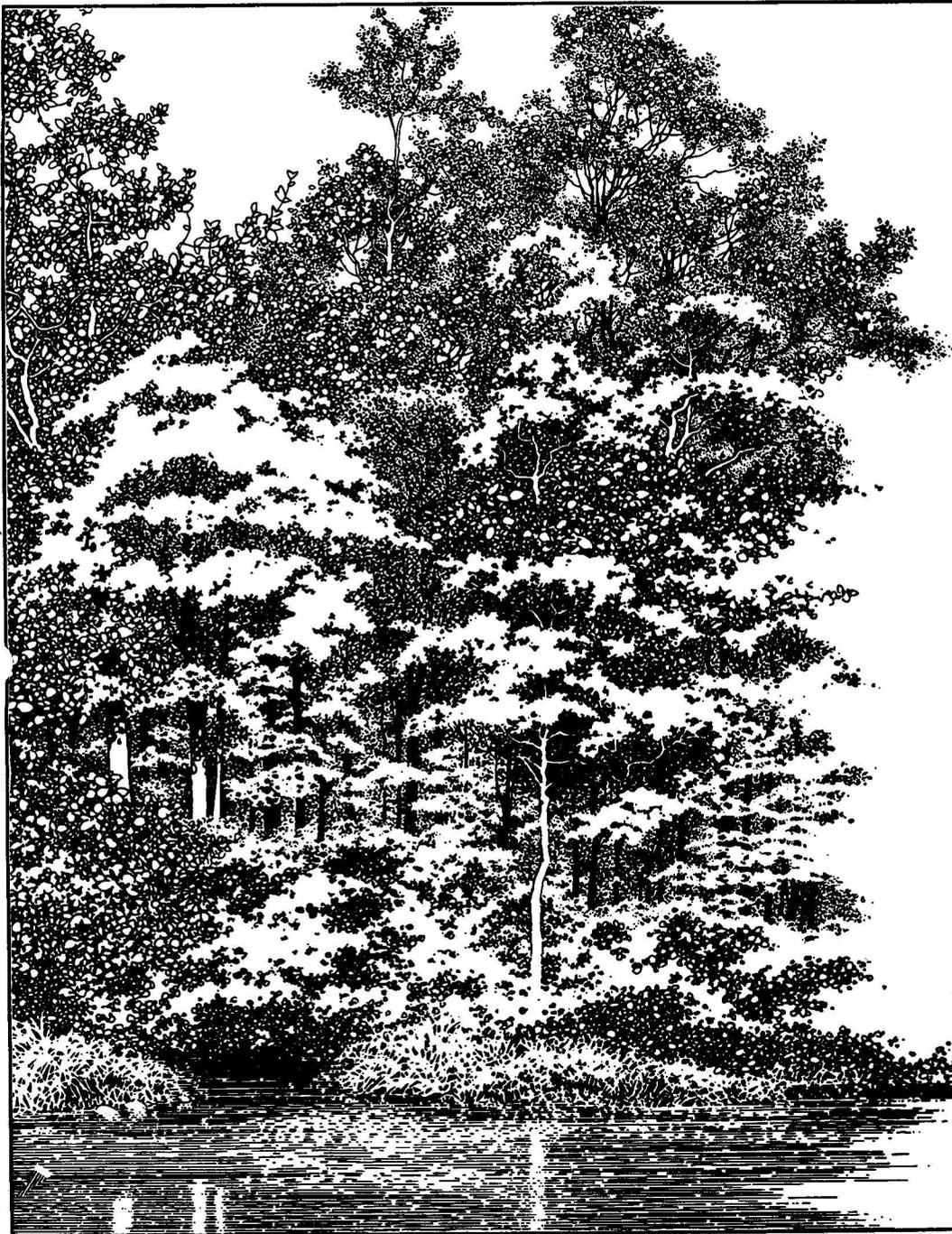


# Good News Unlimited

*June, 1985*

Solo Christo—Sola Scriptura—Sola Fida—Sola Gratia



## Jesus and John the Baptist

Part One

by  
Brad McIntyre

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**Good News Unlimited** is published each month by Good News Unlimited, Inc., 11710 Education St., Auburn, CA 95603-2499, USA.

Subscriptions are free upon request.

**Good News Unlimited** is a non-denominational organization comprising a variety of gospel ministries. This magazine is dedicated to proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ and his kingdom of grace. It also seeks to keep subscribers up to date on all aspects of Good News Unlimited's ministries—international radio broadcasts, public seminars and congresses, local preaching appointments, publications, **Good News For Kids** (a monthly section in this magazine), cassette publications, etc.

As a nonprofit religious corporation, Good News Unlimited is supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in the USA, Canada and New Zealand.

The editor welcomes unsolicited manuscripts; however, they cannot be returned. Please send typed, double-spaced manuscripts, of general interest to Christians of all denominations, to: The Editor, **Good News Unlimited**, 11710 Education St., Auburn, CA 95603-2499, USA.

**Canadian office:** P.O. Box 3068, Station D, Willowdale, M2R 3G5, Ontario, Canada.

**Australian office:** P.O. Box 1603, Hornsby-Northgate, NSW 2077, Australia.

**South African office:** P.O. Box 11096, Universitas 9321, Republic of South Africa.

**New Zealand office:** P.O. Box 20154, Christchurch, New Zealand.

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## Editorial

**W**e have been hearing a lot lately about V-E day, May 8, 1945. The western world has been celebrating the 40th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe. *Time* magazine joined in the celebration (April 29, 1985) and carried a number of feature articles on V-E day. Otto Friedrich introduces his article, "There Was Such a Feeling of Joy" with these words: "May 8, 1945 — V-E day — was a day for which millions of people had fought and worked and prayed and died . . . The bloodiest war Europe had ever known was finished." It must have been a wonderful day. It's hard for me to really appreciate what it must have been like for those who had endured six long years of agonizing hardship to take to the streets in joyous celebration. V-E day is a day for us all to remember but especially for those who had experienced the tragedy of World War II. In a unique way it is their day.

In the same article Otto Friedrich makes the following perceptive statement:

In retrospect, the outcome should have appeared inevitable — perhaps ever since the Allied invasion of North Africa in late 1942, probably since the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in 1943, almost certainly since D-day and the Normandy breakout and the liberation of Paris in the summer of 1944. The Allied advantage in troops and weapons meant that it was only a matter of time before the Germans were defeated.

