

WALTER LÜTHI

The Church
to Come

The Message of
the Prophet Daniel

Translator
David Haxton Carswell Read

Digitisation

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Translator's Note

HERE is outstanding proof that the 'expository' sermon need not be out of touch with present-day life. In the following pages you will hear a voice from the cauldron of Central Europe, faithfully expounding the Book of Daniel in its stark modernity. It has been the ideal of the translator to let that voice be heard with as much as possible of its original vigour and freshness. – The text used throughout is the Authorized Version... Margin, or Moffatt.

My thanks are due to Mr. Victor Wiesenberger for his indefatigable and skilful aid over the linguistic hurdles.

D. H. C. READ

Preface to this digital edition

Firstly, I would like to say a very big thank you to Heather and Iain McKelvie, Ireland². During their holiday week with us in the Swiss Alps, they motivated us to read through not just one sermon a day together, but all twelve sermons over the seven days. In the end, this was a very valuable experience and a great blessing for all of us: Light and hope from God's word in our lives and in our present time! At the same time, Heather and Iain, as English specialists, helped to find and correct the various digitisation errors (OCR). They also made suggestions for some necessary modern-day adaptations of old English expressions that are no longer understood today. Thank you so much! Heather, we will miss your lively way of reading Daniel's message to us!

RECOMMENDATION: Based on this personal experience, we can only warmly recommend, reading these sermons aloud in a smaller or larger group of people.

² From 2004 to 2010 Heather and Iain McKelvie were dear members of our mission-team in Arequipa, Peru, where we lived from 1996 to 2020.

The previous version of the English Bible texts has been replaced throughout by the 'New American Standard Bible 1995' (NASB1995)³. This version is still more comprehensible today and is even closer to the German original, in which the Bible texts of the Luther translation were used.

Some expressions or passages that were translated incorrectly or inadequately have been slightly adapted.

A few explanatory footnotes have been added here and there.

The biblical quotations in the sermons have been emphasised in italics. For those from the book of Daniel, only the verse numbers have been inserted. For all others, the references have been added as footnotes.

IMPORTANT! For an appropriate understanding of these sermons today, it is essential to always keep the original context in mind: Sermons, preached in Basel, right on the border with what was then Nazi Germany – at a time when the 'labour pains' of Second World War, which began three years later, were already clearly noticeable.... See below the notes about the author and further down the 'Foreword by the author'. – The fact that the 'preacher' was then only 35 years old may also surprise us... In the spirit of Walter Lüthi himself (in Daniel 1) let us interpret this with amazement and gratitude as: *'God gave!'*

The publisher of this digital version, Hans Käser

The author Rev. Walter Luthi (1901 - †1982)

He was born 1901 in Günsberg above Solothurn, Switzerland, but is a native of Lützelflüh, and in his way he is a true Bernese. He was first a pastor in the town of Vinelz on Lake Biel and then worked in the church of Ökolampad in Basel for several years. That's where, as a 35 years old pastor, he

³ A few expressions have been adapted to the German original Bible text.

gave the sermons of Daniel. From 1946 until his retirement in 1968 he served as a pastor at the cathedral of Bern. His first book, the weekday sermons "Das ewige Jahr" (The Eternal Year), brought Christianity back to all seekers, but above all to farmers, in a completely new way. Pastor Lüthi became known far beyond the borders of the German-speaking world through his interpretation of Daniel, "Die kommende Kirche" (The Church to come), which has been published in many languages. A counterpart to this is his book "The Message of the Prophet Amos", which has also been published in English and Dutch.

Foreword by the author

This work is based on twelve sermons, which were given from December 1935 to October 1936 at Ökolampad in Basel and were subsequently only slightly cleaned up afterwards.

The exposition of the Book of Daniel involved the steadily growing conviction that it contains a particular message for our time, often in a very startling way. Although God's message is one and the same for all times, yet the Lord summons us to watch for "the signs of the times" That is the significance of the Book of Daniel. It sharpens our vision to recognize these "signs".

The expositor confines himself to the *message* of the prophet — a self-imposed limitation. The author is well aware that there are questions raised about "Daniel" which are to-day more obscure and insoluble than ever, and which must on the whole remain insoluble until the day of "seeing face to face".

It is quite obvious by now that in all the twelve chapters the prophet's finger continually points to the One who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that in comparison with the other prophets a

particularly clear witness to Christ is given in "Daniel". This is the main point — that he sets forth Christ; and it is not affected by the problem as to whether it pleased God to let Daniel prophesy looking forward from the sixth century or looking backward from the second. So, we have intentionally laid aside the enormous critical apparatus. The prophetic word of Daniel remains a prophetic word from without and from above, whatever we call it from within — a plain, forward, backward, or round-about view.

It should be noted too about the Book of Daniel that in any case we are not dealing here with a burnt-out crater. Daniel is an active volcano. Therefore, if anyone thinks that it is a matter of playing with cold lava, for edification or otherwise, he should realize that he is playing with fire.

Basel, Switzerland, beginning of January 1937. Walter Lüthi

Cover note of the scanned original

This work has been selected by scholars as being culturally important, and is part of the knowledge base of civilization as we know it.

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I. The Church in Prison

¹ *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. ⁶ Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.*

⁸ *But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, ¹⁰ and the commander of the officials said to Daniel: "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my*

head to the king. " ¹¹ But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah: ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. ¹⁶ So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables. ¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.

¹⁸ Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. ²⁰ As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. ²¹ And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king. Daniel 1

According to world-history it is "¹ the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah". Nebuchadnezzar's troops stand before the gates of the holy city. But Nebuchadnezzar strides through the ages. The King of Babylon does not remain before the walls of the historical Jerusalem. It is not just a question of this Jerusalem before which the tents of Babylon stand for scarce a day. As far as the eye can range over the whole earth Jerusalem is besieged by the troops of Babylon

to-day. Babylon has in the first place taken possession of youth. It's not only "²*some of the vessels of the house of God*" that is to-day in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He has never stood in need of "*some vessels*". His imperial will has been accustomed to take the lot. And so he has laid his hand on the youth, the coming generation of the community. Nebuchadnezzar thinks: "Whoever has the youth..."; Nebuchadnezzar thinks, and — God directs.

³*Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles.*" He sends for the boys. For obvious reasons the boys interest Nebuchadnezzar more than the girls. If he gives a thought to the girls at all it's only because he sees in them the future mothers of his battalions. We know Napoleon's phrase — which might have been Nebuchadnezzar's — "Give me mothers!"

However, Nebuchadnezzar doesn't take an equal interest in all the boys. He limits his choice to "⁴*youths in whom was no defect*". Nebuchadnezzar has less use for 'defective', weak young people. They can neither carry a pack nor sling hand-grenades. In the domestic accounts of the Babylonian king a blemished youth was entered in under the heading 'Liabilities'. One was best rid of them. And so, to-day throughout the whole world Nebuchadnezzar is pondering the ways and means of this problem: either how he can prevent the blemished children from coming into the world at all, or if by mischance that has already happened how he can get rid of them with as little rumpus as possible. The recipes of Friedrich Nietzsche have ceased to be simply ideas in a book. Woe to the blemished children when the countries of the world resound to the brazen steps of Nebuchadnezzar summoning "⁴*youths in whom was no defect*"!

Yes, but was that not our own demand just a short time ago? In our junior, senior, and high schools, haven't we ourselves

called out for children in whom is no blemish? Wasn't that just our ABC, our multiplication-table, our faith and our Paternoster, our — Gospel? "⁴ *Youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge...*" isn't that the secondary-school boy of our dreams?

There's no getting away from it. We fathers and mothers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have ourselves become Nebuchadnezzars, and we still are. More or less unconsciously we have joined in the song of Youthful Fitness, which the world obeys. Nebuchadnezzar is living — a thousand times, a million times, he is living, and not only on the sports field, and in the recruiting office. He lives in our heads and hearts. For Nebuchadnezzar is the Spirit of the Century, not any particular century, but simply for all times and all places the Spirit of the Century, the Spirit of this World, the Spirit of the Times.

Then Nebuchadnezzar takes the lads in whom there is no blemish into his palace. And there he lavishes royal abundance on them. "⁵ *The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years...*" The king's care for the boys he is interested in extends to the menu, to the very dishes and brands of wine. He may "cut the budget" in other directions; here, where it is a question of the education of the lads "⁴ *in whom was no defect*", he shrinks from no expenditure.

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar does only too well by the boys from Jerusalem in his palace. He cares not only for their bodies, but also for their souls. He doesn't only lay down the law as to what they must eat and drink. He goes on to decree what they must think and — what they have to believe. The lads must study "⁴ *the literature and language of the Chaldeans*".

He wants to teach them perfect Chaldean — Chaldean literature and language. For Chaldean is the king's language. The king knows that these lads have brought another language with them from their home. Therefore not only education but a re-education will be necessary, and that, as Nebuchadnezzar well knows, takes time. He seems even to be counting on a certain amount of resistance. So he appoints a regular course of re-education of a comprehensive nature — an educational "Three Years' Plan". Nebuchadnezzar is fond of comprehensive plans. But we begin to see what the tendency of this re-education really is from the fact that right away the king takes from the boys the names that they had got from the community, handed down to them from their fathers in the faith, and gives them names in honour of his own gods: *"7 Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego."* Just a trifle perhaps; but it shows us with what grim consistency and far-reaching purpose Nebuchadnezzar goes to work.

The ultimate object of the Babylonish education is plainly stated: *"4 For serving in the king's court."* Thoughtful pedagogues are beginning to discuss to-day "that public education lacks a unifying basis and a unifying aim". But even already that is hardly true, and very soon it will be the outward wisdom of yesterday. All over the world, more obviously every year, there is an ever more conscious unifying of education. From the islands of Japan to the Swiss Alps, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Gulf of Finland, public education continues to take on a more clearly unified pattern. The rising generation of the world is to be educated for this ultimate object: *"4 For serving in the king's court."* We've got to-day a world-wide unifying aim in education — the production of amenable and serviceable instruments of Nebuchadnezzar.

Without any kind of protection or defence, Daniel and his fellow-prisoners are handed over to this system of education. Nebuchadnezzar commands; and they have to obey. The believing community cannot help it. Nebuchadnezzar takes from them the rising generation and forces them to sit on his school-benches. They've just got to endure it. Why they must endure it we shall see later in the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel.

And yet the believing community should know: There is a God above Daniel and his comrades in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. And God draws a line through this beautifully conceived educational system of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar thought he had worked it all out just right, but he still had something to learn. He had to learn that *"He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep"*⁴, but quietly carries through his mighty work in this world to the end. God had got Daniel and his friends in His book, long before Nebuchadnezzar had entered them in his little booklet. God has singled them out from their birth and girded them with iron; has set them at His table, fed them with His food, and refreshed them with His cup. Let Nebuchadnezzar school them a hundred times over *"for serving in the king's court."* — God has chosen them for *His* service. Nebuchadnezzar may change the names of the children of God; he may exchange the name of God for the names of his gods; but Nebuchadnezzar will never gain his object. He should have stopped to think before coming into conflict with God's plans. For before even this conflict had begun, it had already been won by God. God knows the ways and means to lead His children to the goal that He has appointed for them, and God will reach this goal — in spite of Nebuchadnezzar. What we go on to read has an almost comic ring about it. It's an

⁴ Psalm 121:4

expression of that divine humour that we find in the Psalms: *"He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them."*⁵

"⁸ But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials." And so, in spite of the imperious will of Nebuchadnezzar, God ordains that Daniel has to eat the food that is provided according to His own will. And the king's own steward has to be his accomplice. Isn't that just the way that God got hold of a Moses to be His instrument in the palace of the Egyptian tyrant... through Pharaoh's daughter? Now the food that God has ordained for Daniel is not so luxurious as that of the royal table. Rather a worry for the steward: *"¹⁰ I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."* But the steward can hardly believe his eyes. At the end of the time of probation he has to acknowledge that the lads who live *"by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord"*⁶ are thriving not just equally well, but better. And here the steward stands — and we with him — in the presence of a mystery.

If the stewards of this world, in the junior, middle, and high schools, are beginning to open their eyes, it is to this fact; that no generation can be brought up on the food from Nebuchadnezzar's table. Year by year thousands of *"youths in whom was no defect"* are leaving the school-rooms and the lecture-rooms, and they are hungering for work and no one gives it them. If this fact doesn't make you the slightest bit

⁵ Psalm 2:4

⁶ Deuteronomy 8:4; Matthew 4:4

more cautious about Nebuchadnezzar's food, then you are past help. For the food from the king's table has in the last resort always come short just where it has sought to replace and to supersede the Word from the mouth of God.

In view, then, of this failure of the food from Nebuchadnezzar's table, it is understandable that here and there a teacher, a professor, a mother, a father should follow in the footsteps of this steward; follow in frailty, secretly and timidly, but in faith; and make this steward's programme their own: *"¹⁶ So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables"* Vegetables, cabbage — miserable fare in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and of this world. But thank God every now and then the time-table allows Nebuchadnezzar's bill of fare to be set aside (not only during the hours of religious instruction) and the vegetables from God's table to be offered.

Finally we've got to admit that the king himself is better served by such an indiscretion on the part of the steward, even against his will. For we read at the end of the chapter: *"²⁰ As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm."* Now that's not presumption, for it's not a question of the wisdom that we have in our heads, or the prudence that we have in our hearts, but of that mystery that the apostle James talks of, *"the wisdom from above"*⁷. We shall come across this wisdom again, more than once, in the course of the Book of Daniel. God has hidden this wisdom from the wise and prudent and has revealed it unto babes. For this reason, and for this reason only, are these lads *"²⁰ ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm "*. For it is written of them: *"¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch*

⁷ James 3:17

of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams." When God gives, He gives ten times more than the steward of Nebuchadnezzar can give from the table of the richest king.

"^{9.17} God gave." God gave Daniel *"⁹ favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials"*. And God gave the four lads what they needed in the palace of the king. And yet again, it was God who gave Daniel his peculiar gifts of exposition of scripture and interpretation of dreams. Throughout all these twelve chapters Daniel tirelessly points his finger to this *"God gave."* The book of Daniel is not about the story of a man, Daniel, who lives with his companions at the court of Babylon in captivity and has to go through all kinds of humanly touching things. As moving and instructive and heart-wrenching all this personal experience of this man may be, they are not the actual story of the book. No! It is *God's* history, and consists in this, that God there and then opened His hands and *"gave"*.

But all that God has given from the beginning of the world, and all that He gives to-day, and will give till the end of the world, is fulfilled and accomplished in Jesus Christ, His Son: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..."⁸* The Son is the Gift of God. Yea, He is more than that. In the Son, the Father gives Himself. The threefold *"God gave"* in the first chapter of the prophet Daniel leads us to the Son of God.

God gave Himself in His Son. And that is the one and only reason why the children of the believing community are not lost in the palace of the king. These children are baptized into His Name according to the command of Him who sends His community into all the world and unto all peoples. As the baptismal hymn puts it, the children are "immersed in

⁸ John 3:16

Christ". And so when fathers or mothers of the Christian community anxiously enquire about their sons and daughters, I can only answer: Believe! Believe that your children belong body and soul unto Christ and not unto Nebuchadnezzar.

"Whoever lays hold of youth..." Well, who has laid hold of youth? Who has got youth and the future, Christ or Nebuchadnezzar? If the Christian world to-day is worried by this problem, then the Christian world must be told that this is not simply a question of children and children's children. There's more at stake. It's not simply a question of the growth of the individual, but of the growth of the community. And the first chapter of the book of Daniel gives the amazing answer that the community need in no way despair of its future growth, since God is minded to work out His purposes against all the assaults of Nebuchadnezzar. Here we are directly reminded of that incident reported in the Gospels, which admittedly from quieter times is tainted by a childish-*idyllic* side odour, but which is now appearing to a struggling community once more in its mighty splendour: ¹³*Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But Jesus said: 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'* ¹⁵*After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.*⁹

Christ is not willing to give His children into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Christ "lays His hand on them" and does not allow Nebuchadnezzar to rob them of their souls. Nebuchadnezzar may stride through the ages; but through the ages Christ offers to a youth the gift of discipleship: ¹⁶*As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they*

⁹ Matthw 19:13-15

were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them: 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' ¹⁸ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. ¹⁹ Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him. "¹⁰

Daniel 1 and Mark 1 stand in a direct line. The selfsame Hand that sent the gift of discipleship to the four lads at Nebuchadnezzar's table, sends that same gift to the four lads by the Lake of Gennesaret. But that same God, who gave in Christ, gives to-day, and gives to all eternity.

"God gave" — that is the Gospel of this chapter.

¹⁰ Mark 1:16-20

II. The Church as the Steward of God's Mysteries

¹ Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. ² Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³ The king said to them: "I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream." ⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation." ⁵ The king replied to the Chaldeans: "The thing is gone from me.¹¹ If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap. ⁶ But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation." ⁷ They answered a second time and said: "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation." ⁸ The king replied: "I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm, ⁹ that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed; therefore tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation." ¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king and said: "There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has ever asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean. ¹¹ Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one

¹¹ Changed to 'American Standart Version'.

else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh." ¹² *Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.* ¹³ *So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them.*

¹⁴ *Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king's bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon;* ¹⁵ *he said to Arioch, the king's commander: "For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?"* *Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter.* ¹⁶ *So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king.* ¹⁷ *Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter,* ¹⁸ *so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.* ¹⁹ *Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven;* ²⁰ *Daniel said: "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him.* ²¹ *"It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.* ²² *It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.* ²³ *To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king's matter."* ²⁴ *Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king's presence, and I will*

declare the interpretation to the king." ²⁵ Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!" ²⁶ The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar: "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?"

²⁷ Daniel answered before the king and said: "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. ²⁸ However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed. ²⁹ As for you, O king, while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place. ³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. ³¹ You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. ³² The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴ You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But

the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king. ³⁷ You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; ³⁸ and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold. ³⁹ After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. ⁴¹ In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. ⁴² As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. ⁴³ And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery. ⁴⁴ In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering

and fragrant incense. ⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel and said: "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery." ⁴⁸ Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court. Daniel 2

When tyrants suffer from bad dreams, God is at work. When Joseph was languishing in the Egyptian gaol, it was through an alarming dream of the Pharaoh that God set him free. And so we read now in the beginning of this second chapter of the Book of Daniel: *"¹ Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him."* God is terrifying Nebuchadnezzar with dreams. Then Daniel's hour has struck. For Daniel is living in the king's palace as the "steward of the mysteries of God".

This frightened king comes very close to us to-day, as he stands before us with his helpless cry: *"³ I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream."* And when he is asked about the contents of the dream, he can't remember and has to confess: *"⁵ The thing is gone from me"*. All he can say is that it was a threatening dream. Don't we feel the most lively sympathy with him here? Isn't this just exactly our own state of mind when we think of the world-events we have had to witness during these last few years? Can you really look back on recent history in any other way than as a bad dream? We have seen a world in which events rush straight on like a dream. They have that dream-like quality of being one minute crystal-clear and the next again dark and misty. Impossible to seize the stormy series of events and to make of it an intelligible whole. It has been like a dream. We

have dreamed a dream and our spirits are troubled to know the dream. But "the thing is gone from us". Only one thing do we know: it was a bad dream.

This Nebuchadnezzar may have lived and dreamed when you like and where you like. But his countenance stares at us across the ages. Nebuchadnezzar is one of ours. He might be sitting next to you this morning as your bench-mate. Yes, *we* are now this king, you and I. For what he does in his hour of need is exactly what we do. He calls in the Chaldeans to help him, the wise men, the brains of his nation and of his day. *"²Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams."* But they are unable to help him. They are as helpless as he is, and they have to admit it: *"¹¹The thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh."*

Yes, for a long time now we've been calling in the Chaldeans, the wise and able ones of this world, the specialists and the experts! But where is the brain of the nation? It has left us in the lurch. To expect and to demand help from the wise and prudent is just as foolish now as it was when king Nebuchadnezzar called in the Chaldeans.

And now, what happens? We might well be overcome with sheer terror by the very modernity, the horrifying modernity, with which events begin to unroll in this chapter. And can only shudder and continually repeat: Just like this, yes, just like this it has happened with us. This is exactly what we have seen and lived through in the last decades. The helpless king gets impatient and begins to threaten. After the experts have failed him the king has recourse to violence. He proclaims a massacre for the brains of his country. It's just that way that we have moved and are still moving.

