian/Hungarian, the Ottoman, the German, the Japanese, the British, the USA, the Chinese, etc.

In Daniel 9 it becomes clear that the Roman Empire has its 'latter-day extension' in all that Antichrist, with his right-hand man, the 'False Prophet', achieves in that short reign of his. Notoriously, an immense statue is involved, a statue that speaks. John sees in Revelation 13 how the False Prophet "tells those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast... He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."

Nebuchadnezzar's 'dream' highlights the "Stone"! With the force and velocity of a flash of lightning, the 'Stone' hits the proud sculpture in its 'feet of clay'. As the immense statue comes crashing down, all of the World's 'imperiousness' is reduced to rubble, which is one way of describing the moment when the Son of Man, the invading **King of kings**, ascends David's Throne in Jerusalem, to judge and reign over all the World!

Meanwhile, before the Antichrist is revealed, Man is empowered and goaded on by the "spirit of the antichrist", but – John tells us - the true King of kings, victorious as He rose from the dead, **is greater than the one who is in the world!** His arsenal is filled with weaponry, but these are the weapons of LOVE that conquer the resistance of Man's heart. And so, those of us, no longer 'of' the world, though still 'in' the world, our King has armed us 'to the teeth'. It is what John wants us to realize. We're in the world for a purpose. If we belong to the real King of kings, we must be consciously enlisted to serve under Him, wherever and however He decides...

In verse 6 we find that our 'testimony' (Light, Life & Love) *may be* received, but most likely it is not. The important thing is that, indeed, the testimony is given, i.e. the communication of God's love in Christ. John then gives more details about that LOVE having to be visible as a TESTIMONY in, and to, the world's inhabitants. For the Lord's combatants to be ever more aware of that LOVE that saved them, John draws attention to His '**propitiation**'...

Our sin – rebellion, blasphemy, you name it -, calls for condemnation; nothing less will do. But if the Savior, through the shedding of his blood at Calvary, saves a sinner from sin, then this sinner is *also* saved from condemnation. That is of immense satisfaction to the sinner, but what about the One who has been sinned against? Does God not need to be satisfied also? The terrible stains and scars of men's pride and rebellion - all over God's Creation – they need to be faced and they need to be erased. God **must** be compensated; there must be true reparation! Things cannot be left up in the air... But **who** is up to that task?

Just as in ch. 2:2, John declares: **“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins”** (4:10). There you have it! The Son of Man, through the blood He shed at Calvary, perfectly propitiated (compensated) for the Sin of Man. The Sin of Man was great, VERY great, but the Son of Man – with His love and atonement - is greater! Which means that God is truly and completely satisfied! As He died, the Son exclaimed: **“It is finished”**. The outstanding bill has been totally paid and cancelled.

The rest of John’s chapter opens up before us, as these principles are understood. John works out all the practical consequences of that love; not our love, but his, the love that brought about propitiation for our sins. That “perfect love” now draws men to Himself. In Propitiation the price for Redemption was paid in full. The redeemed are now the clay in the Potter’s hands. And the Potter is at work, unceasingly.