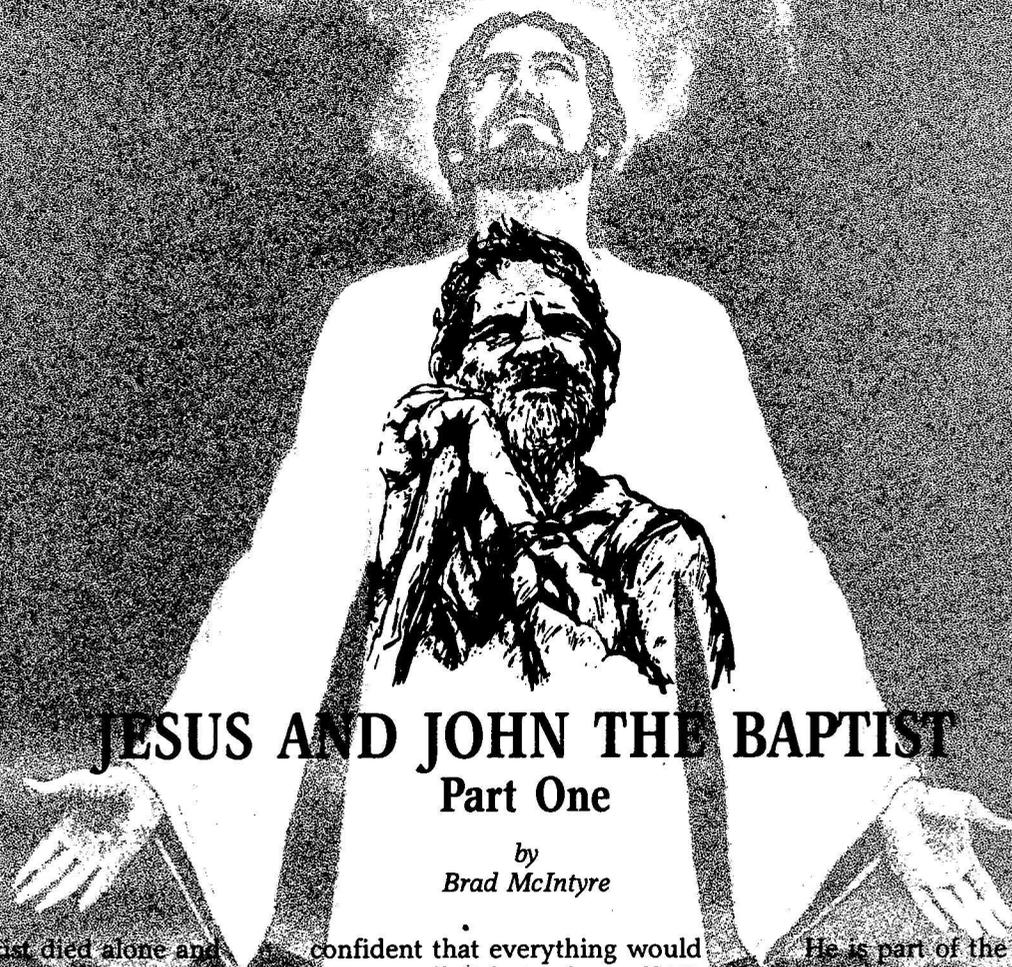
Yes indeed, World War II was really won on D-day June 6, 1944. The success of the 250,000 soldiers who landed on the beaches of France guaranteed the triumph of V-E day.

Some years ago the famous French theologian, Oscar Cullman, saw in D-day and V-E day an analogy of the relationship between the cross and the second coming. In Christian theology, the great battle Jesus fought on the cross (Col 2:15) is D-day and the battle he will fight at his second coming (Rev 19:11f) is V-E day. The decisive battle of the war between good and evil was fought at Calvary. The serpent's tail continues to thrash about in chaos but his head has been crushed. When the Allies made that successful launching at Normandy, victory for them had already begun. They were already tasting something of the victory of May 8, 1945. Similarly, as disciples of Christ we may already experience "the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:6). We live between the times of D-day and V-E day.

For every Christian the cross of Christ is the center of a history, the culmination of the scheme of salvation begun after the Fall, the source of present power, and the positive assurance of God's final victory.

Life "between the times," between the resurrection of Christ and the second coming is marked by paradox. Life must have been difficult for the soldiers after the successful Invasion of Normandy. They must have sensed that victory was assured but there were still battles to be fought. There was still the Battle of the Bulge. The battle was still raging yet at the same time there were assuring hints of ultimate victory. The same is true for all Christians. The new age has come but the old still remains. There is a mingling of the ages. We live in a state of tension between two actualities. We have been delivered from sin yet we war against it. C. A. Scott puts it well: "Again and again in St. Paul... (there appears) the paradoxical assertion of an experience which is complete and yet in process, certain and yet conditioned, present and yet an object of aspiration and hope." But while the battle rages we know that the war has been won. D-day has come, V-E day is assured!

—Noel Mason



# JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

## Part One

by  
Brad McIntyre

John the Baptist died alone and perhaps confused. Jesus did not intervene. The ax would have fallen on the root of each individual tree (Mt 3:10; Lk 3:9). Instead, it fell on John's neck.

I sometimes feel sorry for John. Quite frankly, he got a raw deal for all his labors. Here he was, the forerunner of the Messiah, the charismatic leader of a new reform movement, the herald of a new age . . . Yet he decreases in importance once Jesus comes on the scene; he never joins the Jesus movement; he is imprisoned and doubts whether or not Jesus is really the "one who was to come;" and finally he is beheaded in the middle of the night in order to satisfy the whims of a drunken ruler.

Have you ever wondered what thoughts raced through John's mind before he lost his head? Did he expect a miracle would save his life at the last moment? Was he

confident that everything would turn out all right in the end? Was John praying when the ax fell or was he wondering? I doubt if he was singing.

John probably had some doubts about what was going on. Why shouldn't he be a bit confused over the turn of events? I know a few people who seriously criticize God because of what happened to John the Baptist. We expect a better fate for our spiritual heroes. Wouldn't John and Jesus have made a great evangelistic team? Why, they could have combined their ministries! Yet for some reason John disappears into oblivion.

The Gospels use John to promote Jesus. This isn't surprising, for John was a "pointer" — he too pointed away from himself to the Messiah. Though John stood on the border of the new age, pointing toward it, he never entered into it himself.

He is part of the Christian story only because he bore witness to the Christian's Christ. Apart from that fact, the Gospels have no use for John. In fact, John is a temporary actor in the divine drama and once Jesus comes on the scene, John is discarded like an empty milk carton. For the Gospel writers, *John has no individual history apart from his witness to Christ.* And once his witness is finished, he is too — and what a terrible finish it was!

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### John — The New Prophet

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There isn't room in the Gospel story for two heroes. Exit John. When the reality arrives, there is little use for the shadow. When the Messiah finally comes, there is little use for those who have prepared his way. Once the main hero enters, lesser heroes dissolve into the offstage darkness.

But although John the Baptist is

not the main part of the Gospel story, he is certainly a significant part. All four Gospels deal with his ministry and see him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Like a swift, hot desert wind, John blows into the history of Judea with a stirring message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" Born into a priestly family, he has nothing to do with the formal priesthood. Instead, he calls into question the legitimacy of temple religion and Pharisaism; he calls the current religious leaders "a brood of vipers;" he smashes Jewish pride by criticizing those who trust in their perfect pedigree, for after all, children of Abraham are easily replaced — even by stones; the common people also, including the tax collectors and Roman soldiers, are stirred by John's fiery sermons. John hits everyone. The coming age will be a time of terrible wrath for the unprepared but a time of redemption for the repentant. Therefore, "repent."