The last succour that men resort to is usually violence. In revolution from above or from below, from Left or Right, every time the final human argument is the clenched fist. If the Chaldeans have failed, if the brains have left us in the lurch — all right then — violence! And yet violence, as we see here, is always the sign of ultimate helplessness and complete failure. But now, when the weakness of the brain-power has become apparent, the hour has struck for the State-police. Where the Chaldeans fail, the executioner Arioch steps in, "¹⁴*Arioch, the captain of the king's body-guard*". Now, don't immediately let your thoughts travel over the Alps or over the Rhine! Here at home, *our* Chaldeans have failed us. You and I, our fellow-countrymen of the Left and the Right — our scholarship is at the end of its tether. And we have come right up against that point where the way of violence begins.

But there lives in the king's palace a man with the name of Daniel, "²⁵*a man among the exiles from Judah*". And he sees the day of destiny approaching. But his mission and authority in the palace of the foreign king is to see and to show a way just where the Chaldeans have failed. And it's not the way of all flesh, the way of violence, but the way of which it is written: "*Your way was in the sea and Your paths in the mighty waters, and Your footprints may not be known.*"¹²

Daniel is driven to prayer. He beseeches God for light, for a word that he can say to the angry king. And Daniel does not pray alone. He takes into his confidence that little group of men who call upon the same God and stand under the same promise. "¹⁷*Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter,*¹⁸*so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven...*"

¹² Psalm 77:19

In this complicated problem Daniel gets God's answering guidance through a vision in the night. And this vision is so unequivocally clear to him, and brings him such a radiant certainty that it contains the message for the king, that the next morning he can scarcely conceal his joy. At the very point where our human wisdom fails, there is a Wisdom of God. There is One who has light even where we can see only darkness. Daniel gives expression to this certainty in the presence of his companions-in-prayer in the glorious words: *"²⁰ Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. ²¹ It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. ²² It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him."*

And then he goes to the king and bears witness; a witness that might have cost him his head, a witness of which we are tempted to say: "How brave!" But this isn't a matter of human bravery or heroics, but of a way, indicated and prepared by God, and travelled by a man in frailty. The obedience of faith is something more than bravery; for it is a gift of God. All that Daniel has, all that he is, is a gift.

It is given to him to make a clear and frank statement to the king. The Chaldeans, Daniel begins, have not been able to reveal the secret to the king, for it lies outside of their power. Daniel undertakes their defence. The king has asked the impossible of them. *"²⁸ However, there is a God in heaven" who has given Daniel the secret. Daniel is anxious to point the king away from himself to the Giver of the gift. And so he adds an explanation: "³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man"*, but through God's gracious mediation this human impossibility has become possible.

The vision which he now goes on to describe to the king is odd enough: ³¹*There was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome.*" The head of it is of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs and feet part of iron, part of clay. ³⁴*You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands.*" The stone smote the feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces — in fact, broke in pieces the whole image, iron and clay, brass, silver and gold. The whole image ³⁵*became like chaff from the summer threshing-floors*" which is blown to all the winds by the first breath of air that comes. It's all very well for Daniel in his interpretation to say to the king: ³⁸*You are the head of gold.*" It's cold comfort, when it must immediately be added that the stone broke everything in pieces — including the head of gold!

Men have racked their brains to discover what world-powers are indicated in this passage. And certainly real world-powers are meant. But their actual names don't seem to us to be essential. For there is no earthly kingdom that is *not* indicated here. The picture speaks of all that is armed with "great power and much cunning"¹³. Nebuchadnezzar's vision is a wonderfully clear mirror of the nations. For in it is simply described the nature of nations as we have seen them quite clearly in former centuries, and in this century. We have seen countries and peoples and whole races resembling the golden head. And we ourselves have seen the days when we could shout for joy. "Still is the flourishing, golden time; still we have days of roses." But the roses have lost their leaves. The storm has taken them. And so the head of finest gold stands on its feet of clay, and will be broken in pieces by the stone. And we have seen, and still see, countries, peoples and races, made of "steel and stone", who sing that "God who

¹³ Martin Luther

made iron to grow, wants no slaves"¹⁴. But the stone that is cut out without hands, crushes the iron races too. Clay or iron, brass, or silver or gold — they all stand on feet of clay, and none is a match for the stone that rolled.

We have seen this stone set loose, and have heard its mighty rolling through the world of men. And not only as spectators. Each one of us has had and has cherished our own little kingdom. And the stone has also passed over our little private kingdoms, the golden and the silver, the iron and the clay. Our private spheres and interests, our capitalized and invested means — gold and clay alike — haven't they all been shaken by the stone that is rolling through our years? No, this is no longer a dream. The stone of God's judgment rolls through our days. For this is a crystal-clear spiritual insight that comes across to us here from the prophet Daniel. In this light we gaze into the dark countenance of the future. From this point the real meaning of our times grows upon us.

But, thank God, this isn't the whole revelation the prophet received. There is a meaning in this stone of God's judgment. It doesn't roll blindly and haphazardly through the ages, nor execute mechanically its destructive work. The stone has an appointed destination. Even if our eyes cannot see the hand that sets it loose, the fact remains that a hand controls it. It's not just for the sake of smiting that the stone of God's judgment smites the kingdoms of this world, but to make room for the eternal kingdom. And so whenever our little kingdoms of silver or gold or clay are smitten, then, however hard it may seem at the time to us, from God's point of view it will be a matter of making way and room for the coming of His Kingdom. The smiting of this stone shows how jealously God guards his undivided Sovereignty. *"For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God."*¹⁵ There's something

¹⁴ A German song written by Ernst Moritz Arndt in 1812 during the Napoleonic Wars

¹⁵ Exodus 20:5

about this stone that reminds us of our mountain avalanches. Both man and beast are frightened enough when they hear them thundering in the distance or near at hand. And yet this thunder, whenever you hear it, is really a sign of winter's overthrow, a sign of victory over ice and snow, and a sign that Spring is coming even when the earth is still numb under the 'eternal snows'.

Yes, the stone "³⁴ *cut out without hands*" is so obviously the herald of God's eternal dominion, that finally Daniel says that this stone is the very Kingdom of God itself. For he has noted in the vision the sudden change in the stone: "³⁵ *became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*". Quite abruptly, the stone that Daniel sees in his prophetic dream rolling over the nations has another task. It no longer merely destroys; it raises up. Here Jesus Christ, the corner-stone, moves into the prophet's field of vision. He is the "*mountain*" that "*filled the whole earth*". Can we think of anyone else but Christ when we hear the word of the prophet which flesh and blood cannot have revealed to him, a word in which our whole chapter culminates: "⁴⁴ *In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.*"

It is not here given to Daniel to see how the stone of destruction becomes a "*mountain*" that "*fills the whole earth*". There's a kind of gap in his vision. And this gap is filled by the message of the New Testament. For there we see how, according to God's mysterious decree, the stone that the builders rejected, has become the head of the corner. The stone of destruction which Daniel sees come crashing down has reached its limits and its destination in Jesus Christ. The Lord of all lords and the King of all kings has let Himself be ctushed by the stone of God's judgment. Yes, the stone ctushes Him so grievously that finally on Good Friday

evening it seals His tomb. But look! The stone of destruction has been shattered and rent asunder like an avalanche. Since that Easter morning we know the blessed secret of God: there is a place where we can find protection and shelter from the destructive rolling of the stone. That is the place where upon this earth there stands the cross of Him who took the judgment on His shoulders.

But the cross is the only such place. In all other places Daniel's stone is still rolling through the world; and with frightened eyes we are watching to-day its destructive work. Now is the time of sighing for all creation. But in faith we know of that place whence the stone can roll no farther. And in hope we fix our eyes on the day that will "break in" at the end of time. Then will all stones be finally rolled away and the dead arise from the grave. And then is the fulfilment of that which the prophet saw: ³⁵ *But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*"

III. The Confessing Church

¹ *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.*
² *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.* ³ *Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.* ⁴ *Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language,* ⁵ *that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.* ⁶ *But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."* ⁷ *Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.*

⁸ *For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews.* ⁹ *They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever!"* ¹⁰ *You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image.* ¹¹ *But whoever does not fall*

down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. ¹² *There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."*

¹³ *Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.* ¹⁴ *Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them: "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"* ¹⁵ *Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"*

¹⁶ *Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.* ¹⁷ *If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.* ¹⁸ *But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

¹⁹ *Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.* ²⁰ *He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire.* ²¹ *Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the*

furnace of blazing fire. ²² *For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.* ²³ *But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.* ²⁴ *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials: "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king: "Certainly, O king."* ²⁵ *He said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!"* ²⁶ *Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said: "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire.* ²⁷ *The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.*

²⁸ *Nebuchadnezzar responded and said: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.* ²⁹ *Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."* ³⁰ *Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.*

⁴1 Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: May your peace abound! ²It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation. Daniel 3:1 – 4:3

¹Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon" That's the way Nebuchadnezzar builds. He builds in the provinces, where the peasants bend their backs and strain their necks under the whip of the overseer and the slavish tribute-system. He builds in the plain of Dura where there are rows of miserable hovels in which women are sighing at the hand-mills and children are crying out for milk — all because Nebuchadnezzar needs this gold that his subjects wrest from the earth, for his hanging-gardens and golden images, for all his expensive royal whims. Six cubits broad and sixty cubits high is this Abomination of the princes who build golden images from the sweat, and the blood, and the tears of the working people in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

But Nebuchadnezzar rejoices not in his golden image. The lustre of the gold is feeble and dull. It never gives him a really warm feeling in his heart. And so Nebuchadnezzar has to have a "²dedication" for the golden image in the plain of Dura. Nebuchadnezzar sets great store by dedications. Only when the people are there to gaze in awe and wonder at the image, does his pleasure in it acquire the necessary spice. He summons, then, for the dedication-festival "²the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces" — the leaders and deputy-leaders of the whole nation. A dazzling military review. And not only these; but with

them the "⁴peoples, nations and men of every language". A monster parade. "³And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." They had to stand. In Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom everything jumps to the word of command. The iron will of the king marshalls the nation in ranks and rows. The great assembly has to wait there before the statue till the veil drops from the golden monument. They have to wait obediently, like little children on Christmas Eve waiting in the doorway till their mother gives the signal. And then they've got to express joy and amazement, and their eyes must shine. That's what the Nebuchadnezzars of all ages call 'dedication'. And only when he can 'dedicate' does, his heart sing within him.

And yet Nebuchadnezzar really only half-believes in this business. He knows well enough that a frame of mind cannot simply be commanded. He's got to make it. Nebuchadnezzar can make anything. Nebuchadnezzar's idea of creating a frame of mind is by the beating of drums. And there's a suspicious abundance about this music which is supplied to create the missing frame of mind. Time and again the instruments that Nebuchadnezzar is using for his purpose are enumerated. "⁵Horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music." Then, we read, "⁴To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, ⁵that at the moment you hear the sound of the..." instruments... Well, what then? Are your eyes to shine and your lips to shout "Hurrah!"? No, that's no longer enough for Nebuchadnezzar. Then shall you "⁷fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up".

They must worship — they are commanded to worship the six cubits broad and sixty cubits high Abomination there in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Now it's a religious question. The golden image gets its first real lustre under the light from above. Nebuchadnezzar's dedication-festival cannot do without its 'mystic'. Here is the

culmination of the ceremony — not when backs are curved and necks are strained, but when knees are bent and hands begin to fold in prayer. Strange! In all ages Nebuchadnezzar can only maintain his throne, if an altar stands near the throne and lends him the security and strength which he lacks. Nebuchadnezzar cannot exist on the roll of drums and the blast of trumpets. He yearns for the soft stringed instruments — ⁵*Horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music*". And only now, when the hymn is mingled with the roll of drums, and the priest of Baal is tolling the bell, is Nebuchadnezzar's conscience silenced about his Abomination in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar is a Strong Man — strong in no ordinary sense of the word. He embodies what we know to-day as the totalitarian state. His authority is total, all-inclusive; there is no sphere of life that escapes it. The absolute power that this one man has over the ⁴*peoples, nations and men of every language*" is revealed to us in this third chapter of the Book of Daniel. Not less than nine times — in wearisome repetition — we are reminded that Nebuchadnezzar ⁷*set up*" this image. In fact, absolutely everything that is set up in the land is set up by him. He has set up every lime and oak, every foundation-stone, sign-post, and boundary-line. And what Nebuchadnezzar sets up is law. Woe to him who dares to provoke the ninefold mighty will of Nebuchadnezzar!

For him the fiery furnace stands prepared.

The fiery furnace has also been set up by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace — these two go together through all ages. The fiery furnace is part of his permanent stock. And not without reason. The fiery furnace is the central 'boiler' of the whole country, from which are heated afresh every morning all ²*the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the*

judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces" and the "4 peopled, nations and men of every language" as well, to the farthest corner of the kingdom. The fiery furnace is the motive power that sets all the parts working, so that they rise and fall before the golden image in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Fear, fear of the fiery furnace is the secret driving force of Nebuchadnezzar's totalitarian state.

This fear is so tremendous that all succumb to it. *"2 The satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces" rise up and bow down. And the people — "4 all peopled, nations and men of every language" rise up and bow down, and pray before the shining Abomination in the plain of Dura. And how very understandable it all is! Indeed, it would be hard to understand if it were not so. For the fiery oven is hot — so hot that it hardens the bricks of the fortress — but the bricks are all human. After all, they are all human — including Nebuchadnezzar. And the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar represents the spirit of them all. For Nebuchadnezzar is always the exact copy of the spirit of his age. It is focused in Nebuchadnezzar — but his 'spiritual child' is a whole race. And it's not as if Nebuchadnezzar is the sole criminal and all the others we read of here just spotless lambs. It never is so, at any time in history. For the sixty cubits high Abomination is really the sum of all the abominations in the land. The Idol sixty cubits high is composed of all the little idols which are worshipped and honoured secretly in the palaces, and still more secretly in the cottages. And "7 all the peopled, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up".*

They *all* fell down... So we can no longer succeed in retaining the role of spectators. For our distress and our shame lies in this: that we have all joined in this great prostration in the

plain of Dura. The reason why there is so feeble opposition to the great Abomination is that the little abomination is within us all. 'Friends of the people' (flatterers of the people!) are always telling us that the people are always good and only the rulers wicked. Only the rulers want war and not the people. If that were true — then I'd like to see the regime that would be capable of driving the people again into mass-destruction! But it is most certainly not true! It is a lie that the people do not bear the seeds of war in their own hearts. That's why in all ages Nebuchadnezzar has no opposition, none in 1914, and none to-day — because his spirit dwells in every cottage. It is the spirit of oppression and exploitation, of injustice and lies, of unchastity and godlessness. There it is, written on the second page of Holy Scripture, and it goes right on through Daniel, chapter three, to Romans, chapter three — they all come crashing down, and great is the fall thereof — all princes and governors, and all peoples and tongues. ²²*For there is no distinction;* ²³*for all [m]have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* ¹⁶

⁷*All... nations.*" It doesn't say that our Swiss nation is an exception. Brethren, it's serious to think that it's perhaps our particular Swiss misery, that in our country during these last years, in observations and opinions and judgments, we have been congratulating ourselves on being different, in the sense of being better than the others. Isn't it perhaps our national misfortune that just now when we were speaking about the Abomination of Nebuchadnezzar and his people, we instinctively turned in our thoughts to the East and West, and to the South and North? But, faced with this third chapter of the Book of Daniel, can one seriously think of maintaining that our people and our government are one whit better than all the other people and governments? Is a Nebuchadnezzar perhaps less a Nebuchadnezzar when he appears

¹⁶ Romans 3:22-23

in smaller size? And is the number of those who have fallen away rather smaller with us, because the fiery furnace is not yet burning so fiercely? Or is it not rather the other way round? Is our guilt before God not greater than that of all the other countries, since even before the fiery furnace has begun to burn in our midst, we have been in haste to bow down — you might almost say voluntarily? The bowing-down of other nations is, at present at least, humanly more comprehensible; and, if we can speak of pardon here, isn't it more pardonable than ours? But Daniel sees through our Swiss decency and apparent uprightness:

They *all* fell down.

*"However, there is a God in heaven."*¹⁷ And God in heaven sees our shame. He sees it in all its length and breadth. And He sees the Fall of the children of men, with all that it means. And then what happens? God extends His blue heaven over the plain of Dura and lets the rain fall on the province of Babylon. Have you ever thought what wonderful compassion it is that allows day by day the sun to shine and God's heaven to be blue above the six cubits broad and sixty cubits high Abomination that is worshipped in our time? According to the length and breadth and height and depth of our Abomination, something should have happened long ago. And yet that very thing has not yet happened.

That is the mystery of the mercy of God.

In the time of the Flood, God singled out a Noah. In the time of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, an Abraham. God singles out a community for Himself and preserves it in life in the midst of this fallen and apostate world — a world which meets us, as it were, — condensed and unalloyed, in the totalitarian state. God, the God of mercy, chooses for Himself instruments, vessels of His compassion and His love. A mere

¹⁷ Daniel 2:28

handful of people, three men — their names are known, and in our chapter they represent the Church of God.

God equips these three men so that they shall not bow down before the image in the plain of Dura, even though it be Nebuchadnezzar who has set it up. God so equips them that He puts into their mouths the answer that they are to give when they are *"brought before governors and kings for My sake"*¹⁸, They give the king an answer that can never have originated in the mind of man. They enter into no kind of argument, but straight from their lips comes the simple witness, for which alone they are chosen and equipped: *"¹⁶ We do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

This miracle of the confessing Church stands before Nebuchadnezzar in absolute sovereign power, like a wall that springs up suddenly from the earth. And this wall of faith is not the product of man's hands. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar realizes that somehow it will be more impregnable than the fortified wall, twenty-seven yards thick, which he has built round his city. The man of violence stands so weak and helpless before the witness of the believing community that he entirely loses his kingly bearing and speech: *"¹⁹ His facial expression was altered."* His mouth speaks and he utters words of surpassing folly characteristic of Nebuchadnezzar in every age. He issues a punishment-decree, and its very impossibility is more laughable than royal. He orders *"¹⁹ to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated."* And, it goes on, *"²² the king's commandment was urgent."* Between the issue of the commandment and the

¹⁸ Matthew 10:18

execution of justice there is not even time to remove the mantles. They get no respite or last meal. And so Nebuchadnezzar sweeps away the men who set themselves up against that which he had set up.

What happens then is well known and passes all understanding. Anyway Nebuchadnezzar comes to realize that he is not dealing with three puppets. For these three men represent the elect community of God, and in them the promise is fulfilled: *"² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. ³ For I am the Lord your God."*¹⁹ The king has got to recognize *"²⁷ that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them"*. And so it happened that amazement came over him. This is not the mature fruit of repentance. Nebuchadnezzar has not yet come to that. (It is coming, as we shall see in the next chapter.) This is a kind of passing tremor, a momentary uncertainty that settles upon him. Nebuchadnezzar has begun to ponder over these three poor men. He knows nothing of the mercy of God, which is seeking him out; but he does know the power of God, and it makes a tremendous impression on him. *"²⁹ There is no other God who is able to deliver in this way "*

All this is God's doing — the God of whom we have already heard in the first chapter: *"God gave"*²⁰. That there are three men who do not worship in Nebuchadnezzar's totalitarian state, is a miracle of God. The miracle of the confessing Church. That the three were not devoured by the fire is no greater miracle. Suppose the fiery furnace *had* consumed them. The real miracle would have happened just the same.

¹⁹ Isaiah 43:2-3

²⁰ Daniel 1:9,17

Listen to the witness of the three themselves: ^{"18} *But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*" And now there remains one last question, which we are raising only with a certain hesitation, and answering only by way of a hint. For the final light on this will be given to us only when "we shall see face to face". This question is about that mysterious Fourth whom Nebuchadnezzar catches sight of with the terrifying shout: ^{"24} *Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire? ...* ²⁵ *Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!"*

We believe we know this mysterious Companion of the three men, who appeared *"like a son of the gods"*. And we dare to believe that He is not only a son of the gods, but the Son of the one God, who has descended into the fiery furnace of this world, because He knows the whole breadth and height of our Abomination, and the whole depth of our Fall, and has mercy upon us. So now there is not only the sun shining on the plain of Dura, but there is set up in this sinful vale of tears the cross of the Redeemer, which both judges us and calls us.