John dresses like Elijah and lives an ascetic life in the wilderness. He is a loner who all his life has been preparing for this moment. Finally, when the Word of God comes, John goes. Immersion in the Jordan — even for Jews — is needed if one is to be ready for the Coming One who will immerse with the Spirit and with fire. For this Coming One is on a serious mission of sifting: his winnowing fork is in his hand and the wheat will be separated from the chaff. Be ready! Or you'll be blown away.

John is specific, almost to the point of meddling. He tells the "haves" to share with the "have nots." He tells the tax collectors to be honest for a change. He even says soldiers should be content with their wages. John dares to confront politicians about their personal affairs. Here is a specific message calling for specific changes in attitudes and behavior. Those preparing for the kingdom are to prove the genuineness of their repentance by deeds of compassion, generosity, honesty, fairness, truthfulness and contentment.

Straight talk and impending judgment — that's John. There is

an "alreadiness" in his message. "Already" the ax is laid to the root of the tree; "already" the wrath to come is near; "already" the fruitless professors of a sterile religion are judged unworthy; "already" the Coming One stands among them, unrecognized; "already" the turning of the ages is taking place; "already" history is shifting to another era and the unprepared will be left behind.

Thus, after three hundred years of prophetic silence, John the Baptist appears as a new prophet calling for repentance and change.

*... It was only a preparatory baptism, designed to prepare a person for the better baptism which Christ would bring. John's baptism did not initiate a person into the kingdom of God, it merely set the stage for one's entrance into the kingdom.*

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### The Baptism of John

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John baptized with water. This made him inferior to the Coming One who would baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Yet John's water baptism was significant. The Bible says John preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4). This baptism was not the means of forgiveness, as some have thought, but the occasion for forgiveness. It was the visible expression of a genuine repentance resulting in forgiveness through the grace of God. The ritual of water baptism gave expression to repentance while repentance gave meaning to water baptism, making it more than just a barren act.

The baptism of John symbolized both obedience to God and unity with the purpose of God. If John was really God's new prophet, then submission to his baptism signified oneness with the divine will. Luke tells us that the common people and even the tax collectors obeyed John and were

baptized, but the religious elite "rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John" (Lk 7:29-30). Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their refusal to acknowledge that John's baptism came from heaven (Mt 21:23-27). In fact, the opposition of the religious authorities to John the Baptist is a preview of the struggle Jesus would have later on with these same authorities.

The baptism of Jesus fulfilled all righteousness (Mt 3:15). As our substitute, Christ demonstrated his solidarity with us through baptism. Though sinless, Jesus was buried beneath Jordan's waters and thereby gave supreme endorsement of John's ministry.

But the baptism of John was limited. It was only a preparatory baptism, designed to prepare a person for the better baptism which Christ would bring. John's baptism did not initiate a person into the kingdom of God, it merely set the stage for one's entrance into the kingdom. It placed one at the border of the messianic age, prepared, ready and waiting. But it did not empower that person to cross over into the next era. Technically speaking, the baptism of John was for repentance only and did not include a baptism of the Spirit (see Acts 19:1-7).

Despite these limitations, John impacted the people of his age so powerfully that many thought he was the Christ. The Gospels, however, reveal that John was no egomaniac: "He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ'" (Jn 1:20); "He must become greater; I must become less" (Jn 3:30).

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### The Sect of John the Baptist

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We admire John for such deference, but not all John's followers agreed. Some disciples of John resented Jesus' stealing the show. There is limited evidence that a "Baptist sect" existed long after John's death and that this sect had conflicts with certain Christian communities over the years. Some scholars have suggested that one motive behind the fourth Gospel is to refute the inflated claims of these loyal followers of John the Baptist.

For example, John 1:6-8, while acknowledging that John's ministry came from God, sees John *only* as a witness, not a prophet. The baptism of John exists solely for the purpose of revealing Christ (1:31); Jesus existed before John and is greater than John (1:30); John the Baptist is not the Messiah (1:20; 3:28); unlike Jesus, John never worked miracles (10:41); and 4:2 seems to refute any claim that Jesus was a baptizer on the same level with John. We have already referred to the key verse (3:30) in which John himself says that he is to decrease in importance while Jesus is to increase.

If certain disciples of John the Baptist did continue the dream long after their leader's death, it only accents the power of John's influence as a religious leader. What a powerful man of God he was! And lest we give the impression that the fourth Gospel is wholly against John, we should point out the place of honor it gives to the ministry of the Baptist. John was sent by God (1:6) to reveal Jesus to Israel (1:31; 3:29), and was one of the major witnesses to Jesus, along with the Scriptures and the miracles (5:31-40). John the Baptist "was a lamp that burned and gave light . . ." (5:35). So the writer of the fourth Gospel recognizes both the greatness of John the Baptist and the superiority of Christ.

### **The Greatest of the Prophets**

In Matthew 11:7-15, Jesus praises John the Baptist before the crowds. He says John was indeed a prophet and "more than a prophet" (vs. 9). Why? Because John was the specially chosen herald of the Messiah. Malachi wrote about him hundreds of years before, saying, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way

before you (Mal 3:1).

John had the privilege of announcing the imminent coming of the Christ, of awakening people to the nearness of the kingdom of God, and even of baptizing the "Lord's Anointed." Therefore, Jesus could say, "among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist" (vs. 11).

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Nothing in John himself made him the greatest of the prophets. Rather, it was the *nature* of his unique mission that constituted his greatness. John's greatness resided in his message not his own person. Yet despite his unique mission, Jesus continued by saying, "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (vs. 11). What did Jesus mean? Verses 12-14 give us a hint:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he

is the Elijah who is to come. (RSV)

These verses present many difficulties, but one thing seems clear: John the Baptist marks a dispensational divide between the Law and the Prophets on the one hand, and the new age on the other. John symbolizes a turning-point in the times; the old age comes to an end in him and the new age begins with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. These verses also imply that John belongs to the old age which has passed away rather than to the new age in which the kingdom of God is exerting its power. He merely announces the soon-coming of the new age.

A similar verse in Luke implies the same thing: "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently (16:16). Here John is put in the time of the law and the prophets while the new era is characterized by the preaching of the kingdom. The new situation which Christ brings about transcends all that has gone before, including the Law, the Prophets, and even John the Baptist. This is why the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. He or she has already experienced the powers and privileges of the new age through faith in Christ whereas John never crossed over the border into the new age.

### **Conclusion of Part One**

So far our study has been historical. But John's life and ministry are too rich to be confined to mere history only. As Christians, we can draw many spiritual lessons from John. Part Two of this study focuses on what we can learn from the life and death of John the Baptist.

## **— APOLOGIES —**

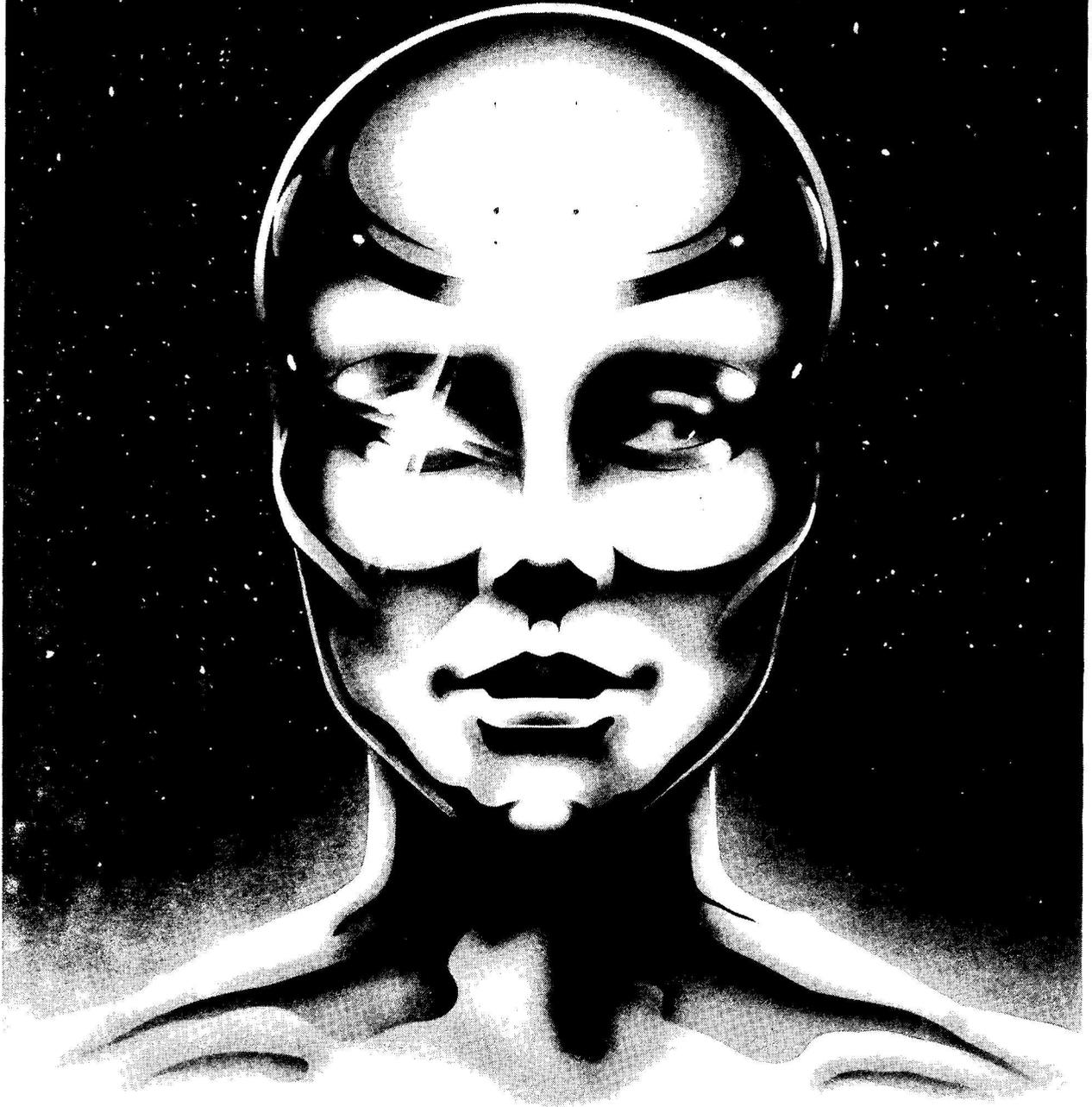
We are sorry to have to inform you, that the August seminars, featuring Paul Porter, have been cancelled. Paul has had to postpone his visit to Australia for personal reasons.

We are hopeful that he will be able to come at another time.

# GETTING THE BIG PICTURE?

Part Two  
Science, Religion and the Cosmos

by Noel Mason



I will never forget my first visit to New York. On arriving from Australia I was immediately overwhelmed by the size and grandeur of the skyscrapers. I rushed into the first shop and bought a camera

and caught a bus to the famous Empire State building. After loading the film I stepped back and peered through the lens. I was too close. Retreating further I tried once more, but to my dismay I

could only get half the building in the frame. I dashed up the street and tried again, but the skyscraper was just too big. I tried sitting on the footpath, I entered another building and took an elevator to

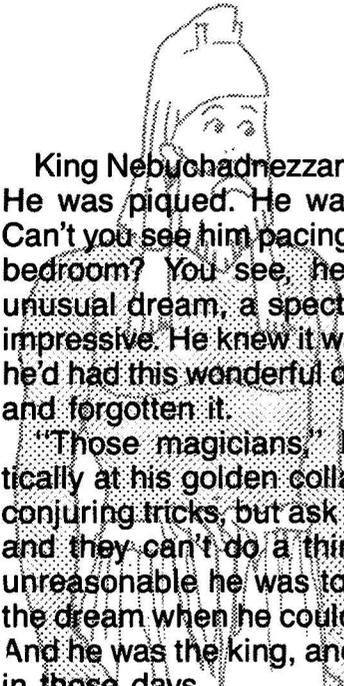
# GOOD NEWS FOR KIDS



## THE STORY OF THE STONE

### Daniel ch. 2

Gillian Ford



King Nebuchadnezzar was mad. He was angry. He was piqued. He was furious. He was wild. Can't you see him pacing up and down his palace bedroom? You see, he'd had a dream — an unusual dream, a spectacular dream. It was so impressive. He knew it was. But **what** was it? Yes, he'd had this wonderful dream and now he'd gone and forgotten it.

"Those magicians," he roared, pulling frantically at his golden collar — "the fools can play conjuring tricks, but ask them something serious and they can't do a thing!" He never saw how unreasonable he was to expect them to tell him the dream when he couldn't remember it himself. And he was the king, and the king was like a god in those days.

This dream had wakened him up and then he couldn't sleep again. He'd tossed and turned all night. That morning all his servants spoke only in whispers, smiled medium smiles to be safe and tiptoed around the palace. For when the king of Babylon was tired he was temperamental and heads would roll.

And so Nebuchadnezzar (we'll call him Neb for short — it's such a mouthful) lost his royal temper. He screamed at his armed guards to round up all the magicians in the country. "Tell them," he shouted, "they'll be cut in pieces if they don't tell me that dream."

Arioch made a mental note to tell the royal sword-sharpener to get to work.

"But," added King Neb, "tell them if they find the answer **quickly**, they'll get wonderful rewards

and a new job." (These days prizes are often vacations but in those days they gave new jobs.)