This is where we come near to Easter. That is the only place from which we can reach the heart of this third chapter of the prophet Daniel. For this is a prophetic chapter. That is to say, it is a foreshadowing of the events which *"on that day happened in Jerusalem"*²¹. For there they all fell down, Peter, the "rock-apostle", with them. There the mighty depth of the Fall was revealed. And there stood another before Nebuchadnezzar and said: I ^{"16} *do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter"*. And there another said before the

²¹ Echoing Luke 24:18

judgment-seat: *"¹⁷ If it be so, my God whom I serve is able to deliver me out of your hand."²²*

And then, because of that great Fall, came Good Friday and Easter. And now there happens something more than yonder in Babylon; What happened before the terrified eyes of Nebuchadnezzar in the plain of Dura is a mere trifle compared with what took place before the wondering gaze of the soldiers in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. For it was not just Nebuchadnezzar's fire, but Death itself, that *"²⁷ had no effect on His body... nor was the hair of His head singed, nor were His trousers damaged, nor had the smell of mortality even come upon Him"*, for He is risen and appears in glory.

Since then, wherever two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is, the mysterious Fourth, in the midst of them. And if the three have to go into the burning fiery furnace then remember — He, who is Lord of all graves and crematoria, is Lord also of all fiery furnaces.

"²⁹ There is no other God who is able to deliver in this way."

²² See John 19:11

IV. The Church as Watchman

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ⁶So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me. ⁸But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying: ⁹"O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation. ¹⁰Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. ¹¹The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹²Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it. ¹³I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. ¹⁴He shouted out and spoke as follows: 'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with

the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his heart be changed from that of a man and let a beast's heart be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.' ¹⁸ This is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said: "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar replied: "My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth ²¹ and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged—²² it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth. ²³ In that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying: 'Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,' ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come

upon my lord the king: ²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. ²⁶ And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity."

²⁸ All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. ²⁹ Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ The king reflected and said: "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" ³¹ While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." ³³ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. ³⁴ But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored

Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him: "What have You done?" ³⁶ At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride. Daniel 4:4-37

It's a very high tree that Nebuchadnezzar sees in this chapter's dream. Trees *can* be very high — intolerably high. They can rear their proud crests to the very heavens. And they steal the nurture and the sun from all the little trees around them. And God apparently just watches. Yes, God lets His rain fall and His sun shine for the waxing and flourishing of the great trees as well as the little. Even the unrighteousness of this world grows by the grace of God. But, although God's forbearance with the great trees of this world is stronger than ours, and although He can restrain Himself longer than we can and often tarries beyond our comprehension — yet He is not asleep. Even when we can no longer see it, His righteousness is there.

But Nebuchadnezzar's nights aren't half so peaceful as they might appear to an outsider. For he has a dream and ¹³ *behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven".* This Holy Watcher stands at his post. And so, ye little trees that wither in the shadow, don't be despondent because the high tree shields you from the sun! The Holy Watcher lives, and no Nebuchadnezzar will be left in peace.

Don't be despondent, ye little trees, for the hour of the great tree will strike. This Holy Watcher is the guarantee.

But Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty lasts a long time. Even after the judgment has been pronounced on him, twelve months elapse. Then it literally strikes in on him, like lightning on a bright morning. Meanwhile Nebuchadnezzar is insolent enough. He appears and behaves *"like a tree firmly planted by streams of water"*²³. In the splendour of his political and cultural achievements, he comes to such a height of presumption as to say: ³⁰"Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" But the word sticks in his throat. The king can scarcely finish the sentence when ³¹"a voice came from heaven", a voice that smote him. Long lasted Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty. Long lasted God's forbearance. Then suddenly, here it is — the judgment!

There's a phrase that has remained with me from my boyhood days. I often heard it from old men and women in the country, when they were working or sitting round a table discussing the ways of the world. It went like this: "Someone has seen to it that the trees don't grow right up to heaven". This phrase was apparently common on men's lips at a time when Daniel seems to have been better known than to-day. Here, in the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel, we shall be shown just how it will be seen to, and who it is that sees to it that "the trees don't grow right up to heaven".

For that is the task of the "Holy Watcher", who stands at his post and guards God's honour. We shall scarcely go astray if our thoughts pass over from this Holy Watcher, whom Nebuchadnezzar sees in his dream, to the witnesses and prophets of God. In the Old Testament, as far as the eye can see, every

²³ Psalm 1:2

Nebuchadnezzar has such a watcher by his side. And his function is to see to it that it is not forgotten to *"render to God the things that are God's."*²⁴ And we hear John the Baptist saying to the adulterous king of his day: *"It's not lawful for you to have her."*²⁵ But to the people and his spiritual elite he used words that are strangely reminiscent: *"The axe is already laid at the root of the trees."*²⁶

Now we must examine Nebuchadnezzar's dream a little more carefully. Perhaps it has something to say not only to the high trees — the kings, the Caesars, statesmen, and dictators — but also to us who eke out our existence as lowly shrubs in the shadow of the high trees. Every tree that appears to him in the dream is described by Nebuchadnezzar with the words: *"¹² Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it."*

We are rightly surprised at the beauty of these words from the mouth of a monarch who lived two and a half thousand years ago. We can hardly escape coming under the spell of this dream. For it is seldom enough that Nebuchadnezzar dreams only of brutality, violence, and might. He would like to be the kind of tree that brings benefit and bears fruit — *"fruit abundant, and in it was food for all"*. And he would like to provide shade for all the beasts of the field, kindly shade, and to bestow his protecting care on the birds of the heaven. *"All living creatures fed themselves from it."* He sees himself in the role of the Father of the whole nation. His subjects are his children, and he sees to their nourishment, clothing and shelter. He protects them against foes from within and from without. And there would be room in his great-

²⁴ Mark 12:17

²⁵ Matthew 14:4

²⁶ Matthew 3:10

majestic heart for all children. A truly royal dream, worthy of a king!

In all ages no statesman could possibly have a finer dream. But this dream would be also acceptable for his subjects. Think of it. A state that is great and strong; a fatherland that is respected and feared among the nations, expanding in strength, credit, and territory, stretching to the ends of the earth — one doesn't need to be Nebuchadnezzar to be inspired with enthusiasm for such an ideal. We should all like to be citizens of a country that has broad leaves and offers life and shade for all — a fatherland well-equipped in education, nutrition, and armaments, a state with teeming cradles, a country of which one could say "¹²*and in it was food for all*". No, this is an ideal which we to-day are in no hurry to reject, more especially if we are also lucky enough to be occupying some little official post in the state. Many young girls to-day are looking for men with settled incomes — and they are dreaming of these Nebuchadnezzars! Our generation would fling itself blindly into the arms of such a Nebuchadnezzar.

And so now, quite unexpectedly, we ourselves begin to dream! And it is Nebuchadnezzar's dream that we have been dreaming. Nebuchadnezzar's is just our dream, dreamt, you might say, from the hearts of all of us. In this dream comes to the 'super-conscious', what lies dormant in the subconscious of all of us. Yes, we have dreamed it to the brink of madness, this dream of the tree whose crest reaches to the heavens, and whose leaves extend to the ends of the earth. For that has been the dream of our European and American nations; and lately, with the added emphasis of one who has got to catch up, also the dream of the East. Or am I wrong? Have we not all dreamed of an age when our fatherland should conquer the whole world, or when the whole world should be our fatherland (which comes to the same thing!)

and when all the five continents should stand open to our boundless desires?

The chapter begins with the oft-repeated words: *"⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace."* This dream comes from a background of peace and quiet. Isn't this what Progress once promised us, and is still promising us with high-sounding words: "rest in the house", a "flourishing palace", a castle in which we can spend our days as peaceful and contented, indeed as horribly peaceful and horribly contented 'citizens'. A castle in which one feels so secure that there is no more need to beg for daily bread. A castle, in which we would have to say everything – and God nothing.

That has been our dream.

What have the nations been longing for ever since their expulsion from Paradise? What have they continually come to blows about? I can't remember reading anywhere a more striking transcription than is given us in this fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel. Listen:

"⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream ... ¹⁰ and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it." To understand this vision fully we must listen to the word of a self-deification that borders on Caesarism²⁷: "³⁰ Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" We can get an idea of how

²⁷ Caesar madness, megalomania

very seriously this monarch took his self-glorification from the excavations of old Babylon. A great number of the stamps have been found with which Nebuchadnezzar marked the bricks when the great fortresses were being made. These marked bricks were to perpetuate his name for all time and to pass on his glory to the farthest generations. On one of the many commemorative tablets we can hear Nebuchadnezzar express the desire that the gods would grant him "a life in distant days" and "health of body". And this particular inscription ends with the words: "I should like to be old for ever."²⁸

Nebuchadnezzar builds "by the might of his power for the honour of his majesty". With his great buildings he would like "to be old for ever". But the Holy Watcher stands at his post; and when Nebuchadnezzar steps over into the holy territory of God, he hurls him back within the human boundaries. Whoever crosses this frontier of humanity, "let him die the death", For ²*I am the Lord your God...* ³*You shall have no other gods before Me.* ⁴*You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness...* ⁵*You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...* ⁷*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.*²⁹

The Holy Watcher will never allow it that Nebuchadnezzar should build "by the might of his power for the honour of his majesty".

Now we are ready to proceed to the second part of this dream — the less beautiful part. Listen to the Holy Watcher crying aloud: ¹⁴*Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage...* ¹⁷*in order that the living may know that the*

²⁸ Robert Koldewey: *Das wiedererstehende Babylon*, Leipzig, 1914, pp. 53 f., 75 ff

²⁹ Exodus 20:2-7

Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men."

This is just what has been ever more forcibly borne in upon our generation for more than twenty years: The Holy Watcher, who guards God's honour, is at work. He prunes the proud tree-tops, and lays hold of the luxurious foliage. And a tremor runs through not only the great high trees, but also the lowly shrubs. As we hear the blows of the axe resounding through the forest of the nations, they seem to come nearer and nearer to our own country. The time is coming, and it may not be far away, when ^{"14} *the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches"*.

This is what it says of Nebuchadnezzar: he is to be roused up out of the peace of his house and out of the comfortable prosperity of his palace, and to be driven out into the fields, there to lie with a band of iron and brass under the dew of heaven. And God is to take away his human heart and give him the heart of a beast. And there in the barren wilderness he will be banished ^{"33} *until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws"*.

It is not given to us to know to what extent this prophetic word is already fulfilled in our generation and its rulers, or whether it has still to be fulfilled in us in the future. We can just simply declare that our place is in the very centre of this judgment. Or are we just at the beginning? Perhaps at the first of the seven times? The man who oversteps the appointed bounds of humanity, and scorns the Holy Watcher, finally sinks below all human levels, and gets a ^{"16} *beast's heart"*. Yes, in his behaviour he sinks below the beasts. For the protagonist of the culture of anti-God and the ethos of anti-Christ behaves in the end like a wild beast. The coloured, the anointed, and the singed hair — the pride of 'the cultured man' in all ages — begin to grow like eagles' feathers, and the manicured nails begin to look like birds' claws.

The gourmand is driven from his nice bourgeois (or vegetarian) cuisine, and must be glad to feed on grass along with the oxen — or on husks with the swine — ¹⁷ *in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men*".

But this doesn't exhaust the meaning of this chapter. (Who ever can exhaust it?) There is still something in it without which we should not have dared to open it to-day in our midst. In a pitch-black night of storm sometimes a little solitary star comes to view between the driving clouds. So here in this chapter of darkest judgment there remains a star. Only a star. But still it *is* there. And if we attentively and perseveringly follow this star, we shall finally see it standing over that inn, where a Child was born in the stall, even when the darkness was great, and the shades of guilt and death lay black upon the earth.

This is the pastoral advice that Daniel gives the king: ²⁷ *Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.*" Daniel has to speak like this. God Himself put this counsel into his mouth. And so it is the correct and the best advice that he can give the king. But God's speaking to mankind did not end with Daniel. After centuries of silence when *"word from the Lord was rare in those days"*³⁰, God spoke again through the mouths of the apostles of the New Testament. In the light of the New Testament Daniel can to-day expand his advice, completing it and explaining it: All thine own righteousness — *"And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned..."*³¹ — all thine own righteousness can never set thee free from thy sins, nor rid thee

³⁰ 1 Samuel 3:1

³¹ 1 Corinthians 13:3

of thy misdeeds. There is no place in the wide world where thou canst get free of thy sins and rid of thy misdeeds, but one: the place where a very different King has gone bound in chains with the multitude of thy sins, driven out into the field, ill-treated and rejected by His people. But after, when thou art free, really and truly free and rid of thy sins, rid and free through Jesus Christ — then go to the poor and prove to them thy gratitude by the fact that for the rest of thy life thou wilt never again cease, as thou hast means, "to do good and to share with others"³². That is the star that rises into the dusky sky of this chapter. It is the star that we have already been able to see in the first chapter, when we made this discovery: "*God gave*"³³.

It is the star of Bethlehem.

But we must remember that the pardon of the erring king certainly does not mean that the results of his misdeeds and sins would be removed from him as with a magic wand — just as if he had never done wrong. Nebuchadnezzar has to endure all sorts of painful consequences of his misdeeds — yea, "^{16,23,25} let seven periods of time pass over him". Nebuchadnezzar bears the consequences himself. For it is finally the way of a more genuine and humble penitence, and he is now ready to tread it. He goes on his way in the keeping of his God, who punishes him, because He loves him:

³⁴ But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and

³² Echoing Daniel 4:27

³³ Daniel 1:9:17

among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him: "What have You done?""

Up to this point many amazing things have been reported to us in the Book of the prophet Daniel. But here we should remain standing and be still before the great silent miracle of a late repentance, mightily wrought in the heart of a life-long tyrant.

At the close of the chapter there stands a promise — a promise shining as clearly as the dawn of a new day glows red after the night is past. God will not destroy Nebuchadnezzar, because He willeth not the death of a sinner, but that he should live and serve Him. A stump shall remain and a root of the tree. Yes, God will also include in His mercy and His blessing the rulers and statesmen who serve Him, and give Him the glory. He is also desirous for these high trees *"that they should bear fruit for their time"*³⁴. Therefore, the king closes with the words: *"³⁶At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."*

We have come to the end of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. The new heaven and the new earth come into sight. Here we meet that glory that shone on Easter morning from the other side of the tomb. Here at the end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar that other reign begins, of which it is written: ³¹The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³²and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden

³⁴ Echoing Psalm 1:2

plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."³⁵

This is the one and only tree of which the Holy Watcher allows the top to grow up to heaven, and the branches to reach to the ends of the earth.

³⁵ Matthew 13:31-32

V. The Pastoral Office of the Church

¹ Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. ² When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. ⁶ Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. ⁷ The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon: "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

¹⁰ The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said: "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your

father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. ¹² This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation." ¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel: "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. ¹⁵ Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. ¹⁶ But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered and said before the king: "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. ¹⁹ Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he

elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. ²⁰ *But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him.* ²¹ *He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.* ²² *Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,* ²³ *but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.* ²⁴ *Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.* ²⁵ *Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN.'* ²⁶ *This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENĒ'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.* ²⁷ *'TEKĒL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.* ²⁸ *'PERĒS'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.'* ²⁹ *Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.*

³⁰ *That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. Daniel 5:1-30*

Now it is night. Over King Nebuchadnezzar we could still see the fading light of a star. There is none left to shine over

Belshazzar, his son. Here is a completely starless night — a night of shame. Yet who can think of this without at the very same moment — not even pausing to draw breath! — uttering the cry from above which we have heard ringing out: *"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."*^{36?}

But there's more than night in this fifth chapter of the Book of Daniel. There is darkness here — a darkness that raises the question: Can it ever again be Day? But can we say that without immediately adding: *"Behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you."*^{37?}

The Light — let me not forget the Light! *"The Light shines in the darkness..."* But *"the darkness did not comprehend it"*.³⁸ There is a darkness that "comprehends it no more". And that is the kind of darkness it is here. This is the kind of darkness that only Holy Scripture can show us. Now this can mean nothing else for the Church than to believe in spite of all human impossibilities in Him who dwells beyond *all* impossibilities in light unapproachable. Just because it is night here, and just because it is darkness here — that, brethren, is why we must say "Believe". When we are so utterly lost we can do no other than grope for the hand of the Redeemer. Therefore, it is impossible to read this chapter without continually looking unto Jesus Christ. Every word and every syllable points forward to the Redeemer, points forward to Christmas, to Good Friday, to Easter, to Ascension, to Pentecost.

Here Jesus Christ is preached.

The very opening of this chapter brings us right into the middle of the night, and unrolls a picture of the deepest moral

³⁶ Isaiah 60:1

³⁷ Isaiah 60:2

³⁸ John 1:5

depravity. King Belshazzar, a last scion³⁹ of the dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar, "*held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.*" And with Belshazzar and his thousand lords there are carousing also their⁴² *wives and concubines*", their mistresses. In this king's palace we get a glimpse of the world as it always is in the last stages before a cataclysm. Evil has overflowed its channels. All barriers are down. Sin has now got to the point where ripeness becomes rottenness. The merest trifle will start the headlong rush to ruin. Belshazzar is not just a private individual, but the offspring, ripe for judgment, of a nation, ripe for judgment. And over his banquet there hangs that damp, sultry atmosphere that hung over Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot, and over the Flood generation in the days of Noah: "³⁸*They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,* ³⁹*and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away.*"⁴⁰ It must often seem to us that a breath from this plague-ridden atmosphere is moving over our times. With Belshazzar, the flood rushed in. What father Nebuchadnezzar had done in forty-three years of constructional work, resulting in the unparalleled power and sovereignty of Babylon, began to crumble with his death. And the shroud of the desert sand is wrapped around the ruins.

But it has not yet come to that. God's forbearance and patience still hold the doomed world together. It hangs on fine threads. They are not yet completely worn through. Belshazzar's hour has not yet struck. For him there is still time for redemption. He still stands under the promise to the publicans and sinners. There still goes out to him the call to repentance and return. "¹⁰*Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax*

³⁹ heir, branch, child...

⁴⁰ Matthew 24:38-39

collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples: 'Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?' ¹² But when Jesus heard this, He said: 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick'.⁴¹

And so, Christ does not stand outside the throne-room in which Belshazzar held his last feast with his thousand guests — a throne-room which the excavations of buried Babylon reveal to have been nineteen yards wide and fifty-eight yards long, with walls whitened with a plaster roughcast. The Gospel for publicans and sinners is also valid in this banqueting-hall. We have proof that Jesus Christ does not remain outside Belshazzar's halls. There are signs — feeble perhaps, but still signs: The blue rosette in the buttonhole of a young man who knows himself called by Christ to battle against the scourge of 'wine and women'; a Salvation Army lass standing at the street-corner. I can recall a Whitsun evening in Hamburg: As we were strolling down towards the sea, there in the middle of the harbour district we saw in passing soldiers of the Salvation Army, men and women, penetrating into the halls of Belshazzar — just as the fire-brigade carries out a burning man. For us that was a sign that Christ is still greater than Belshazzar's depravity. And still Christ does not remain aloof when here in Basel towards midnight the halls of Belshazzar begin to empty and many of his slaves go staggering home. Every now and then in the course of pastoral work one meets wives or mothers who for years and decades have stuck it out by the side of a Belshazzar, and have raised the flag of faith new every morning. Over such faith stands the Promise that it will receive the crown of life, because it has endured to the end. Belshazzar is set beside us so that

⁴¹ Matthew 9:10-12

our faith may grow in him, and that in him the glory of the Redeemer should be revealed — yes, *in him*.

But Belshazzar's "great feast" is not simply a matter of "wine, women, and song". Not even a Belshazzar can restrict his celebrations to such commonplace ingredients. A special attraction has to be presented, something quite unusual to tickle the palates of the guests, and to form the climax of the feast. Belshazzar gets them to set out the precious altar-vessels which his father in his time had brought home as booty from Jerusalem. These chalices are handed round among the thousand nobles, the wives, and the concubines, with suitably blasphemous remarks.

Surely God's punishing hand must now strike in upon this provocation. But God waits. God can wait. None of these offenders found the blasphemous drink sticking in his throat; none of them was struck down on the spot.

So great is God's forbearance and patience.

God's waiting does not only apply to the place where senseless drunkenness and incipient madness have overflowed all bounds. God is affronted and His name taken in vain even in quite decent surroundings. God's vessels may be defiled even before Nebuchadnezzar's hand has plundered them from the Temple and even before Belshazzar's servants have set them on the drinking-table. God must also have patience with those who go to the Temple. Even priests' hands are not clean hands. Yea, wherever a human hand dares to lay hold of the vessels of God, and wherever a human lip touches the brim of such a vessel, we can only speak of unclean hands and unclean lips.

That is, in other words: Even for the followers of Belshazzar the way to the Lord's Table stands open — yes, the way to the Lord's Table! For what minister could distribute the bread, what elder could hold the cup, who could pour out the

wine, and what communicant could approach the Lord's Table, if the call to the Table cannot be heard by Belshazzar and his thousand lords, his wives and his concubines? There is no Christian man who has at no time and at no place sat at Belshazzar's table. And the forgiveness passes over beyond Belshazzar to that other dark night when even for Judas the way to the Table stands open, and when even for Judas the call to Life goes out. So deep into the abyss the Shepherd seeks His lambs.

But now that the "great feast" has reached its climax, God intervenes and presents an item that was not foreseen in Belshazzar's festive programme. God answers with a sign. *"⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall."* It is of God's goodness that He gives signs, warning-signs. Still God's hand would warn — warn, and not destroy. Whatever hour has sounded for him and his generation, Belshazzar is still granted time to note and to watch the signs of God. There is still a time of grace for the brick-built palace of Babylon. Even at the eleventh hour the lord in the parable goes out to hire workmen for his vineyard. In the household of God there is an eleventh-hour grace, a grace for robbers. It is offered to Belshazzar, to his thousand lords, his wives, and his concubines, to his generation. Hence the fingers on the wall. *"³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying: 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!'"* *⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said: 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?' ⁴¹ And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.'* *⁴² And he was saying: 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!'"* *⁴³ And He said to him: 'Truly I say to you, today you*

shall be with Me in Paradise'.⁴² This is the grace that is offered to Belshazzar and his generation by the warning fingers on the wall. But, Belshazzar, the time is flying! Eleven o'clock is past, and the hand is already moving up to twelve.

And now — the effect of the sign. ⁴⁶*Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.*" And later, after the court-scholars have been hurried in and have not been able to interpret the writing for him, it goes on: ⁴⁹*Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.*" That is the effect of the sign — terror, sheer terror, nothing else. But God does not want to terrify Belshazzar. God has something quite different in store for him, something much greater and more glorious. God wants to lead Belshazzar to repentance — to repentance, to returning, and to life. But Belshazzar will not repent. He wants to get off more lightly: They want only to be frightened, Belshazzar and his generation. Even yet Belshazzar puts on his royal airs in braggart style, bestowing and conferring ⁴⁷*purple and... necklace of gold*", ranks, decorations, and positions. He has still both hands full, and has not realized that it is now time to stretch out an empty hand in supplication. When he is still able to bestow, he is not yet prepared to receive.

Belshazzar is obdurate⁴³.

God's goodness knows no limits that we men can see. It goes far beyond our powers of comprehension. But somewhere outside — beyond our understanding — God's goodness comes to a limit. For finally God will not let Himself be mocked. At a certain point, God says: Enough. This is what the parable tells us: ⁴⁰*And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who*

⁴² Luke 23:39-43

⁴³ Impenitent, stubborn, hardened.

were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the other virgins also came, saying: 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' ¹² But he answered: 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹⁴⁴

There is a mysterious moment when the door shuts.

But, look, before it finally locks in front of Belshazzar and his generation, it is actually opening yet once more. God's forbearance and patience are so extraordinary as to be almost upsetting. The Queen mother comes into the hall. Up to this time she has not frequented the feast. She has been doing what a mother does when her son is out after wine and women. She has lain awake.

This watcher now walks into the general confusion like an angel. And she is an angel, a messenger of God, who now once more, for the last time, makes the offer of grace.

She reminds Belshazzar of a man whom he had long forgotten. But ¹¹ *in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him*". This forgotten man is Daniel. But Daniel is alive, even if he is forgotten. Daniel is God's Church in the palace of Belshazzar. Daniel can wait till the day of the great terror. Then he will be sent for. Belshazzar declares himself ready to hear the man Daniel. But he wants still to behave towards him in gracious condescension, and make him subservient to him with ⁷ *purple and... necklace of gold*". In the same way, exactly the same way, in the first days of August 1914, Belshazzar sought out Daniel, when the churches were filled, for a short time, to the last pew. But it was not a day of repentance and life; it was a passing neurasthenia ⁴⁵.

Now Daniel fulfills his office. He rejects the generous hand of Belshazzar with the words: ¹⁷ *Keep your gifts for yourself*

⁴⁴ Matthew 25:10-12

⁴⁵ weakness of nerves, lack of courage, fear

or give your rewards to someone else." Thou hast not humbled thy heart, although thou hast known the history of thy father, and hast known how it went with him, and hast seen that God does not let Himself be mocked. Therefore, not because of thy sins, but because of thine obduracy⁴⁶, God has numbered thy kingdom; God has weighed thee in the balances and found thee wanting and depraved. Therefore God has divided thy kingdom. That is the meaning of the writing on the wall: *"25 Menē, Menē, Tekēl, Upharsin."*

And suddenly the night falls on Belshazzar and his generation. It is the night that is wrapped in 'outer darkness', and in which, according to the witness of Scripture, *"there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"*⁴⁷, the night of which it is written: *"You fool! This very night your soul is required of you."*⁴⁸ That is the night which we cannot even bear in thought, not to speak of reality, without a steady look at the Crucified One.

"30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain."

Here we touch on Pentecost. And here the words fall on our ears: *"37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: 'Brethren, what shall we do?'*" ³⁸ *Peter said to them: 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.'* ⁴⁰ *And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying: 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'"*⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Impenitence, stubbornness, hardening

⁴⁷ Matthew 13:42

⁴⁸ Luke 12:20

⁴⁹ Acts 2:37-40

VI. The Chruuch Militant

^{5,31} And Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

¹ It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, ² and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.

⁴ Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. ⁵ Then these men said: "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God." ⁶ Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. ¹² Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king's injunction: "Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?" The king replied: "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." ¹³ Then they answered and spoke before the king: "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day." ¹⁴ Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him. ¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king: "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed." ¹⁶ Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel: "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." ¹⁷ A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.

¹⁹ Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he had come near

the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel: "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"²¹ Then Daniel spoke to the king: "O king, live forever!²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."²³ Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.²⁴ The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

²⁵ Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound!²⁶ I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever.²⁷ He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."²⁸ So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.
Daniel 5:31 – 6:28

¹³ Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom." There is something peculiar about this man Daniel, something that keeps reappearing chapter after chapter. One might almost say that he has a special kind of

atmosphere about him. That which marks him out from everyone else is called, mysteriously, ⁵³ *an extraordinary spirit* ". He is distinguished not just by the exceptional natural gifts which he enjoys, but by the glorious divine mystery of his election. Daniel is delegated by God to the palace, and here he exercises his prophetic and his watchman's office. That was his function in Nebuchadnezzar's palace. That was his function at Belshazzar's table. And now it is again his function in the palace of Darius. Kings come and kings go. Thrones are set up and cast down. But Daniel remains, for *"the word of the Lord endures forever"*⁵⁰.

Darius has the sense to make use of this mysterious man, who obeys an excellent spirit, for the equipment and the securing of his kingdom. There have always been kings and rulers who have been not only willing to tolerate members of the believing fellowship in their palaces, but to appreciate and to honour them. For the sake of the excellent spirit that has taken up its abode in Daniel, the king reposes in him a peculiarly absolute trust. Yes, Daniel appears to be the only one of the hundred and twenty princes whom the king can altogether trust. The course of events shows us how Darius comes to see his own weal and woe⁵¹ as if it were in the hand of this ⁵³ *one of the exiles from Judah*".

But wherever a Daniel comes to the palace of a king and gets honour, there is danger in the air. Daniel can grieve the excellent spirit; for it is not his own spirit, but dwells within him as a guest. The favour of the lords does not harmonize with the favour of the Lord. This is the misfortune of all national, royal, and state churches since the days of Constantine the Great. They become 'courtly', adapt themselves to their surroundings, and conform to the momentary spiritual currents of their nation. Daniel's 'courdiness' has reached

⁵⁰ 1 Peter 1:25

⁵¹ His good and bad days, his destiny.

such a point, even in our democracy, that the mass of the people rightly see in the Church just an instrument of the holders of power and property. Daniel has become a 'courtier'. But woe to Daniel if he really becomes a courtier. For then he has ceased to be Daniel.

This chapter is headed "Daniel in the Lions' Den". But if the beginning shows us Daniel, not in the lions' den, but hale and hearty in the king's palace, we ought not to tremble any the less for him than if he were already in the lions' den. Kings' palaces are far more dangerous for Daniel than lions' dens. But look I Here in the palace where Daniel has already climbed so high that he can climb no higher, a miracle happens: Daniel remains what he is. He remains one ¹³ *"of the children of the captivity of Judah"*. He remains a subject of the King of Kings, before whom thrice daily he bows the knee, as is the custom of the fellowship of which he is and remains a living member. Verily, there is an excellent spirit in this man, that keeps him thus from apostasy and betrayal. But we mustn't talk here about constancy and suchlike human virtues. That would be to misunderstand the situation. For it is written: *"Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion [not only inside the lions' den], seeking someone to devour."*⁵² Daniel is now protected from the devil in the shape of a 'drawing-room lion'⁵³.

God has His hand on this man, long before he gets into the lions' den. And if God had not carefully shielded him, in the brilliance of the court he would have gone brilliantly to ruin, and would have got the position of Court-preacher-in-chief. When we think how unmolested we Christians are still today in our country, how much in demand, how esteemed, or at least where that is no longer the way, how tolerated; when we think about the social and public position which we

⁵² 1 Peter 5:8

⁵³ society man, lounge lizard

servants of God's Word still take in the world to-day; then we must often be sorely distressed about Daniel — he might become soft, 'in soft raiment', soft and weak-kneed, and so unfit for the lions' den.

But the fellowship has still time to prepare. The lions' den has not been opened here as it has elsewhere. In our country they often seem very thin planks that still feebly cover up the lions' den — planks that year by year grow weaker, and one day may suddenly give way. But still it is covered up. We must use the time that is granted us to break free from that spiritual rottenness, from that furtive rottenness, which carefully avoids all offence and provocation, and interprets the Word of God along the line of least resistance. May a breath soon blow through the ranks of the Evangelical Church of our nation, a breath of that 'excellent spirit', to keep the church in the king's palace in the Truth, until the world acknowledge that God is God, and that He maintains a believing fellowship in this world.

The peculiarity of this chapter compared with the third chapter, which also portrays the persecuted fellowship, lies in this fact: That there it is the king who personally stands behind the persecution, consciously and deliberately, while here the persecution is completely against the king's wish, and even during the persecution the believing fellowship enjoys the favour and sympathy of the Supreme Head of the State.

Through this circumstance we get a valuable insight into the role which the company of world-rulers has to play. It is not the king himself who conceives the idea that he should be the object of prayer as the only god, for thirty days. The idea is suggested to him, and is a manoeuvre of court-intrigue. *"⁷ All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction..."* When a Supreme Head deifies himself,

those who are around him have always a share in it. Supreme Heads, the mightier they are, stand in so much the greater danger of becoming dependent on their advisers. That is one thing that strikes us in this chapter.

And now we come to the remarkable part played by an impersonal force, that comes clearly on to the scene — a force that is even mightier than the king himself. This force is called here, with striking frequency, 'the law of the Medes and Persians'. Once more it isn't the king himself who has contrived this 'law', but the intrigues of those round about him. He himself unwittingly gives his seal to it, without having the least suspicion that he is thus striking at his most reliable and faithful subject. Dark powers stand behind this 'law of the Medes and Persians'. This 'law' develops into a spiritual force and a death-dealing instrument, against which the king himself is powerless. Finally, it is no longer the king that sits on his throne, but a bloodless, and yet a dismally bloodthirsty, 'law of the Medes and Persians', that lies like a furtive spell ghost-like over the whole land, secretly complied with in horror by everyone, and enslaving the king himself. In Darius the true face of all tyrannies is revealed to the believing fellowship in this sixth chapter for all time.

And now what does Daniel do, faced with his personal and impersonal enemies in the king's palace? ¹⁰ *Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.* Now notice that Daniel doesn't proceed to defensive measures, as becomes his position in the State, of even to the attack. What is described here is rather a retreat than an attack. Daniel does *"as he had been doing previously"* — he does no less, but he does no more.

"¹⁰ He entered his house." There have been periods in the history of the believing fellowship from the beginning, when the Gospel temporarily decides to retire into the house, where it can only be proclaimed secretly or in disguised forms, and not *"from the roof-tops"*⁵⁴. Perhaps our text is a sign for the persecuted fellowship — a kind of divine hint. In any case it gives warning against unnecessarily provocative actions that might bring the stone of persecution prematurely into play; or, what would be worse, against an over-publicity which would only lead to the Gospel weakening into a miserable, colourless sort of thing.

In our country we may still freely and openly proclaim the Gospel. We may still expound Daniel. We can still ring the bells, and go on a bright day to church in our Sunday clothes. All this is no longer a matter of course. There may come a time when we too will have to fly back with the Gospel into the house, or to an even more secret place. The history of the fellowship has plenty to say about caves in the forest, clefts in the rocks, and catacombs.

"¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house."

But his withdrawal into the house was not a renunciation. In his house too, Daniel remains what he really is. Daniel knows that the 'law of the Medes and Persians' has eyes and ears that can reach even to the place where a quiet man of prayer is on his knees. Daniel knows that. Yet *"¹⁰ he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying..."*. Daniel knows that three times a day the 'roaring lion' in the shape of a police spy or informer is lurking around his house. But the excellent spirit, that has taken up its abode in him, will not suffer God's hymn of praise to be dumb before the 'law of the Medes and Persians'. The excellent spirit causes

⁵⁴ Echoing Matthew 10,27

the dread of the lions' den to be taken from him, even with fear and trembling. This is the second miracle that comes to pass before our eyes — once again a miracle of protection. 'In the house', where the temptation is specially strong and very near, Daniel is protected from betraying the cause. Truly, this miracle can be accomplished only by an excellent spirit, by a spirit come down from above, by the Holy Spirit.

And then comes the third miracle of protection, reported in this chapter — the miracle of the protection in the den of lions. *"¹⁶ Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel: 'Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.'* — *¹⁸ Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him."* "The pious wish' that the king sends Daniel — a kind of agnostic, embarrassed expression, such as one often hears by the side of a sickbed — comes to an unexpected fulfilment. You only have to look at one of the life-sized lions, revealed by the excavations, fashioned on brick in bas-relief, and portrayed in shining natural enamels, as they adorned the outer walls of the royal city so very numerously. They served to inspire respect in the peaceful and terror in the hostile visitor. When you gaze into this wide-open throat, armed with teeth — then you have only one thing to say: This is a miracle. God had *"²² shut the lions' mouths"*. There is no other explanation and it would be folly to seek one. It is only for our understanding, and not for God's sovereign power, that this miracle in the lions' den is greater than the other two miracles of protection, reported in this chapter.

Now I wonder if it has occurred to any of us in the reading how definitely in this whole sixth chapter of Daniel, notes from the New Testament Passion-story continuously and softly vibrate, without actually piercing through. It happens here and there, as we shall see immediately, often with even a verbal similarity:

*"⁴ Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel... but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him." And thus, it runs in the Passion-story: "⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. ⁶⁰ They did not find any."⁵⁵ But when, among other things, it is said of King Darius: "¹⁴ and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him", and that he is not able to sleep at night, what could be a truer comparison with Pontius Pilate and his wife? And then, after the deliverance of Daniel from that horrible sequel, it is reported that the persecutors of Daniel together with "²⁴ their children and their wives" had to perish in wretchedness. Does that not bring back to us the word that the Lord spoke to the people of Jerusalem on His way to the place of execution, in a tone of last solemn judgment: "*Stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*"⁵⁶?*

But most amazing is the reminiscence of the Passion-story, where it reads: "¹⁷ A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel." But when Darius calls out: "¹⁶ Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you", then we hear the scornful cry of them that passed by, there by the cross: "*He saved others; He cannot save Himself*"⁵⁷ We think we hear the actual foreword of the Easter Gospel, when it says of King Darius: "¹⁹ Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice..."

⁵⁵ Matthew 26:59-60

⁵⁶ Luke 23:28

⁵⁷ Matthew 27:42

Is this surprising reminiscence of Good Friday and Easter a mere formal correspondence, just a mere coincidence? Or can we not rather conclude that here again the prophetic finger comes into view, pointing to Jesus Christ?

But when we now look off unto Jesus Christ, we become aware of something which Daniel even here cannot see the last depths of the mystery of Christ, in which He passes far beyond what was revealed to Daniel. Christ cannot say what Daniel said in answer to his king on the morning after the night in the lions' den: *"²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him."* Christ must die, even although "before God innocency was found in Him", yes, just for that very reason. Because He is innocent, according to God's decree, He must die for the guilt of the world. In the Garden of Gethsemane there *"an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him"⁵⁸*, but this angel did not remove the cup from Him. He must drink it to the dregs. At the time of the arrest, Christ could indeed have prayed the Father and He would have sent Him twelve legions of angels. But He did not pray the Father for them, and what had to happen He allowed to happen. He let His body be broken and His blood be shed. No angel closed the jaws of the lion. The good shepherd sees the wolf coming and does not flee.

"How wonderful then is this punishment;
The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep.
The Lord, the Righteous One, pays the debt
For His servants."⁵⁹

Daniel remains alive in the lions' den. That is a miracle in our eyes. But Christ, and with Him His people who ever and again are brought before the lions, does not remain alive.

⁵⁸ Luke 22:43

⁵⁹ Hymn from Johann Heermann: 'Herzliebster Jesu, was hast Du verbrochen', 3rd verse.

Christ dies, and His body is laid in the tomb. But the Lord of life and death brings back the body to life from the tomb. As it were from the dark bowels of the lion, Christ is raised to life. Here a ray of light comes from the prophet Jonah who after three days returns to life from the belly of the whale. And so on Easter morning another angel of God stands by the empty tomb, and says something still more amazing than was said about Daniel after his night in the lions' den. This other angel announces to the world a miracle, without which all other miracles would be unreal... the miracle of miracles: ⁵*I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.* ⁶*He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.* ⁷*Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead.*⁶⁰

And now let me quote at least the conclusion of the chapter, an edict of king Darius, strongly reminiscent of the Resurrection message, that comes down to us from the time between Easter and Ascension:

²⁵*Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! ²⁶I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. ²⁷He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."* ²⁸*So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."*

⁶⁰ Matthew 28:5-7

VII. The Church Triumphant

¹ In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. ² Daniel said: I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it: 'Arise, devour much meat!' ⁶ After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷ After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸ While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts. ⁹ I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; his vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before

Him; the court sat, and the books were opened. ¹¹ Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. ¹³ I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. ¹⁴ And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. ¹⁵ As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.

¹⁶ I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ "These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come." ¹⁹ Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, ²⁰ and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. ²¹ I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived

when the saints took possession of the kingdom. ²³ Thus he said: "The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. ²⁴ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. ²⁶ But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷ Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him." ²⁸ At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself. Daniel 7

What is our nation heading for? What is Europe heading for? And America? And Africa? And India? And Russia? And Germany? and Jewry? and the Evangelical and the Catholic Church? and the great power of Islam? What is Christendom heading for? And the world? What will become of us and our children? It would be folly to seek an answer to this distressing flood of questions anywhere else than in the Bible. And it would be a presumption, which God would punish, if we were to set forth the world-situation as less mysterious and as less incomprehensible than it appears in the prophet Daniel, especially in this seventh chapter.

Daniel sees next a great heaving sea. To-day a movement is passing through all the nations of the earth. That is one thing that we must establish quite plainly to begin with. Where is this movement tending? Above all, how is this movement to

be interpreted? Who could presume to make pronouncements of his own, or even to voice conjectures? Is this movement going downwards or upwards, forwards or backwards, to the right or to the left? Should we call it an awakening or is it perhaps the beginning of a sleep? Does the struggle that has begun among the nations signify birth-pangs or death-throes? Are the storms that have sprung up over all the earth the storms of autumn or of spring? We do not know; we ought not to know — yes, we would go so far as to say: Woe to him who thinks he does know. We can only lay it down that for the present condition of world-society there is no more apt description than that which the prophet gives: "*2 The four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.*" From the heaving sea of the nations we see shapes and forms rise up, of which we don't know the final significance, nor how they will develop, nor what we shall have to expect from them. First of all, we see only what Daniel shows us: They are strange, odd — not to say, fantastic figures. Up to now we have seen no such things, and thought, when we read about previous generations who spoke of them, that they were made-up "Stories and Sagas of Long Ago" — just medieval superstition which we have long ago outgrown. Today we are seeing figures that did not exist in our previous world-conception, and which are really hardly less strange to us than lions and leopards with wings, or wild beasts with ten horns.