And so Arioch, the captain of the guard, eventually came round to Daniel who was on the magician list. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I'm very sorry but I have to chop you up. I've heard that you're a good guy but the king's in a tizz and I've got my job to do.

"At least," Arioch continued, "it's only being cut in pieces. Sometimes I've known him to have 'em strangled, chop their heads off, cut them all in pieces and then burn 'em. So don't feel too bad about it — it could be worse."

"But," said Daniel. "That's a bit much isn't it? Why's he doing it? Is it because I wouldn't eat his meat in chapter one?"

"No, no, no," said Arioch, and he told Daniel about the dream.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Daniel. "My God can tell me that dream." And so he went and saw King Neb and asked him for a little time to get the answer.

"Just a **little** bit of time," threatened Neb.

Well his friends thought he was silly. "You've just postponed the execution for a day or two," they said. But Daniel didn't think so.

"Let's pray," he said. And you know that God heard him and honored his prayer. He gave Daniel the very same dream he'd given King Neb and what's more he told him what it meant. Daniel was so thankful. There's several long verses in the story with Daniel saying "Thank you God for helping." Very shortly, Daniel was ushered into the king's presence.

"Your magicians couldn't tell you, your majesty, but my God can."

Maybe you've seen famous stars on TV being told "This is your life." Well, Daniel said to Neb, "This is your dream. You saw a great big, shiny-bright statue appear. It was very scary wasn't it because it was so big? The head of the statue was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the stomach and thighs were made of bronze, the legs were of iron and the feet a mixture of iron and clay."

"That's right," said Neb. "You've got it."

"And as you watched," said Daniel, "a stone



seemed to come out of nowhere and smash the feet of the statue. The whole thing shuddered and trembled, then fell and shattered. Those precious pieces flew up like pieces of hay flying out of a harvesting machine. A great wind appeared and all the pieces flew away like dust."

"And then, your majesty," said Daniel, "you saw that insignificant little stone grow and grow and grow until it became as huge as a mountain. Why it seemed to fill the whole earth."

"That's right," said Neb. "You've got it — but what does it all mean?"

"I'll tell you what it means," said Daniel. And he told Neb, "You are that head of gold. Babylon is the greatest nation that has ever been or ever will be. But one day it will be overrun by an enemy and other world powers will follow. None will be as great as Babylon, however."

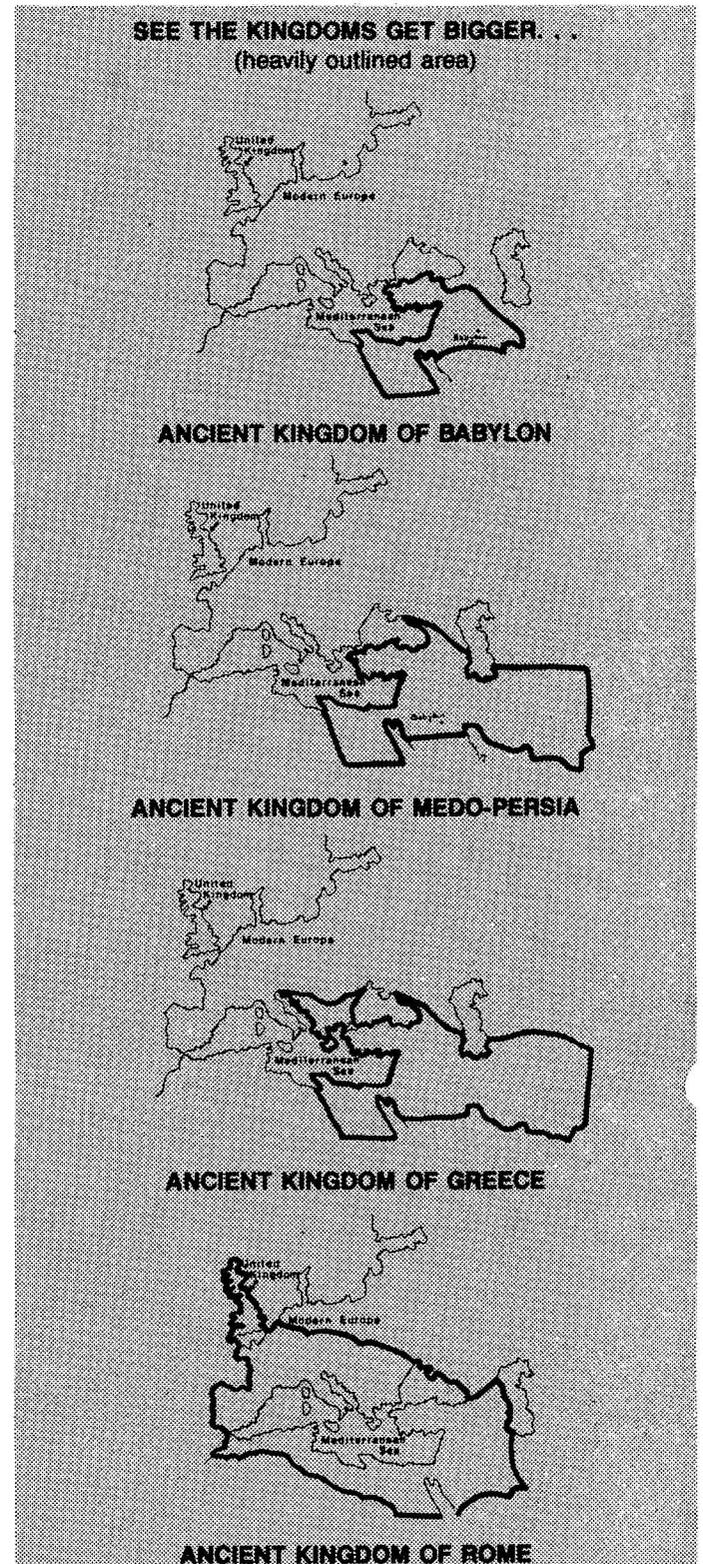
"But then the stone will come in the days of those kings. It represents the kingdom of my God. One day he's going to put his throne on earth."

King Neb was quite astounded and fell flat on his face in front of Daniel. He even tried to offer a sacrifice and burn incense to him. This God of Daniel's must be quite something to tell the future and give the dream to both of them.

So that's how Daniel was promoted and made ruler over a province of Babylon and how his

helpers Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were also promoted.

How many people have been greatly fascinated by this chapter, especially with the metals in the image. We know the head was Babylon because



it says so, but there have been differences of opinion about the other kingdoms. Some have said that the silver kingdom was Medo-Persia which overturned Babylon. And then the bronze part of

the image, the stomach and the thighs, they said, was Greece and the iron legs Rome. The feet of clay and iron were the ten or so kingdoms that Rome eventually divided into (the ten is symbolized by the toes).

Others have said that the silver kingdom was Media, the bronze Persia and the iron part Greece. Greece later divided into two rulerships (symbolized by the two feet of the image, not the ten toes!) Both these opinions have some good arguments for them.

It's amazing how many hundreds of hours have been spent studying these metal kingdoms. And thousands of pages have been written on them. Yet these kingdoms were shattered by the stone to dust and blown away by the wind. It's the stone that grew to the size of a mountain and filled the whole earth that's the most important thing in the whole chapter and yet much less has been written about that.

That image must have looked so impressive with its precious metals shining in the sun. You'll notice that the value of the metals decreased as they went down, but the strength increases for gold is weak and iron strong. Yet that small stone destroyed what was most valuable and most strong in those worldly kingdoms and we must wonder why. You see these nations were evil and cruel. Their governments were full of unbelief, disobedience and pride and they were very mean to God's people, Israel.

So what Daniel is saying to Nebuchadnezzar is this — you may be the king of the richest nation in the world, but because you scoff at my God, you will be overwhelmed by enemies. And my people will often be in subjection to wicked powers like yours. But one day, God will set up his kingdom here on earth. He'll set a king on this throne like King David of old. He'll be a mighty warrior and as a nation Israel will fight and overcome your wicked powers.

So, boys and girls, when the people who lived in Old Testament times read or heard this story, they looked for the coming of God's kingdom and his Messiah — a Prince who would come from God and rule over Israel and save them from their enemies. And even when Jesus was born, hundreds of years after the dream, they were still looking and longing for "the stone."

Imagine the horror and surprise of the Pharisees when Jesus announced that he was the stone. It was hard for them to understand this because Jesus was not the warrior they expected. He was the Prince of Peace.

But nevertheless when Jesus came he brought God's kingdom to earth. That's not easy to understand because it's really an invisible kingdom now in one sense. But you can see it at work wherever there are people who love Jesus with all their hearts and have asked him to take away their sins. Wherever you see people or children who long to do what is right, who love truth and goodness and honesty and justice — there is God's kingdom.

The day will come when Jesus will return. All nations and people that love evil will be destroyed and God's kingdom will indeed be the only one on earth. That will be a very happy day for those who love Jesus. But remember, boys and girls, you can be a citizen in God's kingdom now if you ask Him. Why don't you?

### **MORE ABOUT THAT STONE:**

You might wonder why Daniel used the symbol of a stone. It happens that in ancient times many of the ancient peoples on this earth believed that the earth had a navel — you know, a belly button — at its center. They believed the earth was a living creature. The navel, they thought, was the foundation of the whole earth (like the foundation supports a house, the navel was believed to support the earth). It was the point from which nourishment spread right across the earth. They thought water rose at this point and became the rivers of the world. They thought light was first created at this point and greenery spread across the earth from this center.

This was not just the idea of the people who wrote the Bible and believed in Jehovah God. Other pagan nations had the same idea. And all the ancient nations in the Far East believed their temple was built on that navel. They marked it with a rock, for the river of life was supposed to come up underneath and if they didn't stop it with a rock the world would flood. So because there were many gods in all these different countries and many temples supposedly built over the navel, "navel stones" have been found in quite a few places. They probably all thought they were the only one with a stone. There should have only been one — it made the earth look a bit like a baby with fifty belly buttons. But maybe they didn't travel far and so they didn't know this had happened.

The Jews had a similar belief. They believed that the foundation stone of the temple (the cornerstone on which rested most of the building's weight) was the navel of the earth.

There was a story referred to in Psalm 118:22 that when the temple was being built, the stones which were to make it up were kept in a quarry away from the temple site. This was because the Israelites had been told not to have the sound of hammering on the site where the temple was actually built. The stones were cut and shaped and hammered away in the quarry and then transported to the site where they were fitted together with very little noise. It must have been very difficult.

There was one stone at the quarry that appeared very ugly and unsightly. It was the strangest of shapes and a funny color so they threw it out on the scrap heap. But when it came time for the cornerstone (the foundation stone of the temple) to be cut out, it was found that this ugly stone which had been rejected fitted exactly and did not need to be altered.

This story will help us to understand the Scriptures in Matthew, Mark and Luke where Jesus announces that he is the Stone. He had just been telling the Pharisees a parable about a vineyard. He told them how a landowner (who represents God when you understand Jesus' hidden meaning) planted a vineyard (Israel) and let it out to tenants (the Pharisees) who were to till and nourish the vines. The man (God) sent servants (the prophets in the Old Testament) but they were treated terribly. So finally he sent them his beloved son (Jesus) — and they killed him. The Pharisees responded to this story by saying, "God forbid." Then Jesus answered and said this:

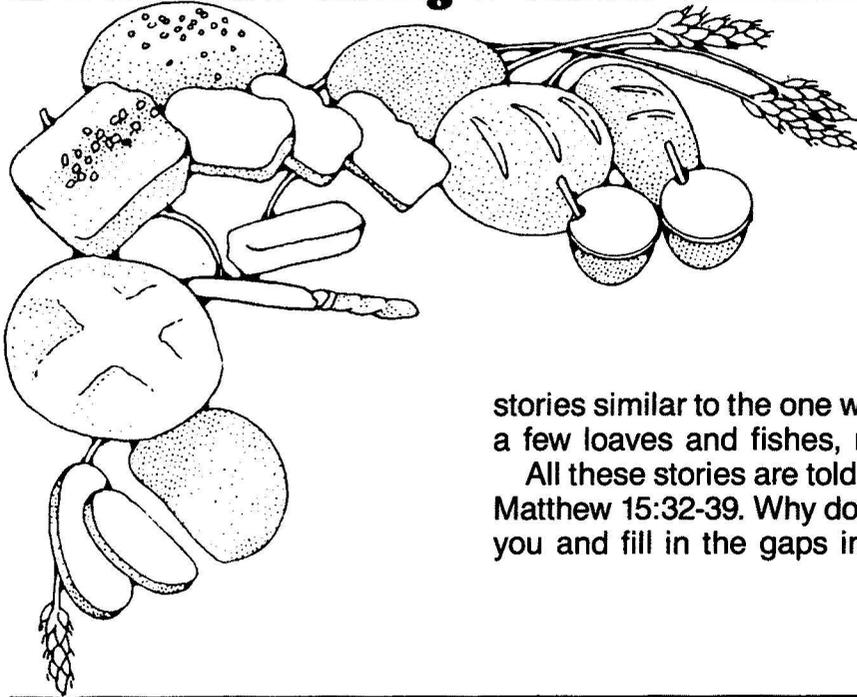
"The very stone that the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces. But when it falls on anyone it shall crush him." That crushing stone

refers to the stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What Jesus is saying is this — "I am that beloved Son that God has sent and you will kill me. And I am that stone that was rejected, the one in Daniel's dream that will crush the wicked."

In the book of Daniel, the stone represented God's kingdom, but in the New Testament, Jesus says he is the stone. And as the stone, he is the foundation of the church and with him God's kingdom has come.