We have lived to see what our education would not even let us dream about. We have seen a world-war, a world-bolshevism, a world-capitalism; we have seen the summit of all folly — a world-crisis, which originated in over-production and was followed by unemployment. Out of the universal mists of our time we have seen the fantastic contours of a world-godlessness rising up; and now we are watching the ever-clearer outlines of the modern totalitarian state taking shape — setting itself in the place of God. One after another

of these beasts has raised his head, coming to the surface amid the distant vapours of the stormy sea of the nations. Like ghosts, we have seen them come nearer and nearer, and now they are here. We don't know what to think of them. But Daniel's description claims our attention when he says something special about the bear: "⁵*And three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it: 'Arise, devour much meat!'*." But he says of the leopard: "⁶*the beast also had four heads*". Truly heads are the characteristic of our generation; heads are the symbol of our nations; heads have become our pride and glory. But they are no longer just single heads; they are here quadrupled. The heads get together. And what doesn't occur to one, occurs to another. But the heads have mouths. It's not just at random that it is said of the last of the four beasts that it was "⁷*dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet...*" and "⁸*possessed... a mouth uttering great boasts*". Twice in this chapter mention is made of this "*mouth uttering great boasts*". Is it too much to think here of the world-press, or even of the unexpected possibilities of the radio for publicity and propaganda? But whether these individual interpretations are correct or not, at any rate the picture as a whole is correct. Daniel shows us here our present world-situation with a clarity of vision which comes from a revelation beyond history. The world is a heaving sea from which giant shapes of beasts raise up their fantastic manes.

But that is not all that Daniel sees in his dream. The prophet sees beyond this grim actuality, full of terror and danger, yet another that seems to us somewhat friendlier. Above the sea, and above the beasts appears a throne that "⁹*was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire*. ¹⁰*A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him*". On this throne, wrapped in fire, he sees One whom he mysteriously names

'The Ancient'. Then he describes the indescribable with the words: *"⁹ His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool."* This strange scene seems to him to take on ever more distinctly the features of a court of justice. Round about Him appear *"¹⁰ thousands upon thousands were attending Him"*, and in front of Him, evidently the condemned, *"myriads upon myriads"⁶¹*; and then it says *"the court sat, and the books were opened"*.

Surely, we ought to be listening carefully here? For isn't God speaking to us like a Father, who lovingly strokes the head of his worried and harassed son, and assures him that "the God of old is still living"? Why do the beasts that rise up from the abyss frighten us so sorely? Is it not because they assume a divine appearance, because they make absolute claims, because they behave as if they were eternal, as if they sat on the ultimate and highest throne? And now comes the prophet and says to us — yes, he says it quite definitely to us (would that we could understand it!) — *"¹¹ Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time."*

"For an appointed period of time." The beasts live as long — and only as long — as *"⁹ the Ancient of Days"* on the Throne allows. We must realize that God's throne is set up over the nations and their rulers. All these nations and rulers are not heading for the fulfilment of their will and imagination, but for that which *"⁹ the Ancient of Days"* has ordained for them. And the victory of this or that beast over another beast is not decided by them, but by the will of the 'Ancient', who sits on the throne high above them all. But in the last

⁶¹ Daniel 7:10 or: "ten thousand times ten thousand".

resort, not one of the beasts will be victorious, however mightily or long it may rule. The One on the throne remains the final Conqueror of all conquerors. All the beasts will lie at His feet: *"¹² But an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time."* It is this Word from the throne above the sea, this Word from the "Ancient", who stands above all world-events, this Word alone and nothing else, that makes the Church Triumphant.

So long as we remain in this world and age, on this side of the grave, the fact that God's throne is erected over the sea and over the beasts is and will remain a mystery. The words of the prophet about the uplifted, eternal throne do not 'lie to hand', and are not to be reckoned on the fingers. The words don't just come by chance to Daniel. And so, he has good reason to say of himself at the close of this chapter: *"²⁸ As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."* When we are talking here about the Church Triumphant we must not forget for a moment that it is God who triumphs and not we men. The Church Triumphant lives here on earth by faith and not by sight. This is the ultimate, unfathomable mystery which can only be comprehended by the faith which daily needs the prayer: "Lord, increase our faith".

Here is the most grievous mystery that this chapter reveals to us about the situation of the Church Triumphant: God allows the sea to rage, and many a little ship that set out in hope has been devoured by it. And then there is the other fact that *"¹² an appointed period of time"* is allowed to the beasts, that they should have a season and time at all to make great speeches, to devour and break in pieces, trample down, and, to crown all, to boast of their successes. This is what is unfathomable about God's government of the world — the temporary triumph of the wicked. God often leads the beasts out of the abyss on a long rein, as if they were guided by no hand at all. Only faith can comprehend it, and only to the believer

does the prophet say: ¹² *But an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.*" And only while the Church has this faith is it the Church Triumphant.

It is because this world, wherever we look, shows us only the sea and the beasts that we have a Holy Scripture, a living Word of God, a prophet Daniel — a Church. It is here — only and exclusively in the Word of God — that the divine mystery can be made known to us: God sits in government and must triumph over all devils. Surely the reading of newspapers is also a Christian duty. There is a kind of illicit innocence about the Christian who closes his eyes to the signs of the times. But we know that the newspapers can only show us the sea and the beasts. The Bible, on the other hand, shows us from the first page to the last "the Spirit that moves upon the waters"⁶², the throne over the sea, and the mysterious Hand, in which all the reins are gathered up — yes, not only the reins of the great beasts; but the slenderest threads of our own daily personal destinies.

The dream of the prophet contains a third feature. In the midst of this chaotic world, Daniel sees a company of those who already actually have faith in the most High God and King. Daniel sees this company delivered up to the fiercest of all the beasts, the fourth beast, of which it is said: ²⁵ *He will speak out against the Most High... and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law.*" We know what this time is. The spirit that "changes times and laws" is our spirit. Not only the Bolshevik, but our spirit, the spirit of the times. We live in the age when woman becomes like man, child like adult, adult childish, summer like winter, winter like summer, the day like night, and the night like day. It is we who change these temporal ordinances of our Creator at our discretion.

⁶² According to Genesis 1:2

To this beast is the Church delivered up ^{"25} *for a time, times, and half a time*". God's will for us is here at its darkest and most incomprehensible. It often seems as if God were impotent and could not help His Church. But a mother forgets her child sooner than God has ever forgotten His 'saints'. He has *"inscribed her on the palms of His hands"*⁶³. God knows all about the struggle which the faithful are enduring throughout all the world to-day, when *"they say to me all day long: 'Where is your God?'"*⁶⁴. There is also time granted to the beast to hold its triumph over the Church ^{"22} *until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom*".

"And let the princce of ill
Look grim as e'er he will,
He harms us not a whit;
For why? His doom is writ;
A word shall quickly slay him."⁶⁵

At a certain point this vision of the final triumph of God over all beasts is incarnated in a Figure who appears suddenly before the ^{"9} *the Ancient of Days*". ^{"13} *I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.*" And to this Son of Man the Ancient of days gives over the government: ^{"14} *And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.*" This is where the vision of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, dawns upon the prophet. The risen Christ says: "All

⁶³ Echoing Isaiah 49:16

⁶⁴ Psalm 42:3

⁶⁵ Martin Luther hymn: 'A Safe Stronghold Our God Is Still'.

*authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*⁶⁶ His is the kingdom. There is only one eternal kingdom — that of the Son of Man. And there is only one eternal throne — that of which Christ speaks in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. It may well seem that evening is coming — and evening may indeed come, and night — but the last word is with the morning, the morning which rises upon all nights and darknesses, the morning of that Last Day in which *"the Son of Man will come in the clouds of heaven"*⁶⁷ — and *before Him shall be gathered all nations*⁶⁸. The pangs that sweep over the Church to-day, and come like death-throes upon the believing fellowship, are the birth-pangs of the Last Day when *"the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"*⁶⁹. The storms which have arisen may come as Autumn-storms; but for Christ and His kingdom they are Spring-storms. Our vision in God's Word is not of 'The Decline of the West', but of 'The Breaking-in of the Kingdom of God'. ³²*Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;*³³ *so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.*⁷⁰ The Church Triumphant is the Coming Church that is *"coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband"*⁷¹.

Since the Church believes in the triumph of her exalted Lord, who shall come in the clouds of heaven, she is still, as before, doing what, humanly speaking, would be called folly or presumption: She is still sending her messengers out on to the stormy sea, among the beasts that are rising up from the waters. These are the ambassadors of faith, who have to

⁶⁶ Matthew 28:18

⁶⁷ See: Daniel 7:13; Mark 14:62; Revelation 1:7

⁶⁸ See Matthew 25:31-32

⁶⁹ Matthew 13:43

⁷⁰ Matthew 24:32-33

⁷¹ Revelation 21:2

announce the breaking-in of the Kingdom of God, and to point the finger to the throne above the sea, to an Ancient of days, and to the Son of Man, to whom the power is given. That is what the Church is doing to-day — pointing forward. Yes, the Church hears the noisy tumult of the tossing waters, and sees how the little ships that are sent out dance and totter like nutshells, as if at any moment they might be swallowed by the stormy sea, and devoured by the sea-monsters. But the Church knows of the triumph of the Son of Man; therefore, she is the Church Triumphant. Such tremendous things may come from out of the mouth of this world that the witness of the Church is completely shouted down. But the Church knows that the little cry from the crib at Bethlehem, and the last death-rattle on the Cross, and the Victory-shout of the Risen One will reduce to silence over all the world this *"mouth uttering great boasts"*. For ¹⁴ *His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed"*.

This is the great vision in which the word of the prophet Daniel seems to culminate. To sum up, it has a threefold signification:

1. The raging sea of the nations and the beasts that rise up out of it.
2. Above it, the throne of the Almighty who executes judgment, and has given dominion to the Son of Man.
3. The persecuted Church, in faith triumphant.

We may be anxious about the last of these three main points in this chapter. But we know of the Son of Man, who is at the same time the Head and the Shepherd of the fellowship. The shepherd sees the lion coming, and the bear, and the leopard, and the Fourth Beast, and does not flee. ¹¹ *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... ¹⁶ I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I*

*must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*¹⁷²

⁷² John 10:11 and 16

VIII. The Lowliness of the Chruch

¹ *In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously. ²I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was by the river Ulai. ³Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. ⁴I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself. ⁵While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. ⁷I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. ⁸Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. ⁹Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. ¹⁰It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. ¹¹It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular*

sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. ¹² And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper. ¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?" ¹⁴ He said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored."

¹⁵ When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man. ¹⁶ And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said: "Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision." ¹⁷ So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me: "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end." ¹⁸ Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright. ¹⁹ He said: "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end." ²⁰ The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹ The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. ²² The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power. ²³ In the latter period of their rule, when the transgressors have run their course, a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue. ²⁴ His power will be mighty, but not by his own power, and he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform his will;

he will destroy mighty men and the holy people. ²⁵ And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; and he will magnify himself in his heart, and he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without hand. ²⁶ The vision of the evenings and mornings which has been told is true; ut keep the vision secret, for it pertains to many days in the future." ²⁷ Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it. Daniel 8

The beginning of this chapter has awakened a memory of my youth, which I think it is worthwhile to relate. It was in the course of a school-expedition in the Jura. Towards evening we came to the neighbourhood of a chalet. And here our attention was soon arrested by a curious spectacle. A ram from another flock had pushed through from the neighbouring pasture land, through a gate which had been accidentally or purposely left open. A second ram, just as strong, the rightful lord of this flock, interpreted this as an illegal invasion and encroachment, and began to show fight. At first there was a seemingly harmless skirmishing between the two rivals. Half-amused and half-curious, we watched. But their movements gradually became swifter, and got to such a heat, that we became quite anxious. One of us ran to the herdsman; the others tried to force the two apart. But already it was too late. Their attacks became ever more violent; yellow foam gushed from their mouths; with dilated eyes and lowered heads, round after round followed with unbelievable rapidity. And now a last horrible clash, a dull thud, and one of the two beasts sank to the grass with skull smashed in, and horn hanging down, while the other limped groaning away. The herdsman could only certify the death, and drag off the deceased animal on a dung-cart to the chalet. Although as country children we were accustomed to looking after

animals, we fell quiet remarkably early that evening. There was no happy sing-song. Such a violent battling to the death, and ferocious bestiality, had struck and terrified our inmost souls.

It is an animal-fight like this that the prophet sees in his vision. But strangely enough, this struggle does not take place in the country, as one might expect, but in the town; not beside a peasant's cottage, but "²*in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam... by the river Ulai.*". And here it's not a question of animals, but of men. The ram and the he-goat stand for human kingdoms. The ram is the Medo-Persian Empire, and the he-goat, with the one great horn that breaks into four parts, is the Grecian Empire of Alexander the Great. But what have we to do with these names from the dust of ages past? What connection have we still with them, and they with us? O brethren, would that it were even so: Would that these kingdoms lay a thousand fathoms deep under the earth, covered over by the desert sand! But it has become only too clear to us in the course of the last two decades, that the ram and the he-goat are not covered over in the desert sand, but are alive to-day, exactly as Daniel saw them in his vision. We need only strike out the old names and replace them with names that we read every day in the papers, and all the rest remains the same. God has given the prophet the kind of view that surpasses the limits of years, decades, centuries, and millennia — that is not hemmed in by space and time. For the visions of Daniel "*a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night*"⁷³. Yes, the ram and the he-goat, which at any moment can fall on each other in unrestrained self-annihilation, are here with us in the present world of nations, to the obvious terror of us all: "⁴*I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward... but he did as he pleased and*

⁷³ Psalm 90:4

magnified himself." In this one sentence — "*he did as he pleased and magnified himself*" — we get a description of the mentality and behaviour of individuals and of nations in our day. "*He did as he pleased and magnified himself*" — that's up-to-date world-history. Already near the ram is standing the he-goat — the aggressor. Of him it is said that he may come with such lightning speed that "⁵*he was coming... without touching the ground*". The experts tell us that this is exactly the way in which the aggressor will appear in a future war.

The thing that particularly strikes the prophet about both beasts that he sees in his vision is their weapon — the horn. There is an extraordinary lot of talk about horns in this chapter. The horn is the sign and symbol of worldly ram-strength. As far as the eye can see, the world of nations is to-day under the sign of the horn. What nations are showing one another to-day are the horns. Horn stands over-against horn; weapon bristles against weapon. Mankind has become one forest of horns. And everyone trembles for the moment when the least movement begins to stir among these horns. And so the nations put all their strength and ability into these horns.

But, brethren, don't let yourselves be deceived by any trick of this world of horns — be it ever so simple. Daniel's vision shows us as clearly and distinctly as possible the direction in which a world, a nation, a group, or an individual must go in the sign of the horn!

Have a look at this ram! He stands straddle-legged with his horns "⁴*butting westward, northward, and southward*"! In a foolhardy war on three fronts, he is a match for three-quarters of the world, "*and*", it says of him, "*no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power*". There stands the might of the ram, as if established for eternity.

But look! Suddenly overnight, the stronger one appears, as if carved out of the earth, as if called by an inaudible voice, as if summoned by an invisible hand. And as against the stronger one, it is said of the ram: *"⁷ And the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he (the male goat) hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power."* So much for the reliability of horns. So, it is with the strength of the strong. *"¹⁶ The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength."¹⁷ A horse is a false hope for victory; nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength."⁷⁴*

The he-goat has won the victory. And it is said of him: *"⁸ The male goat magnified himself exceedingly."* But already in the next breath it goes on: *"⁸ But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken."*

That, brethren, is world-history as God teaches us to read it. It is world-history of quite another kind from what we are accustomed to see and to interpret. We are accustomed to view world-history from beneath upwards, and to edify ourselves with the thought of how individuals and nations rise up from below, higher and higher from small beginnings, thanks to their ability and strength. But God teaches us to interpret world-history in the opposite direction — from above downwards. He shows us that with both individuals and nations, the one that rises up must always come down again. From God's point of view, among all those who ascend there is not one who does not finally fall down. Yes, the very summit of all human might is the sign and signal that the decline has begun. Daniel shows us the horns reared up in might. But first of all Daniel clearly shows us the broken horns. In God's world-history there is no victor, for of this victor over all victors, it is finally written: *"⁸ But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken."* At the last,

⁷⁴ Psalm 33:16-17

all beasts have broken horns. Whoever sets up a horn will be broken by another horn. *"All those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword."*⁷⁵ There is nothing said about victors and vanquished! Only about broken ones! In God's world-history, the horn is no solution, no deliverance, no way out. For no horn-bearer, be he ever so fierce, is lord of the earth. The Lord of the earth is the God who *"makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire."*⁷⁶

Here we must understand that God speaks about the great ones of this world in accents which if they were coming from a man would be called disrespectful. We imagine that we are dealing here with the giant empire of a man whom the history-books of mankind call the 'Great' — Alexander the Great — but God shows His prophet — a he-goat! In this vision there is something almost like divine humour. The God who sees our pompous looks as we give ourselves high-sounding names and bestow titles, is the God of whom it is written: *"He who sits in the heavens laughs."*⁷⁷

We men are apt to see the great deeds of the past as being greater than they really were. They grow in our boastful imagination. We celebrate them in heroic songs. Think of that hero-song, steeped in the spirit of our heathen ancestors, that has come down to us, their distant children and grandchildren — the song of the Niebelungen, the arch-type of a hero-song, which begins with the characteristic words:

"To us in ancient tales
Many wonders are related,
Of great heroic deeds,
Of mighty works,
Of joy, and weddings,

⁷⁵ Matthew 26:52

⁷⁶ Psalm 46:9

⁷⁷ Psalm 2:4

Of weeping and of lamentation,
Of the combats of bold knights:
You will hear of nothing but wonders."

Wonder! Wonder of human strength! So pompously and solemnly do we proceed to sing of human deeds. We speak of the combats of bold knights and of mighty works. But God speaks of a fight between a ram and a he-goat. The one knocks the other's horns off and smites him to the ground. So unheroically, so inelegantly unheroically and unceremoniously, God speaks in His Book.

And now, beloved, there is something more here about a horn — a horn that is small to begin with, but which finally grows to dreadful length. This little horn does not push westward and northward and southward, but vertically upward. It reaches up to the stars of the sky and pulls some of them down. The little horn does not wage war against his own, but war against God.

The burden of this vision leaves the prophet helpless and desolate, until God sends him His messenger Gabriel and makes him say: *"¹⁷ Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end... ¹⁹ Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation."* In that time *"²³ when the transgressors have run their course"*. A king *"²³ insolent and skilled in intrigue"* comes on to the scene *"²⁵ and he will destroy many while they are at ease"*. He will cause a dreadful devastation among the mighty ones of the earth, even to the people of God, and within God's house. *"²⁵ And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence... He will even oppose the Prince of princes."* Prosperity and success shall be with him for *"2,300 evenings and mornings"*.

We get an idea here of why in the speech of Christian people the anti-Christian godless power, the power of Evil, the Devil, often takes the shape of a horned creature. This isn't

just a mere random whim, but rather a very real remembrance of this eighth chapter of the Book of Daniel, which describes the horns for us so impressively as the expression of the dark abyss. Now we understand why Daniel, after he had to look into this abyss, said of himself: ¹²⁷*Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days.*" That really is enough to make one sick!

But, beloved brethren, this chapter about the abyss is not altogether without a gleam of hope. It is not simply a case of illness. It may well be the illness of repentance, and return, and turning to God — the illness that leads not to death but to life. In the course of this chapter there is continually coming to view something like a shining hand. It is that same hand which at Belshazzar's feast wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall. It is a shining hand in which all threads mysteriously run together. The king, ²³*insolent and skilled in intrigue*", of the last days, ²⁴*will be mighty, but not by his own power*". The power is only lent to him. That is the meaning of the hand. This ¹⁹*final period of the indignation*" is not the last thing that this chapter shows us. However dark it may be, it is just another stage on the way to a great, mysterious, glorious end — the end of all times. Here is the last message to Daniel from the fierce king of the "last time": ²⁵*But he will be broken without hand.*"

Without hand. That obviously means, without human hand. For a hand is already there to break him, but it is *God's* hand.