This world has seen many great men — they have glittered like gold and been as strong as iron. But when Jesus came, he seemed to many as a common stone — despised and rejected by man. Yet as God's stone, he turned the world upside down. To those who love him the precious things the world offers are like dust and chaff. Will you love him today for to love Jesus is to be part of God's kingdom?

## ≡ For the King's Kids



### MULTIPLYING THE LOAVES

In an Old Testament book there is a story about a man who 'multiplied' twenty little barley loaves to feed one hundred men. When asked how there would be enough to feed them all for the loaves were very small like rolls, he replied, "They shall eat and have some left over." And they did.

In the New Testament there are two stories similar to the one we've just told. Jesus fed huge crowds with a few loaves and fishes, not just once, but twice.

All these stories are told in 2 Kings 4:42-44; Matthew 14:15-21 and Matthew 15:32-39. Why don't you ask your parents to read them with you and fill in the gaps in the graph below.

Scripture:	How Many Small Loaves?	How Many Small Fishes?	How Many People Fed?	How Much Left Over?
2 Kings 4:42-44:				
Matthew 14:15-21:				
Matthew 15:32-39:				

Why do you think in Jesus' two feedings, he had less to begin with, fed more people and had more left over in the first than the second? And why did He do better than Elijah?

Scripture:	How Many Small Loaves?	How Many Small Fishes?	How Many People Fed?	How Much Left Over?
2 Kings 4:42-44:	20	NONE	100	SOME
Matthew 14:15-21:	5	2	5000 MEN	12
Matthew 15:32-39:	7	few (more than 2)	4000 MEN	7

ANSWERS:

the fifth floor, but each time I was unable to get the whole building in the picture. I tried a different lens but it seemed to reduce the size of the building, resulting in a loss of its majesty and grandeur. I finally gave up and made my way back to the hotel. Getting the big picture is difficult if not impossible.

It is clear from the history of modern science that scientists are having the same difficulty. The big picture, a comprehensive, unified worldview has eluded the concentrated efforts of the world's best thinkers. Reality seems too big for us. The little bits of information gathered by Galileo, Copernicus and Newton destroyed the medieval worldview. Likewise, the bits of knowledge gathered by Einstein, Planck, Bohr and Heisenberg upset the worldview of Newton. It seems that we can never be sure that we have all the information necessary to formulate a stable worldview. We may have to live with this problem for a long time, for the scale of our universe is awesome. Our minds are set reeling when we realize that light traveling at 186,000 miles a second takes eight minutes to reach us from the sun — but four years from the nearest star, 27,000 years from the center of the Milky Way, and 800,000 years from the galaxy Andromeda. Yet Andromeda is now considered a member of what is called the *local* cluster of galaxies, beyond which lie countless stars and grouping of stars thousands of times more distant from us than Andromeda!

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### Reductionism

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But there is an even more fundamental problem with scientific worldviews than lack of information. It is the problem which grows out of the very nature of the scientific method itself. When I was in New York I found that by using a wide-angled lens I could easily get all of the building into the frame, but, as stated above, the skyscrapers in my picture did not look anywhere near as imposing as they did in reality. Reality also suffers a critical loss as it is perceived through the lens of modern science. Alan Watts, in his book *The Wisdom of Insecurity*, made

this point well when he wrote:

The scientific way of symbolizing the world is more suited to utilitarian purposes than the religious way, but this does not mean that it has more "truth." Is it truer to classify rabbits according to their meat or according to their fur? It depends on what you want to do with them. The clash between science and religion has not shown that religion is false and science is true. *It has shown that all systems of definition are relative to various purposes, and that none of them actually "grasp" reality!*

*"In given circumstances poetry can catch the secret of nature and of man better than some ever so exact description or photograph. . . . Truth is not identical with facticity, and in particular not identical with historical truth. . . . Poetry, parable and legend . . . can communicate more relevant truth than historical report. . . ." A more holistic view of life and the universe demands that we see it from many perspectives.*

The point Watts is making is of fundamental importance. He is not splitting hairs. Every day of our lives, in a thousand ways we acknowledge the point Watts is making. Let me illustrate his point. Suppose we were traveling by cab in San Francisco. We gave instructions to the cab driver to take us across the Golden Gate Bridge. A few hundred yards from the bridge we noticed a sign which read: "NO ENTRY — BRIDGE DAMAGED BY EARTHQUAKE." But our cab driver ignored the sign and continued to approach the bridge. In consternation we cried out, "Stop

sir, didn't you see the road sign?"

"Oh, don't worry about the road sign," says the cabby, "that sign is just a bit of paint on metal. The paint is made up of various chemicals such as toloul, zylol, alcohol, alkid, polyester polymers, etc."

We would learn immediately that a scientific description or analysis of a road sign doesn't say much about its ultimate significance, purpose and meaning for motorists.<sup>2</sup> The same may be true of scientific worldviews. A scientific descriptive analysis of the material aspects of the universe may not tell us anything about the origin, purpose and destiny of the universe.

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### What Is Man?

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Not so long ago I took a course in biology. In a light and playful moment my professor said that man is a complicated animal, composed of certain chemical elements. "In man there is enough water to wash an average-size pair of blankets; enough fat to make seven bars of laundry soap, enough sugar to sweeten a cake, enough lime to whitewash a doghouse, enough potassium to explode a toy cannon, enough sulphur to kill the fleas on a dog. That is all. You can buy the lot for five dollars at the nearest drug store!" If this description of a human being does not enlighten you, try this one from Buckminster Fuller:

Man is a self-balancing, 28-jointed adapter-base biped; an electrochemical reduction plant, integral with segregated stowages of special energy extracts in storage batteries for subsequent actuation of thousands of hydraulic and pneumatic pumps with motors attached; 62,000 miles of capillaries. . . . The whole, extraordinary complex mechanism guided with exquisite precision from a turret in which are located telescopic and microscopic self-registering and recording range finders, a spectroscope, etc.; the turret control being closely allied with an air-conditioning intake-and-exhaust, and a main fuel intake. . . .

Do you think an employer would find this description of a job applicant helpful?

But is not a person more than some carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorous, sulphur, etc.? A bio-chemical description of man is a valid description from the perspective of chemistry but one that is hardly helpful to a sociologist. Once again, a bio-chemical analysis of the human body may not tell us anything about the significance, purpose and value of a human being.

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### What is a Sunset?

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A photographer and an artist who spend many hours trying to capture the beauty of a sunset are obviously convinced that it is more than just a refraction of light on dust and vapor. And it may be that a gifted poet may capture more of the sunset than the photographer and artist. For as Hans Kung has written:

In given circumstances poetry can catch the secret of nature and of man better than some ever so exact description or photograph. . . . Truth is not identical with facticity, and in particular not identical with historical truth. . . . Poetry, parable and legend . . . can communicate more relevant truth than historical report.<sup>3</sup>

A more holistic view of life and the universe demands that we see it from many perspectives. As Donald MacKay has pointed out "completeness of description at one level doesn't necessarily rule out the need for description at others."<sup>4</sup>

So, a problem with scientific worldviews is not just that they are formulated without proper respect for the *unknown*. The more immediate problem is that the scientific method is never able to grasp the total reality of what is *known*. The scientific method reduces things — its reductionistic. Dr. Charles Singer put it unambiguously in his article on science in the Encyclopedia Britannica:

. . . It must ever be borne in mind that science never considers and cannot consider the world as a whole. It is essential to any science that it proceed by abstracting a part of

the universe, to be considered by and for itself . . . Here it must suffice to indicate that there cannot be a 'science' of the whole universe . . . There is no such thing as a universal science, a scientific treatment of the entire universe. It is moreover, certain that there never can be . . . Thus to the oft-asked question 'What does science say about religion?' the strictly true answer is 'Nothing whatever' if by religion is meant a general view of the universe and of man's place in it.<sup>5</sup>

*The scientific way of symbolizing the world is more suited to utilitarian purposes than the religious way, but this does not mean that it has more "truth." Is it truer to classify rabbits according to their meat or according to their fur? It depends on what you want to do with them. The clash between science and religion has not shown that religion is false and science is true. It has shown that all systems of definition are relative to various purposes, and that none of them actually "grasp" reality.*

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### Modern Worldviews

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There are three worldviews widely held at present: (1) the Big-bang (2) the Steady-state (3) the Pulsating-bubble. All of these world pictures are based on observations of the physical aspects of the universe — matter. No one would want to ignore the material side of our universe in an

endeavor to construct a coherent worldview. But what if the physical aspects of our universe do not hold the clue to the ultimate significance of life? For all we know, the random activity of the subatomic particles may be quite irrelevant to the task of constructing a world picture. We would think a person rather odd who went to a live theater and spent all his time trying to discover what the play was all about by studying the stage floor! It may be that the real clue to the meaning of the universe lies in the *personal* rather than in the *impersonal*. If an evolutionist takes his theory seriously should he not look at the apex (human beings) of evolution to discover something of the origin and destiny of the universe?

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### Conclusion

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The history of modern science has convinced me that finding a coherent worldview is no easy task. Who is willing to wager that the standard worldview of today will enjoy favor three centuries from now? With a new sense of humility we may be in a better position today to appreciate what the Hebrew-Christian prophets were trying to say as they spoke about God, man and life as they experienced it in this universe. (To be continued)

1. A. Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*, p. 51.
2. I am indebted to D. MacKay for the basic idea of this illustration. See *Science and the Quest For Meaning*, p. 22.
3. As quoted in *What are they Saying About Jesus?*, C. Collins, p. 59.
4. D. MacKay, *Science and the Quest For Meaning*, p. 21.
5. Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 20, p. 123.



# Wrestling with the Word

by Brad McIntyre

*"No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. . . . He who commits sin is of the Devil. . . . No one born of God commits sin...He cannot sin. . . ."*

(1 Jn 3:6,8,9 RSV).

**T**hat's a tough nut to crack, isn't it? But let me say, it's an even tougher nut to swallow! Do you know anyone who never sins in thought, word, or deed? Do you never sin, not even in motive? Yes, those verses are very difficult to explain but even more difficult to live if taken at their face value.

Sometimes there is a difference between what Scripture says and what Scripture means. For example, when Paul was wrestling with the Galatians over the issue of justification by faith and whether they had to become Jews first in order to become Christians, he told them, "If you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing," (Gal 5:2). If that means exactly what it says, many happy Christians in every church are going to miss out on everlasting life. But, of course, what Paul meant was this: If a person was purposely circumcised as a means of earning Christ's favor, then he had robbed Christ of his efficacy as Savior. So we must distinguish between what Scripture says and what Scripture means. Another example has to do with the gathering of the manna. In more than one place in Exodus 16 it is declared that the people would gather the manna "a certain

rate every day" (see for example verses 4 and 21). But when one reads the whole chapter one finds that the expression "every day" did not include the seventh day which was the Sabbath.

Now let us return to our problem passage from 1 John. The passage certainly does not mean that Christians never sin. The writer of the epistle himself did not believe that Christians were faultless in behavior. In the first chapter he says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (v. 8). Furthermore, he admonishes us to "confess our sins" (v. 9). Again, nearby he adds, "I'm writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous . . ." (1 Jn 2:1). And in the last chapter we read these significant words: "If anyone sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal" (1 Jn 5:16,17).

The rest of Scripture supports this truth that even born-again Christians make mistakes. Indeed, our Lord admonished us that whenever we pray we should ask for the forgiveness of sins (see the Lord's Prayer).

Salvation is never of works at any stage (Eph 2:8,9). And the obvious reason is that our works are never good enough to meet the demands of God's holy law. Wesley spoke with scorn of those religious men who were trusting in their own behavior for salvation and while the following description applies specifically to the unconverted yet to a degree it remains true even for those who have laid hold of Christ. Said Wesley:

Is it not then the very foolishness of folly, for fallen man to seek life by his righteousness? For man, who was "shapen in wickedness, and in sin did his mother conceive him? Man, who is, by nature, all "earthly, sensual, devilish;" altogether "corrupt and abominable;" in whom,

til we find grace, "dwelleth no good thing:" Nay, who cannot of himself think one good thought; who is indeed all sin, a mere lump of ungodliness, and who commits sin in every breath he draws; whose actual transgressions, in word and deed, are more in number than the hairs of his head? What stupidity, what senselessness must it be for such an unclean, guilty, helpless worm as this, to dream of seeking acceptance by his own righteousness, of living by "the righteousness which is of the law!"

(Wesley's Sermons, Volume 1, pp. 78-80)

The sinful nature will not be eradicated until glorification. That is the united testimony of Scripture (Php 1:6; 1 Cor 15:53,54; Jas 3:2).

What then does the troublesome passage in 1 John mean? Most interpreters over the years have pointed out that the verb translated "commits" is in the present tense and that therefore the passage is saying that a Christian cannot habitually practice doing what he knows to be wrong. There is good sense in this interpretation but there may be a better one.

John in this epistle is clearly distinguishing between Christians and non-Christians. His emphasis is not on the contrast between baby Christians and very mature ones. He is painting in blacks and whites only. What he almost certainly has in mind in this difficult passage is the sin he speaks about in the last chapter of the same letter — the sin unto death. By mortal sin John means presumptuous sin, and the passage we are investigating is saying that no Christian deliberately pursues a course of presumptuous sin. Once a believer is born again, such is impossible unless he forsakes Christ. Because our sins have crucified Christ, it's our desire to crucify our sins. Sins of weakness and infirmity we all have aplenty, but they are in different category to presumptuous sin as 1 John 5:16,17 and Psalm 19:12,13 make clear. Thus understood, our original verses do not constitute such a tough nut to crack and indeed can be swallowed with thankfulness and joy.



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