Now only a thin partition divides the prophet from that starry night over the stall of Bethlehem. Christmas bears in upon us. A few rays of that light from heaven have already shone through the darkness of this chapter. God sends the victorious Hand into this world and time, to break the fierce king of the 'last time'. It is not by chance, and no mere coincidence, that the messenger of God, the angel Gabriel, appears in only one other place in the whole of Scripture, besides this

one in Daniel, namely, the first chapter of Luke. There the same messenger from the eternal realms receives the commission to announce to the Virgin Mary away up in the Jewish hills, the coming of another king, of whom he says: *"He will reign... forever, and His kingdom will have no end."*⁷⁸ In Jesus Christ God has set up another horn for His people; not the horn from the abyss, not the horn of destruction, but a Horn from on high, *"a horn of salvation"* that shall serve all people for deliverance. For God sends the Conqueror of all conquerors, the Victor over all victors.

And now, brethren, note how strangely, how very, very strangely, and incomprehensibly, God goes to work. God shows to the world the King, who is to have the dominion over it, as a defenceless child, naked, lying in a simple crib. This is the same God who sends David, the shepherd-boy, against a Goliath without the armaments of Saul; the same God of whom it is written: *"From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease."*⁷⁹ Right into the fray, under the hooves of the rams and he-goats of this world, God sends the Lamb. And the Lamb bears no horns: *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*⁸⁰ There on the cross, utterly defenceless, is the victorious Church. In this world the victorious Church has the form of a Lamb. No one will be a match for this Lamb. They will strike Him with their horns, and wound Him, and kill Him. But He cannot be put aside. In the presence of the Lamb that beareth the sin of the world, the beasts of this world are powerless and helpless. On Him their horns are all worn away. This is the victory that the Church knows about.

⁷⁸ Luke 1:33

⁷⁹ Psalm 8:2

⁸⁰ John 1:29

The last struggle will be between Christ and anti-Christ. And this struggle is imminent. We can observe its beginnings. We have been granted a glimpse into its secret. In the fourth chapter of Matthew the beginning of the struggle between the Lamb and the horned ones is revealed:

"¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry... ⁸ Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to Him: 'All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him: 'Go, Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' ¹¹ Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him."⁸¹

That is the beginning of the struggle between the horn of destruction and the "*Horn of salvation*"⁸². This beginning is already so full of promise that the final victory of the Christ, under whose feet God will put all enemies, is beyond all doubt.

Finally, it is said of Daniel: "²⁷ Then I got up again and carried on the king's business." It never occurs to Daniel to withdraw from the king's palace. Deliberately he remains and does his duty. We must have regard to the signs of the times. To-day it is a sin not to do so. We must look out for the final end; but we must not therefore neglect the duty that lies to hand. "*Then I got up again and carried on the king's business.*" For us that is a call to our every-day duty. But it is a sin to go about this duty ignorantly, since God has not left us ignorant. "*Then I got up again and carried on the king's business.*" And that means, in a still deeper sense, at the same time a call to perform the business of our King of

⁸¹ Matthew 4:1-2.8-11

⁸² Luke 1:69 (Salm 18:2)

kings, in a service of love to our neighbour, and a service of witness to the Lord of the fellowship. Now we must redeem the time, and work so long as it is day.

For it is still day.

IX. The Church of Sinners

¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. ³ So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said: "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁵ we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. ⁶ Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land. ⁷ Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You. ⁸ Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; ¹⁰ nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. ¹¹ Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. ¹² Thus He has confirmed His

words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem. ¹³ *As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth.* ¹⁴ *Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice.* ¹⁵ *And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day—we have sinned, we have been wicked.* ¹⁶ *O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us.* ¹⁷ *So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary.* ¹⁸ *O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion.* ¹⁹ *O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."*

²⁰ *Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God,* ²¹ *while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time*

of the evening offering. ²² He gave me instruction and talked with me and said: "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. ²⁴ Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most Holy. ²⁵ So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street and the wall will be built again, even in times of distress. ²⁶ Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. ²⁷ And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." Daniel 9

With this ninth chapter a new window opens. To discern the meaning of this change, we shall have to halt for a moment in our progressive exposition of the book, and cast a glance back at the way we have travelled.

What have we been continually hearing and seeing afresh every Sunday in these first eight chapters? There have been two opposing fronts, set up against each other, whose contours have grown more clear with each succeeding vision and event. We saw the "rulers, powers, and

*forces*⁸³ in tumult against God. On the one side, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius — the pagan state with its totalitarian claims on lives and souls. On the other side, Daniel, "*one of the exiles from Judah*"⁸⁴, Daniel with his comrades in faith, the people of God in the Babylonian captivity, the oppressed and persecuted Church of Christ in the midst of a world at enmity with God. On this side, the "*magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners*"⁸⁵, utterly at a loss; on that side, God's prophet and plenipotentiary⁸⁶, to whom is granted the clear light of revelation.

And so, it was natural and inevitable that from the very beginning the sympathy of us all should be with Daniel and his comrades in faith. Yes, as members of the Church, we have seen ourselves standing together with Daniel, and the captive people of God, shoulder to shoulder, in the same struggle, in the same distress, and under the same promise of God's certain help. The judgment of God upon Babylon and its great world-dominion has been for us a continual source of comfort, particularly in view of world and Church events in the near future. We have readily recognized the great influence of Babylon on the course of history: "Strong mail of craft and power He weareth in this hour; On earth is not his fellow."⁸⁷ But we have heard how there sits One upon the throne, erected above heaven and earth, whom no power between heaven and earth can rival. "*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.*"⁸⁸

And now comes the new and extraordinary change of tone. There has been a kind of preparation for this, a hint of it, in the previous chapters, especially the eighth (verses 12 and 13), but now we've come to it. A judgment is pronounced

⁸³ Echoing Ephesians 6:12

⁸⁴ Daniel 5:13 and 6:13

⁸⁵ Daniel 5:11 (2:2.10; 4:7)

⁸⁶ Or: authorised representative

⁸⁷ Martin Luther

⁸⁸ Matthew 6:13

upon Jerusalem. Once more in this chapter the prophet sees God's judgment — but this time not upon the God-forsaken Babylon, but upon the pious Jerusalem. Not over the high image of Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 3), but over the holy hill of Zion, hangs the cloud from which God's lightning flashes. Not above the banqueting-hall of Belshazzar "*opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall*", but above the Temple ceremonies of the chosen people, there now appear "*the fingers of a man's hand*".⁸⁹

It is not only the fault of the violent spirit of Babylon, with its godlessness, that the people of God have now been languishing for years in captivity. The fault lies no less with those who are persecuted. It is not so simple — this matter of two fronts! For these two fronts are not nicely and neatly separated from each other. We can't say that on the one side there is only light; and on the other only darkness. For there are shadows there — yes, just as much on God's front. God's Church shares in the sinfulness of this world, and God must be her Adversary too, as Judge. Were God dependent on our piety or on any other human 'confessional-front', when He delivers His victorious attacks on the darkness (chapter 8), then He would be utterly abandoned, and come sadly off! For we lack the 'soldierly virtues' for the Holy War. "⁵*We... have rebelled*", declares the prophet. Note, that he says 'We' — he speaks in the first person! In other words: We are soldiers who have deserted — we are deserters! And *we* — "¹⁴*we have not obeyed His voice*". We are the rebels of God's fighting troops. So much for the "fitness for service" of those who dwell in Jerusalem!

No wheat grows in this world without weeds growing with it. "²⁴*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.* ²⁵*But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and*

⁸⁹ Daniel 5:5

went away. ²⁶ But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ The slaves of the landowner came and said to him: 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ And he said to them: 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him: 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' ²⁹ But he said: 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, first gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"⁹⁰

That is what the prophet sees. This is the new note that breaks in here. It's as if a captain is about to lead his company into battle, and then is shocked to discover the enemy among his own men. Yes, it's also like a doctor who, at the outbreak of an epidemic, wages war against the disease, and then one day has to confess: "The plague has got a grip of my own life". According to God's commission, Daniel must say to a Nebuchadnezzar: "*Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage*"⁹¹; but now he sees that the branch that he himself is sitting on is sawn through. Actually, there is no branch in this world on which we can sit. They are all sawn through. No political party-connection, no religious community, and no church-membership can be our support... no, not even a consciousness of election or prophetic call. All these branches will some day be sawn through. Unfortunately, there is nothing on which we can build. The prophet's *only* support is not in this world.

This confession must be a cause of great distress to the prophet. In this chapter he seems to become a somewhat different person. Up to now there has been still a remnant of his own strength and righteousness. Here it comes to an end.

⁹⁰ Matthew 13:24-30

⁹¹ Daniel 4:14

Daniel has come to the place where one can only stretch out empty hands and pray to God. Yes, his prayer becomes a real begging. ³ *I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.* His prayer is one of the most moving confessions of sin in the Bible. Daniel can scarcely find words enough to describe the sins. And yet there's something more than just words here! ⁵ *We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled.* The sins began in high places: ⁸ *O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You.* But there are also sins farther down. There are no exceptions to be commended: ¹¹ *All Israel has transgressed Your law.* The man who saw kings trembling and broken now stands broken before God, for the sake of his own sins and those of his Church.

And so these mighty "therefores" fall like lashes on the back of the penitent. Because ¹¹ *all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written.* Because ^{14b} *the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done — ^{14a} herefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us.* Let no one wonder at the so ¹² *great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem.* Everything has its cause. And the cause of all causes is our guilt. Let no one ask 'Why?' Therefore — *therefore!* — is this great evil come to pass: Because we have sinned. Therefore — *therefore!* — is Jerusalem destroyed and her people in captivity.

Therefore! The fellowship lay in the fiery furnace (chapter 3). But now we see them in a very special kind of fiery furnace — the fiery furnace of personal and communal guilt. Daniel lay in the lions' den (chapter 6). But here a darker, and deeper, and more hopeless pit has opened under him. It is the 'cruel pit', filled with the mire of personal and national

guilt — a pit whose walls are smooth and without footholds (Psalm 40). Yet there was deliverance from the fiery furnace and from the lions' den. Will there be deliverance out of the fiery furnace of Hell? It is because Daniel has seen the flames that did not consume, and the lions' den that could not devour, that even here he dares again to believe and to hope for a deliverance from guilt. With a last heart-rending prayer, that is more like a cry and a sigh, he dares to turn to God for himself and for his people. ¹⁹ *O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.*" This sin-confession of Daniel's contains the characteristic features of the confessions of the Church in all ages and among all peoples. Yes, the calling and the task of the Church, as over against the world, must always be the confession of guilt, as being the root of all evil. Conversely, it is the characteristic of the world to deny guilt. In this way it seeks to keep quiet about the question of guilt altogether, or else, where it is raised, to raise it about someone else. To-day especially there is a notorious movement among the peoples and nations which is distinguished by this fact: Not only the guilt of one's own nation is denied or exculpated, but the whole Biblical doctrine of guilt is watered down and attacked. Yes, and this radical evasion of the doctrine of guilt calls itself 'Positive Christianity': that's how the wolf comes in sheep's clothing.

In this particular situation it has clearly become the task of the Church to take her stand with Daniel, and to make that confession, which is already beginning to be punished as high treason in our twentieth-century nations: ⁸ *We have sinned*" (We — not the other man!) and with us ⁸ *our kings, our princes and our fathers* ". We ourselves are guilty that our nation has fallen into disgrace among all the nations.

Therefore this ¹²*great calamity...* " that nothing like it has happened under the whole heaven.⁹²

The difference between the Church and the world is not that the Church is less guilty, but that the Church, under God's Word, acknowledges this guilt. The world does not and cannot acknowledge it. And how should it? The Church is the place where guilt is acknowledged and known in this world. Where the confession of guilt is silenced, the Church ceases to be. But the Church is for this reason also the place from which clarion call must continually go forth. There is no other effective means of combating crises than acknowledgment of guilt, forgiveness, and a return to the God from whom we have fallen away.

And so that too is the task of the Church in the nation: To hold fast to the hope that there is a forgiveness. Hope is the gift of the Church to the people. If the Church ceases to hope, then who will hope? If Daniel loses the spirit of prayer, who still has it? A Christian's main job is to hope. But he is a person of hope and not an optimist. Hope differs from the optimism of this world in that she recognises the damage in complete sobriety in order to then hope 'nevertheless'. The final hope of Daniel for his people lies in this: ¹⁹*Your city and Your people are called by Your name.*" And shouldn't we also dare to remind God continually of this: That this generation has been baptized! It still bears the sign of God's covenant on its forehead⁹³, even although that forehead has been insolently and rebelliously raised up in resistance to God.

Right at the beginning of this chapter, and continually through it, one question seems to be insoluble and worrying to the prophet: How long will God's judgment on Jerusalem

⁹² Echoing verse 12

⁹³ Refers to the common practice of infant baptism in the Protestant Church of Switzerland.

last? How long will the 'great evil', that has now so justly fallen on the fellowship, endure? In chapter 8, Daniel, in his vision saw the king of the last time ^{18:23} *insolent and skilled in intrigue* who will appear ^{18:19} *at the final period of the indignation*, "And", it says at the end of that eighth chapter, ^{18:27} *I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.*" This helplessness drove Daniel to seek counsel and answer in the Holy Scripture of his people. He lights on a Word from the prophet Jeremiah: ¹¹ *And these nations (the Israelites) will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* ¹² *Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon.* ⁹⁴ This prophetic word gives Daniel food for thought. If he attached any importance to these seventy years, then the time for the freeing of his people would be near, for the seventy years would soon be completed. That is what is meant by the words: ¹ *In the first year of Darius... ² I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.*"

Then we see the prophet haunted by the question which always claims attention in times of distress and judgment. It is a question which nearly all of us are, very understandably, worrying about to-day — whether we speak of it or not. It's the question: "How long?" (see Psalm 13). That's the question that the patient asks the doctor when he comes to visit. I heard this question last week from the lips of the wife of a man who has been three years out of a job. And I knew that in this one question there throbs to-day the distress of the whole crisis-sick world. The prophet's question is still very much the world's question, in a somewhat different sense, but just as distressful.

⁹⁴ Jeremiah 25:11-12

"How long?" Who is willing to answer? Is there any other course for us than for the prophet, who so often got a direct answer from God through visions, and dreams, and heavenly messengers? And he now humbly determines to examine 'the books', to see if they can give him an answer. These troubled days are driving us inexorably to the Books, with new eyes. What we need to know is written in the Books. In these days it must often be a great joy to us simply that there is a Bible, and that we can open it, and read in it. In any case we should long ago have ceased to know what or how we ought to think, if we had not been able to get direct counsel from the Bible, that is a light for us — the lamp for our feet on the way through the darkness. We must consider it a good thing that men are necessarily in despair in those places where the Books are no longer opened, or have not yet been opened.

No one has ever turned 'to the books' without an answer. And so it is with the prophet. For his questions, his researches, for his confessions, prayers and entreaties, God sends him a messenger from the beyond — the angel Gabriel. He gives him the information that the command from the throne on high has been issued to him — not at the close of his prayer but at the very beginning. ²³*At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued.* — What an astounding encouragement for believing prayer!

The answer that the angel gave the prophet sounds very like that answer that Christ once gave Peter, when he asked Him whether it is enough to forgive one's brother seven times in one day. And Peter got the answer: *"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."*⁹⁵ In the same way the prophet here gets the answer that the captivity of Jerusalem will last not just seventy years, but seventy weeks of years. If one week of years is seven years, then seventy weeks of years would be nearly half a millennium — any

⁹⁵ Matthew 18:22

way far beyond the span of a human being. ^{"24} *Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city.*"

And in fact already, before the expiration of this half-millennium, the walls of Jerusalem were again encompassed. The prophet Jeremiah's vision was thus quite accurate. ^{"25} *The street and the wall will be built again*", but, he adds, *"even in times of distress."* In spite of the outward rebuilding of Jerusalem there will be no time of blessing. In spite of the services of worship, for centuries the Word of God will be scarce in the land, and the mouth of the prophet will for a long time be dumb. But, at the end of the *"times of distress"*, God will send ^{"25} *Messiah the Prince*". And then He is ^{"24} *to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most Holy"*. Even if this thoroughly Christ-saturated passage does not directly refer to the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, it still does point to Jesus Christ. It would be difficult for us not to think of Christ where we read: ^{"24} *to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness"*.

The other passage also points to Christ: ^{"26} *the Messiah will be cut off*". The Abomination of Desolation will dwell in the Temple, between the horns of the altar. Here we can hardly help thinking of the trial of the "Most Holy" by the high priests and elders. Then, when we read: ^{"27} *In the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering*", we think of the rent veil of the Temple, announcing the end of the Mosaic service of sacrifice. Now the sacrifice is offered once for all in Jesus Christ.

^{"26} *And the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.*" Does this not stand in the same line of revelation as the word of the Lord, foretelling the destruction of

Jerusalem by the Romans: ³⁷*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.* ³⁸*Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!*⁹⁶

This is the answer to the question: "How long?" In this answer the prophet has something taken from him and given to him at the same time. There is taken from him the hope that there will soon be an outer and inner restoration of Jerusalem and its people. But there is given to him, gloriously beyond all his expectations, the promise that his supplication for forgiveness of sins is heard. ²⁴*To make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness.*" This will be a miracle infinitely more marvellous than the deliverance from the fiery furnace and from the lions' den.

Of course, a long time must elapse before that day comes. But the prophet remains certain that there *will* be a deliverance. God has a plan which will be carried out, even through periods of time which far surpass our human span of life. That is the meaning of those numbers which we find here and there in the prophets. They should not mislead us into arbitrary calculations. He who would make calculations about the ways of God, risks losing his reason. For our minds are too feeble and too small for God's calculations. It should be enough for us to be certain that God works to a plan, according to quite definite times and seasons, and that there is with Him a time of waiting *"until the time is fulfilled"*⁹⁷ — but day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son.

The near and the distant future stretches out before the nations and rulers of the world like a tunnel. Most haughtily,

⁹⁶ Matthew 23:37-38

⁹⁷ Echoing Galatians 4:4, see also Daniel 8:19; 11:27.29.35

and yet most despairingly, mankind strides through the hopeless darkness. But in the midst of these tunnel-wanderers, there marches a little company of those who know 'from the Books' that the tunnel has an exit. They know who has pierced through and made that exit; they know that suddenly one day we shall arrive at the end of the tunnel, and that the Christ, who has broken through, there awaits the nations and their rulers. But until that day, the little company knows — once again, 'from the Books' — that they live hour by hour by God's mercy, that they are a company of 'miserable sinners'. When the Last Day, the end of all time, is come, men will no longer pray in temples made with hands. Then, according to the message of 'the Books', God's glorious decree will be accomplished:

"¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.' ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said: 'Behold, I am making all things new,'"⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Revelation 21:1-5

X. The church that Prays

¹ *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and one of great conflict, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision.*

² *In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. ³ I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed. ⁴ On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, ⁵ I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. ⁶ His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. ⁷ Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves.*

⁸ *So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. ⁹ But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. ¹⁰ Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹ He said to me: "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. ¹² Then he said to me: "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in*

response to your words. ¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future."

¹⁵ When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. ¹⁶ And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke and said to him who was standing before me: "O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. ¹⁷ For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me." ¹⁸ Then this one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. ¹⁹ He said: "O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!" Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said: "May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." ²⁰ Then he said: "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. ²¹ However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince.

^{11,1} In the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him."

Daniel 10:1 – 11:1

There's something in the air. No one knows just what. But everyone knows that there's something in the air — something like a smell of burning. It's worrying, for the burning

may well be in one's own loft, or in one's own haystack. You notice it about people, wherever you get into conversation with them — in the doctor's waiting-room, on the bench in the park, in the café — they are all behaving as if they had begun to smell something. It's a tense atmosphere that we are breathing. It is charged and impregnated with explosive material. An outspoken word, a name casually mentioned, can to-day have the effect of a match struck in a gas-filled cellar. A man can very suddenly rise to importance; any apparently insignificant event can assume proportions that no one would have dreamed of. And all because of this something that's in the air.

That's why we are living in days when rumour has its way — because everyone is scenting something that they can't quite place. Now it's a rumour about Moscow, now about Paris or Rome; to-day it's a rumour about Spain, to-morrow perhaps about Geneva or about Washington — it's always rumours that get hold of our minds. No one knows where they all come from, or who is busy spreading them around. The fact remains that as the years go by, the people are more and more controlled by rumour. And so, rumour has become a great power for anyone who knows how to capture it and make it serve his interests.

Decisions to-day are in the air. Therefore, he is a sensible man who makes use of the air. Propagandist-addresses, and peace-speeches, false news, lies, and the army of diplomatists flying to conferences — all these make use of the air. Then one day, behind the propagandist-addresses and peace-speeches, behind the false information, the lies, the diplomats, the bomber-squadrons will arrive — also by air. All that is important goes by air to-day. And everyone is convinced that the last reckoning between the nations will take place in the air. What we are beginning to sniff is the smell of burning from the hell of aerial warfare, hell with its savage army, devils flying, through the air.

There is only one thing lacking in the air for this generation — an angel. With the well-aimed arrows of a greedy intellect, men have thought to bring down the angels from the sky. But this is the point where the tenth chapter of the Book of Daniel has something decisive to say to us, if we are still willing and able to hear it. For it tells us that there are not only devils in the air, but also angels. But God has let us come to such a pass, that we have had to smell the burning of hell, before we could again be ready for the joyful recognition that there are angels in the air. "Let this be the first thing that we know," says Martin Luther, "that we do not sit in a pleasure-garden. The Christian must know that he sits in the midst of devils, and the Devil is nearer to him than his coat or shirt, yes, nearer than his own skin. When we do not know that the Devil is so near to us, then we lose the knowledge of the benefit that we get from God through His angels. That is why no Christian should doubt that angels exist."

And now let us look a little more carefully into this chapter. ⁹²*In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks.*" During this time of mourning the prophet touched no delicate food, renounced the use of flesh and wine, and every care of his outward appearance, so that absolute seclusion became necessary. He appeared only to a little circle of his intimates — ⁹⁷*the men who were with me*". For twenty-one days the prophet is wrapped in sorrow for his people. We get a hint there that there could be a day of thanksgiving, repentance, and prayer, that would last longer than the twenty-hours appointed by a State Church⁹⁹. After these twenty-one days, an angel met him. This encounter lets us know that it's certainly no joke for a mortal man to have to meet an angel. In view of this (and many another!) Scripture passage, we must scratch our heads and ask how in all

⁹⁹ Lütthi is referring here to the annual 'Swiss federal Day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer' – 'Eidgenössischer Dank-, Buss- und Betttag'.

the world it can have come to pass that the angels can have sunk in our estimation to such harmless dolls for children — as has actually happened in the Christian community to-day. I think that we can recognize a trick of the one whose interest it is that we should not take seriously the existence of angels. That is his usual procedure: First to make things harmless, and then to clear them right out of the way.

Certainly, the angel that the prophet had to see here is anything but harmless. Not a trace of those sweet little baby-angels with wings — the kind of picture that an impudent fancy has made of the angels of God: ⁵ *Behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz.* ⁶ *His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.* And then it goes on to say that the men who were standing by Daniel have seen nothing, but that ⁷ *a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves*". And we are vividly reminded of the appearance of angels reported in the Christmas and Easter Gospels.

The conversation that now takes place between this angel and the prophet, reproduced in the following passage, gives us such a surprising insight into the significance of the angel-world, that we often feel like imitating these men who *"ran away to hide themselves"*. One hardly dares to raise one's eyes and look through this window, that is here opened on that other world, into which our human eyes may not and cannot see. And if nevertheless we are now daring to do so, it is only with the great reserve and respect that becomes us here.

The angel informs the prophet that on the first day that Daniel began to pray for his people, his words of prayer reached God and were granted. And so he, the angel Gabriel, at once

got a command from the Highest. He set out for the land of the Persians, in whose hands God's people had been since the fall of the Babylonians. And when he arrived there ^{"13} *the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days*". Thereupon a second angel, the special protector-angel of God's people — Michael — is hurried to his help against the Persians. Then He got the victory in the Persian palace. Later, before the angel takes leave of Daniel, he informs him further that he is going to set out again and go from him again to the Persian royal palace, to continue the struggle on God's behalf. He is convinced that the angel Michael will again stand by his side there, for ^{"11.1} *In the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him*".

With this we get an inkling of the ways and means by which our prayers are granted in heaven. Daniel prays that God may change the heart of the King of Persia, to make him gracious to God's people. And God immediately lets the king's heart be influenced in spite of all opposition. I can think of no place in Holy Scripture that shows us more clearly the meaning of earnest intercession. In view of this Scripture-passage, any man who bears on his heart the need of his fatherland and the weal and woe of the nations, may bring his request before the Throne on high. This is the place where *"the thoughts of the people are changed"*¹⁰⁰, changed through the service of those messengers from the other side, who stand at the disposition of the Lord of lords. *"whom the cherubs serve bent down day and night"*¹⁰¹. Here we see how and why the Church ought to pray for a nation, and for all nations.

Verily, where a Church prays the air is no longer filled just with the smell of Hell-burning. Heavenly messengers hurry

¹⁰⁰ Echoing Proverbs 16:9; 21:1

¹⁰¹ From the 2nd verse of the hymn 'God is present' by Gerhard Terstegen: 'God is present, whom the cherubs serve bent down day and night'

to and fro; angels rise and fall, and begin to penetrate even the tensest atmosphere, in the service of the Highest. Where a man is praying, or where two or three are praying together, then rumour is no longer the only power — there descends a power from heaven that reminds us of the "*myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands*"¹⁰² angels that serve God.

There is such a glory about this insight into the affairs of the world beyond that it can harm the human heart. There is an imminent danger here, danger of delusion and of presumption. The man who prays is shown what amazing power lies in folded hands and bended knees, and may begin to grow self-important, and to look in on himself instead of away from himself to the messengers of God, and away beyond the messengers of God, to the One Lord of all the legions of angels.

But watch! God knows of this danger. And so He never wearies of showing us throughout this whole chapter that it is not to Daniel, the pious man of prayer, that the power, the possession, and the accomplishment belong. There is a good reason for this chapter being one of the most personal in the Book of Daniel. There is a good reason why we should get the one personal sidelight on the prophet precisely in this place. Take a look at the behaviour of this man here — at this very point, where what one might call his triumph as a man of God reaches the stars! In the beginning of this chapter we read that he is "*mourning for three entire weeks*". Then before our eyes he sinks "*into a deep sleep... with my face to the ground*". But when the hand from above touches him, he is able to rise up again, and is at least able to cower on the ground on his hands and knees. But in the course of the conversation with the angel, he is so feeble that he loses even the power of speech. It's as if his breath is slowly giving out: "*For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such*

¹⁰² Revelation 5:11

as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me." ¹¹ *And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling.*" ¹⁶ *O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength.*" Again and again, during the conversation the angel has to touch him and strengthen him, as if he were dealing with a very sick man, who has to be helped along with continual injections for continual heart-attacks. No less than four times — in strange repetition — we hear Daniel sighing in this very chapter: *"There remains just now no strength in me."* We know of one other to whom it was given to see into ² *the third heaven*". And he said: ⁷ *Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh.*" ¹⁰³ When God grants this sort of insight to Daniel and to Paul, there is only one way of keeping them from harm. He makes them empty and impotent. For His strength is made perfect in weakness.

This tenth chapter shows us clearly the work of the angels *"who serve God day and night"*¹⁰⁴. But it shows us equally clearly the work of the other angelic powers, who are fallen from God, and now oppose His acts. When a man of prayer is on his knees, not only is the air filled with angels, but also the devils are gathered together. Dark powers encompass the king's palace in Persia. What a dreadful thought... the government-offices of a nation occupied by the forces of anti-God! But the angel Gabriel, leagued with Michael, carves his way through the crowd on the threshold, right to the heart of the king. According to the will of God, the angels obtain the victory.

In other words: In this world there is a battle ordained for the Church. But *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but*

¹⁰³ 2 Corinthians 12:2.7

¹⁰⁴ Revelation 7:15

against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness."¹⁰⁵ — against anonymous forces. Who will stand against the unchained powers of the deep, except with the weapons of the spirit? Yes, but not with the weapons of one's own spirit; not with the weapons that are held in the clenched fist, but with the weapons that can be held only in defenceless and folded hands. A battle rages in the air, in which no individual or nation will be victorious "*by might or by power*"¹⁰⁶. Yes, yes, it is true what the sparrows are crying to-day from the roof-tops: The decision in the future conflict between the nations will take place in the air. But, thank God, quite otherwise than the Air-ministers, and Radio-directors imagine. The decision takes place where a Daniel has been emptied of strength and sinks to his knees; and where the legions of God are mobilized for battle and for victory. Yes, in the last resort, this Daniel on his knees is really that other Daniel, who, high above all pious men of prayer and high above all angelic powers, the only Mediator and Interceder "*in the days of His flesh... offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears*"¹⁰⁷. There is the praying Church, there alone takes place the decision of all decisions — there in those praying hands!

Yes, we can go a step farther still, and say (understand it if you can!): This spiritual battle *is* already decided. The decision has been fought out, and has resulted in the victory of God. Yes, the victory is won, even if, according to God's inscrutable counsel and will, it is veiled from our eyes since Easter-time; and the believing fellowship must still stand in the midst of death and struggle. The Victor over all victors, to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth, to whom the Father can decree twelve legions of angels at a sign — He has seen Satan falling from heaven. The decision in the

¹⁰⁵ Ephesians 6:12

¹⁰⁶ Zechariah 4:6

¹⁰⁷ Hebrews 5:7

air has taken place on the Cross. And there above the Cross there hung such a heavy atmosphere that the sun lost its brilliance in the bright noon-tide. But like a flaming sword, cutting through the thickest mist that has ever been, comes the Word: *"It is finished!"*¹⁰⁸ There on the Cross, the victory is won. There the Lord of Hosts makes Christ the Prince and Captain of the heavenly army. From the deepest pit, Christ is arisen to the right hand of God, from whence He shall come ³¹*in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.* ³²*All the nations will be gathered before Him*¹⁰⁹.

This is not rumour. This is joyful tidings and radiant promise. This promise is a kind of advance-payment, with which the Praying Church in this world perseveres in the fight behind the Prince, for as long as God has ordained. But this battle is to be fought out on the knees, with loosened joints, and failing breath, and utter weakness. Once and for all the battle has been fought out in the Person of the One High Priest, before whom all angels of light or darkness are as nothing (*"all ministering spirits"*¹¹⁰). Here it has taken place, where it says: ³⁹*And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him.* ⁴⁰*When He arrived at the place, He said to them: 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.'* ⁴¹*And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray,* ⁴²*saying: 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.'* ⁴³*Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.* ⁴⁴*And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.* ⁴⁵*When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from*

¹⁰⁸ John 19:30

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 25:31-32

¹¹⁰ Hebrews 1:14

sorrow, ⁴⁶ and said to them: *Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation.*¹¹¹. That is the Praying Church.

¹¹¹ Luke 22:39-46

XI. The Alien Church

¹ "In the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him.

² And now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole empire against the realm of Greece. ³ And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great authority and do as he pleases. ⁴ But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward the four points of the compass, though not to his own descendants, nor according to his authority which he wielded, for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them. ⁵ Then the king of the South will grow strong, along with one of his princes who will gain ascendancy over him and obtain dominion; his domain will be a great dominion indeed. ⁶ After some years they will form an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the South will come to the king of the North to carry out a peaceful arrangement. But she will not retain her position of power, nor will he remain with his power, but she will be given up, along with those who brought her in and the one who sired her as well as he who supported her in those times. ⁷ But one of the descendants of her line will arise in his place, and he will come against their army and enter the fortress of the king of the North, and he will deal with them and display great strength. ⁸ Also their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold he will take into captivity to Egypt, and he on his part will refrain from attacking the king of the North for some years. ⁹ Then the latter will enter the realm of the king of the South, but will return to his own land.

¹⁰ "His sons will mobilize and assemble a multitude of great forces; and one of them will keep on coming and overflow

and pass through, that he may again wage war up to his very fortress. ¹¹ The king of the South will be enraged and go forth and fight with the king of the North. Then the latter will raise a great multitude, but that multitude will be given into the hand of the former. ¹² When the multitude is carried away, his heart will be lifted up, and he will cause tens of thousands to fall; yet he will not prevail. ¹³ For the king of the North will again raise a greater multitude than the former, and after an interval of some years he will press on with a great army and much equipment. ¹⁴ Now in those times many will rise up against the king of the South; the violent ones among your people will also lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they will fall down. ¹⁵ Then the king of the North will come, cast up a siege ramp and capture a well-fortified city; and the forces of the South will not stand their ground, not even their choicest troops, for there will be no strength to make a stand. ¹⁶ But he who comes against him will do as he pleases, and no one will be able to withstand him; he will also stay for a time in the Beautiful Land, with destruction in his hand. ¹⁷ He will set his face to come with the power of his whole kingdom, bringing with him a proposal of peace which he will put into effect; he will also give him the daughter of women to ruin it. But she will not take a stand for him or be on his side. ¹⁸ Then he will turn his face to the coastlands and capture many. But a commander will put a stop to his scorn against him; moreover, he will repay him for his scorn. ¹⁹ So he will turn his face toward the fortresses of his own land, but he will stumble and fall and be found no more.

²⁰ Then in his place one will arise who will send an oppressor through the Jewel of his kingdom; yet within a few days he will be shattered, though not in anger nor in battle. ²¹ In his place a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by flatteries.

²² The overflowing forces will be flooded away before him and shattered, and also the prince of the covenant. ²³ After an alliance is made with him he will practice deception, and he will go up and gain power with a small force of people. ²⁴ In a time of tranquility he will enter the richest parts of the realm, and he will accomplish what his fathers never did, nor his ancestors; he will distribute plunder, booty and possessions among them, and he will devise his schemes against strongholds, but only for a time. ²⁵ He will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a large army; so the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war; but he will not stand, for schemes will be devised against him. ²⁶ Those who eat his choice food will destroy him, and his army will overflow, but many will fall down slain. ²⁷ As for both kings, their hearts will be intent on evil, and they will speak lies to each other at the same table; but it will not succeed, for the end is still to come at the appointed time. ²⁸ Then he will return to his land with much plunder; but his heart will be set against the holy covenant, and he will take action and then return to his own land. ²⁹ At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this last time it will not turn out the way it did before. ³⁰ For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore, he will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. ³¹ Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. ³² By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. ³³ Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for

many days. ³⁴ Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. ³⁵ Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time.

³⁶ Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done. ³⁷ He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all. ³⁸ But instead he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know; he will honor him with gold, silver, costly stones and treasures. ³⁹ He will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he will give great honor to those who acknowledge him and will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price. ⁴⁰ At the end time the king of the South will collide with him, and the king of the North will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them and pass through. ⁴¹ He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon. ⁴² Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. ⁴³ But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver and over all the precious things of Egypt; and Libyans and Ethiopians will follow at his heels. ⁴⁴ But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him, and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many. ⁴⁵ He will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain; yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him." Daniel 11

This is God's mirror of the nations and their rulers. It is neither entertaining nor edifying to look into it, but it is wholesome and necessary. The first thing that we catch sight of in it is one of four kings; and it is said of him that he *"² will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches"*, then he will wage war upon his neighbour. Then follows a second, who has a still greater pile of money than the first, and uses his riches to arm himself for war; and then a third, who does the same; and a fourth, and so it goes on and on throughout the whole long chapter.

But whenever money and power cannot attain their ends, cunning must come to the rescue. Even the most unworthy means are not wicked enough for them. One of them abandons his own daughter to the enemy with the instruction *"⁶ to carry out a peaceful arrangement"*. It is said of another: *"¹⁷ He will also give him the daughter of women"* — to what end? *"to ruin it."* But it goes on, *"she will not take a stand for him or be on his side."* Then comes one who has no success. This is the one who, immediately after his coronation, sends tax-collectors throughout the country: *"²⁰ Then in his place one will arise who will send an oppressor (tax-collector) through the Jewel of his kingdom; yet within a few days he will be shattered, though not in anger nor in battle."* So much the better for his successor: *"²¹ A despicable person... on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred."* This is one who rises out of the nameless masses unexpectedly to the throne. His chief weapon is speech, and it is said of him: *"²¹ He will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by flatteries."* His power will become greater and greater so that his neighbour, the king of the South *"²⁵ will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army"*. But before it comes to a declaration of war, and before they actually attack, there comes a passage that sounds horribly modern: *"²⁷ As for both kings, their hearts will be intent on evil, and*

they will speak lies to each other at the same table; but it will not succeed." Then the last king appears in this mirror of nations and rulers, which seems to us to take on an increasingly modern aspect. He has this speciality, that he ^{"36}*will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods*". He no longer pays respect to anything, even to the ordinances of nature. ^{"37}*He will show no regard... for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all.*" Instead of God, it says further, he will select a god of his own — ^{"38}*a god of fortresses*". ^{"39}*He will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he will give great honor to those who acknowledge him and will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price.*"

So, the angel of God causes a century of world-history to pass over Daniel in one terrifying vision. One naturally thinks of the passage in the Psalms: *"Let them flow away like water that runs off."*¹¹² These kings and their peoples rise and fall like the waves of a stream. As the waves chase each other, so the one chases the other. And as one wave is like the others, so they are all alike. Money — Violence — Cunning, Cunning — Violence — Money: This is the old, original, and yet the new and up-to-date song, that here is sung in a deathly monotone.

A question seems to spring up from every sentence of this vision: Where then is the Word of God? In all these kings' palaces is there no tongue to pass on the message of God? And no finger to point upwards? Where is there an Abraham to fold his hands in prayer under the starry sky on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah? And where is Moses to ascend a mountain and confess before God: ^{"31}*Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for*

¹¹² Psalm 58:7

themselves. ³² But now, if You will, forgive their sin — and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"¹¹³ Is there nowhere a Nathan to take a stand against atrocity and to draw near the king, and say to his face: "You are the man!"¹¹⁴? And where is Daniel to keep the kings within their bounds? Is there no Baptist to cry out: "It is not lawful for you to have her!"¹¹⁵? And why is there no Amos to say: "For three transgressions... and for four I will not revoke its punishment."¹¹⁶? No, it is the century when "the word from the Lord is rare"¹¹⁷. There is a Church, but her watchman's office is feebly kept. It is as if she has disappeared from the face of the earth, and evil goes to work unobstructed and unopposed. As in the fifth chapter, these long verses speak most powerfully just at the point where they fall silent. Silence can also speak. Even as the thirsty desert yearns for the dew of heaven, so these verses cry out for the Word of God, for the Church.

Sometimes the bed of a stream appears to be completely dried up, but the water flows for a time under the earth, and suddenly comes up again from below. Something like this happens at the end of this chapter. One of these-kings, the last and fiercest of them all, puts up a resistance. All the former ones have had only their equals as opponents, and so sooner or later they have got rid of them; until a stronger one appeared, and got rid of *them* in their turn. But this last king is up against a very different kind of opposition. Suddenly and abruptly, we hear of a 'covenant'. In several places this "Holy Covenant"¹¹⁸ is mentioned, "²⁸ but his (the kings) heart will be set against" it.

¹¹³ Exodus 32:31-32

¹¹⁴ 2 Samuel 12:7

¹¹⁵ Matthew 14:4

¹¹⁶ Amos 1:3.6.11.13; 2:1.4.6

¹¹⁷ From 1 Samuel 3:1

¹¹⁸ Verses 28.30.32

And now we come to that consoling mystery that remains quietly established through the ages, even during the most bloodthirsty and wicked periods of world-history — the fact of God's covenant with men. Since the days of Noah there has ever been a uniting rope between heaven and earth. God has never quite let the world go its way, even although there was a time when the Word seemed to be for ever dumb, and when He gave no more 'signs of life'. Even when the wick glowed so feebly that the eye could no longer detect a spark, God had not quite extinguished it. This is the wonderful secret of the Church on earth: He has never cut through the last rope that ties the ship of this world to the shore of eternity. But often it was just one single man over whom God flung the rope of the Covenant, like a lasso. Again and again it happened, and no one knew who this man was, or what he was called. But it was by him that God bound the world to the heavens.

This one covenant-man was for a long time a member of a single nation¹¹⁹, which God had chained to Himself, from the midst of all the other peoples. Only a tiny little nation — perhaps the smallest and most good-for-nothing of all. But already in the covenant which He made with the Hebrew Abraham, it is clear that God is anxious to include all people in this 'Holy Covenant': "*In you all the families (or nations) of the earth will be blessed*"¹²⁰ All nations! God will announce His message to all nations. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.*"¹²¹ So runs the marching-order of the Lord of the Church. And the same Lord will come at the end of the day, and "*All the nations will be gathered before Him*"¹²². He is not indifferent to the nations as such. As

¹¹⁹ Here and in the following paragraphs Lüthi doesn't use the German expression 'Nation' but the expression 'Volk', which usually is better translated to English as 'people'.

¹²⁰ Genesis 12:3

¹²¹ Matthew 28:19

¹²² Matthew 25:32

dearly as the salvation of an individual soul lies on His heart; so dearly does He seek after the salvation of the nations.

There is no nation in the world with which God has not concluded His 'Holy Covenant' in Jesus Christ. The Church of Christ is originally a national Church; and because she is a Church of the nations, therefore she is a world-Church. But now, watch! The Church of Christ is a national Church only in the restricted sense that Christ builds His Church within each nation. But she can never be a national Church in this fatal sense, that an entire nation can as such be the Church — that Church and nation should coincide as one page on another. And certainly, it is never the nation as such that upholds the Church of Christ. Christ alone is the Upholder and the Foundation-stone of His Church — never a nation, not even the so-called 'Church-people'¹²³. And never can the Church receive her commission from a nation, not even from the leadership of a nation, but exclusively from her highest Lord, from Christ in His Word. The Church of Christ is *in* the nation, but she is not *of* the nation.

The Church of Christ among the nations can never be simply an ingredient of a nation, nor even an ingredient of an international, or supra-national, community of nations. But wherever she is truly the Church, she has her origin in heaven. Therefore each Church is and remains a foreign body within her nation or community of nations, and will normally be perceived to be such. This bare fact, that there must be a Church in a nation, is in itself an offensive challenge to every natural nationalism. That a nation has need of the priestly office of prayer, of watchers, and now even of missionaries, without whom it must be lost in darkness and despair; that a nation is lost unless God Himself binds it to heaven — these are diagnostics of indigence that neither the 'natural man' nor

¹²³ In the original translation it says: 'Church-nation', which is rather a misleading expression for the German: 'Kirchenvolk'.

a nation as such will willingly admit without contradiction. And so wherever the Church of God on earth recognizes her calling, and performs her divinely appointed task without treason, is a 'Stranger-Church', living with her appointed nation normally on terms not of friendship but of strain.

Daniel shows us especially in this eleventh chapter that this tension between Church and nation can develop into a regular persecution. And then all the rotten flesh that has been spread abroad through a national Church in calm times will be revealed. The most notable thing about this persecution of the Church is that at first it proceeds quite bloodlessly, with apparently peaceful measures: the king *"³⁰ will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant"*. At first the king proceeds with prudence and foresight against the *"Holy Covenant"*. Through the promises of the king, a large number will forsake the *"Holy Covenant"*. The Church will shrink numerically to a small company. In every age there is a greater danger for the Church in promises, in 'State-subventions', than in threats (expropriation of Church property). Daniel is never weary of exposing the truly diabolic temptations and dangers, that can become snares for the Church of God among the nations: *"³² By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant¹²⁴."*

Then there comes a time when the attempts of fair words are followed by threats and measures of violence. Whoever resists the fair words of the king *"³³ they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days"*. A time of great danger will come upon the Church. It will be the time when children betray their parents; the time of a horrible informing and denunciation, carried right into the citadel of the family. *"³⁴ And many will join with them in hypocrisy."*

¹²⁴ Those who leave the covenant.

"³² But the people who know their God will display strength and take action." The little group that has shrunk together will be newly and wonderfully confident of its divine commission, will accomplish the work that is committed to it, and will remain in the nation: "³³ Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many". The Church herself will come forth sifted and cleansed from this sore time of visitation: "³⁵ Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time".

Now we can realize the importance of the fact that God has also set a Church in the midst of the nation to which it is granted to us to belong, according to His counsel and will — the Swiss nation. We have our Confederation Covenant which men created out of the need of their time for reciprocal defence and offence. And God has set within it His other covenant, the 'Holy Covenant', which could never be framed by men, since it lies for ever beyond their power. Our beloved Fatherland is, rightly or wrongly, famed throughout the world for much that is beautiful and good. But this is the best and most beautiful thing that can be said of it: Among the circle of the nations, our nation also was in the mind of Christ, when He gave His company the commission: *"Make disciples of all nations."*¹²⁵ God has graciously looked upon this our little land, and has bound the anchor-cable of His eternal Covenant around it, lest it pass away with this transitory world. In our history-books the covenant of the old confederates is called an 'eternal covenant'. Strictly speaking, it neither is nor can be eternal, any more than any other human affair anywhere under the changing sun. But there is an eternal Covenant of Calling, which comes down from above, and it is offered to our nation also. And even if this our nation

¹²⁵ Matthew 28:19

must one day perish and be buried — for all is possible under the sun, and it would not be the first nation to have perished! — still, it would not perish eternally. God has erected His Church in this nation. Therefore at the Last Judgment it will have to appear as a nation, even if it has perished long before that day. For the Lord of all nations says: "*Before me shall be gathered all nations.*"¹²⁶ This is God's gracious, holy, eternal Confederation¹²⁷ — that He has condescended to set a Church in the midst of our nation.

That the Lord of all nations one day sends a Paul to the heathen, that Irish monks later bring the glad tidings into our heathen valleys, that one day in the Northern Forest there appears a Church of God — this is the most valuable possession for which we have to give thanks. It is the most valuable in the sense that no other possession can be compared to it. For all other possessions pass away, but this one is eternal. Our dearest earthly possession is Freedom, and indeed we are learning to treasure it more and more as the years go by. But what would it become without the other Freedom, which is called mysteriously "*the freedom of the glory of the children of God*"¹²⁸! We received the certificate of Swiss citizenship in our cradles, and we know how to treasure it as the greatest of earthly fortunes. But the fact that we have already been called into eternal heavenly citizenship at baptism, that is the one good that stands above all goods. We ought to return thanks for this imperishable citizenship and for this eternal home certificate. One sign that we are ready to give thanks is to celebrate the annual Swiss federal Day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ According to Matthew 25:32

¹²⁷ Alluding to the 'Swiss Confederation'

¹²⁸ Romans 8:21

¹²⁹ The translation of these last three sentences have been slightly adapted. This in order to avoid the missunderständign that Walter Lüthi was teaching eternal salvation through baptism alone. Lüthi saw baptism

But now we must realize that the Church, which has been established and ordered by God for the nations of Europe, has to a great extent sold her birthright for a mess of the pottage of State-favour. Thus she has handed over her freedom and her eternal commission to the nation. She has made herself like unto the world, by freeing herself from the bond with which she has been tied to God through His Word. She has let this bond slip from her hand, and so has lost her divine authority and equipment. And so, by surrendering the Word of God, she has become less and less a heavenly 'Stranger' in the nation, and the tension between heaven and earth has been slackened and loosed in her. And so the uncomfortable feeling will often come over us, that the word of the Church is not being listened to at all in our nation; because in this word the nation can no longer see God's Word. They are letting it pass as the idle talk of a casual propaganda of human opinions. They can hardly even be roused to a comprehensive protest against the Church. This, then, is the most effective place where we can repent and return as members of the Church. We must return, radically and recklessly, to the original commission, with which God sent His Church into our nation. This is the best and highest sendee the Church can do for the nation: Let her do penitence for herself, and not preach penitence to the nation. For the nation will not listen, until the Church is again herself a Church, and remembers the 'Eternal Covenant'.

But perhaps the Church can no longer do even that. She may not even have the ability of doing penitence. It seems that this Church of ours is not ready for an inward repentance, a change of mind; but she will nevertheless have to go through a drastic experience of repentance — ³⁵ *to refine, purge and make them pure*".

as God's great gift of salvation to us, but a gift that we, for our part, can accept or reject.

The Church, the Church in the nation, can be only a suffering Church. Christ wills it thus: He will suffer in the nation and for the nation. He is willing to suffer also for our nation. The nations must have someone whom they can accuse. We see that from all the newspapers, that are filled with mutual accusations, in the sphere of both domestic and foreign politics. They are all looking for a back ready for them to lash. This is the service that Christ has done for the world; for the nations. And He is willing to continue this service of sacrifice for the nations, by letting His Fellowship suffer as "*Salt*" and "*Light*"¹³⁰ among the nations of the world. "*You will be hated by all nations because of My name.*"¹³¹. This is the 'alien' character of the Church.

This is the most glorious, and the true, function of the Church of Christ in the nation where she is placed: To suffer, to repent, to clear up the mess that the whole nation has made. And should we not be deeply disturbed by the fact that for some time past Christ has laid this charge not on the Church, but on others — atheists and Jews? But with the reawakening of the Church, it will once more be the Church which will follow in the succession of Christ, according to the mercy of God, as scapegoat for the indelible guilt of the nation. The Church is the first-called to suffer for the nations.

In this great gathering I dare not put the question: Who ought to belong to this Church, for the salvation of our Swiss nation? I have no authority for this question. But Christ, the Lord of the Church, can come Himself one day to any one of us, and ask the question. We can only contemplate that moment in prayer and supplication. Only in prayer and supplication can a Swiss go to meet the day when he must choose between the "*god of fortresses*" and — the Crucified.

¹³⁰ Matthew 5:13, 14

¹³¹ Matthew 24:9

XII. The Church of the Last Days

¹ "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. ³ And the teachers¹³² will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

⁴ But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." ⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river and the other on that bank of the river. ⁶ And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river: "How long will it be until the end of these wonders?" ⁷ I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed. ⁸ As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said: "My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?" ⁹ He said: "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. ¹⁰ Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will

¹³² In the original 'NASB1995' and in other versions the Hebrew is translated as: 'Those who have insight'. But the original German Luther text reads 'teachers', which is a possible meaning of the Hebrew, especially in the context of the second part of v3. So as Walter Lüthi in his sermon is referring to 'the teachers', the "NASB1995" has been adapted here.

understand, but those who have insight will understand.
¹¹ From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹² How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! ¹³ But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age." Daniel 12

It is God's own holy will that He selects a politician of the type of Daniel, and makes him into His prophet. Daniel is a statesman by profession; a statesman from head to foot. He procured for himself his earthly employment no more than he chose for himself his prophetic office. It was as if he grew into it by destiny. In his early youth he saw hostile warriors appear before his native city. They conquered it, and carried him off with other distinguished hostages. He ended up in the palace of a foreign king, and from then on he placed his skill at the disposal of various tyrants, first as page, later as minister, and even as 'right-hand man'. He is so definitely a statesman that his thoughts are continually moving around the great questions of the political arena. Even after the most powerful period of prophecy, it can still be said of him: "*Then I got up again and carried on the king's business.*"¹³³

No wonder, then, that this Book, whose living Word has now been speaking to us on most Sundays for nearly a year, thunders only of politics and world-history. Ever and again, kings and their rulers march past, nations and their kings. We hear of court-intrigue, of government edicts, of war and defeat, of victory and victors' orgies. Now we find ourselves at the king's banquet; now in the royal bed-chamber, where we get a glimpse into his 'private affairs', and into his inmost thoughts. We are not in the least surprised that, in the course of the past year, when we have not been able to get away from this Daniel, one or two of our congregation have

¹³³ Daniel 8:27

slipped quietly away, have been lost to us, or have painfully asked the old question: "Should there be politics in the pulpit?" "A political song is a nasty song." If you want to forget the world and the times behind Church-walls, to veil the realities of this world in a cloud of incense, and to be drowned in unctuous speeches, then you will discover that you are up against all the prophets, the whole Bible — Old and New Testaments — and particularly the prophet Daniel. For this man stands with both feet in this world, commissioned by God to look facts in the face, and to come to terms with them.

Daniel is therefore a worldling, a man of the world in the best sense of the words. He exercises his office just where the world is at its filthiest and bloodiest — in politics. He did continually seek to give up his earthly business, and to take refuge where the opposition to God was not so strong, and where it would have been easier to be devout; but, according to the will of God, he didn't succeed. So he went about his ordained task not in priest's frock, nor even in prophet's mantle, but as it were in mufti¹³⁴. There he stood in the palace of the foreign king, in complete weakness and helplessness, and yet not yielding. Thank God, this man stood his ground amid the superhuman strain of the very questions that are beginning to surge around us to-day, the questions of Church and State, the fellowship and the world, the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men. Thank God, this man has gone through the troubles of his time (and our time, and all times) before the face of God, yes, right to the red-hot fire, and right to... the lions' den. Thank God, the Lord of nations and rulers has shown us this man, standing with both feet firmly on the earth, and yet with both hands pointing vertically upwards to the heavens, and writing the holy will of God with letters of fire on the conscience of the nations and their rulers.

¹³⁴ Normal civilian clothes

And now this last chapter of the prophet Daniel gives us the impression that God wants to give this man, who remains so passionately true to the world right to the end, a kind of reward for his conduct. God reveals to him how it will eventually fare with this earth. He has already been much moved by the course of world-history, and now God reveals to him its last stages. That is why something like a solemn splendour hangs over this last chapter of the book, which otherwise is as commonplace and work-a-day as possible. In this last chapter something rings out like the sound of Saturday evening after a hard weeks' work.

But the Sabbath has not yet come, the holiday is not yet here. A long night still lies between this evening and the Last Morning. Yes, it's just dark night that Daniel sees as the last stage of world-history. *"¹ And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time."* It is as if the old earth would like really to be the old earth just once more for a last time, before she has to give way to the new. She wants to have a taste of everything, to get the most out of it, to have a last fling, before it is all up with her. All the powers of darkness will hasten their steps and redouble their efforts in that last time as if seeking to escape from the approaching destruction. Outside just now Nature shows us the earth decking herself in variegated colours before the Autumn-death; and that's how it will finally be with the world. Just like that. If Hell sounds the signal for a general attack, it is through fear of Him who is stronger than the powers of darkness. *"The demons also believe, and shudder."¹³⁵* When wickedness is most effectively at work, when a time of trouble breaks out such as never was since the beginning of mankind, then the last assault of Hell is near. Then it goes on: *"¹ And at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued."*

¹³⁵ James 2:19

This is the first sign of the last time: Distress as never was from time immemorial. Then we read further about the last time: *"² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake."* This is the second sign of the last time: Death will be abolished. Death! It is the token of this world. We all travel, one might say, under its international flag. Death is always the limit of our thoughts. But the efficacy of this majestic power is to be obstructed and weakened. God's roll-call will be sounded among the graves, and those which were kept closed under the mighty hand of death, according to the will of God, will open. So, after the great tribulation, the deliverance will be ushered in. What is revealed here to the prophet is something absolutely indescribable. He is able to hear and to see what no one had ever been able to see so clearly. Do we wonder, then, when Daniel humbly confesses: *"⁸ As for me, I heard but could not understand"*? For do we understand it any better — we, who know the *"the first fruits of those who are asleep"*¹³⁶ — Jesus Christ? This resurrection from the dead shines out before us as a last, soaring miracle, before which we can only remain standing in silent wonder.

The third sign of the last time is that there will be no reunion of all who are dispersed, and no bridging of all differences. Contrasts and differences will remain: *"¹⁰ Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand."* The hostility to God will not cease, but will rather increase: *"¹¹ The regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up."* There will be a separation and an examination, a selection of a most mysterious kind. There will be those who are *"found written in the book"* and those who are not found written in the book. God Himself will not unite those who are separated, but will separate those who are united.

¹³⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:20

"² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake." Many! But among those who awake, there will be a further awakening; "² these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt". This separation and decision; this selection, which will take place at the end of time, is no less mysterious than the rising of the dead. Who can understand it all?

At any rate there is One who has understood what is written here, completely understood it — Christ, the Lord. From all that we know of the sayings of Christ about the Last Things, we can be quite sure that the eyes of our Lord often fell upon this last chapter of the Book of Daniel. What He said about the Last Things coincides in its characteristic features with what Daniel sees here — often almost verbally. The Evangelists also speak of 'the blessed and the cursed', of a great final separation and decision, of a rising from the dead, of persecution, war, apostasy, and tribulation, which will precede the end. Christ, too, can say to His own: *"Rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."*¹³⁷

In this picture of the Last Time that is shown to Daniel a little detail has struck us. At first we find it strange that the teachers are specially named, the teachers of the fellowship. *"³ And the teachers will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."* How is that really to be understood? Christ once said in a general way: *"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."*¹³⁸ The words which Christ has spoken about the Last Things shed a ray of light on this strange passage about the teachers. Christ continually insists that the danger of seduction, of apostasy, and of false doctrine, will be particularly strong in the Last Time. False prophets will come,

¹³⁷ Luke 10:20

¹³⁸ Matthew 13:43

wolves in sheep's clothing, who will turn many from the right way. With this background a very special significance attaches to the teachers of the Church. Don't despise Teaching! Don't play off 'Life' against it! That's dangerous. Teaching is a protection against error in the Last Time. Don't despise the teachers, who in watching and prayer maintain the purity of the teaching, and worry over theological questions. O God, send Thy Church responsible teachers in this time of tribulation! Kindle Thyself the lights of the Church to show the way through the chaos and error of these days! "³ *And the teachers will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*"

After this view of the prophet towards the last journey of the Church, Daniel is conscious that this is his last view, and that now his end is near. And now we see a strange questioning uneasiness come upon him. I think it is the statesman in him that is roused again, scrupulously intent that the documents should be in order when he leaves his post and goes into final retirement. It is not worry about his own person, but worry about the world; he is really troubled right to the end. And now the question comes: What will happen to all the visions that fell to his lot? Of course, he has revised and arranged his documents, but he can't find any archive that is moth-proof, and protected against fire and damp. What shall become of the message which he has recorded for the nations of this world? He and his message are like a father who is carrying his child in his arms and feels that he is going to fall: "If only the child comes to no harm!" But God allows him a glimpse even of the future of his message. He may leave his beloved prophet's burden to the stream of time, even as the mother of Moses laid her child in the waters of the Nile. At the right time God will let it come floating to the right shore: "⁴ *But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book*

until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase."

During this last year we have been letting Daniel's eternal message to the nations speak to us. We have waited in prayer and supplication often for days, and for weeks, yes, often for a matter of months, until one of the seals should be just a little unlocked, and begin to deliver up a tiny portion of its secret. Every now and then we have got a slight understanding of it. We are certainly continually humbly conscious of how slight it is. We are now at the end of our attempt at exposition; but we know that we are really at the beginning, and in the coming years these pages must often be turned over again, to get "*knowledge*" of that, which passes our comprehension in the world to-day.

Now one question torments the prophet: ¹⁸*"My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?"* It's as if he would ask: Will this vision that I have had about the Last Time, this mysterious message of the "*awakening to life, and to shame, and everlasting contempt*"¹³⁹, will this truly be Thy last Word? Then God answers him: ¹⁹*"Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time"*. So, a mother hugs her little child, who is full of questions before going to sleep, and finally smoothes down the pillow: "Sleep now, my child!" — Sleep now, Daniel, go thy way! It is now time to go to sleep. Then the prophet is given some mysterious numbers, which serve rather to veil than to illuminate: ¹⁷*"He (the angel) raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time."* Finally, the numbers 1290 and 1335 are mentioned. We don't understand these figures, and we should not wish to understand them better than the prophet himself. Understanding of this will come with understanding of everything; when our

¹³⁹ Echoing vers 2

knowledge will no more be in part, and we shall see face to face. Then will the last seal of this sealed book be opened. Till then the believing fellowship has to be resigned and to be content with the fatherly reply which Daniel finally got to his question: ¹³ *But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age.*"

And so, it is evening with the prophet. Saturday evening. The night before the holiday lies long and terrifying, but there remains for the prophet the promise of eternal peace and eventual inheritance. With this last word to the dying man, the holiday is already being rung in, and the eternal Sabbath shines across.

The prophet dies. He dies in a foreign land. He dies in exile. He dies as *"one of the exiles from Judah"*¹⁴⁰. But he dies the death of a prophet. That means that he too may be granted a glimpse of the Promised Land, even although he may never have set foot on it. Of him too it can be said: *"His eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated"*¹⁴¹. God's seers do not become short-sighted, and have no narrow vision in their old age. On the contrary. To a Daniel is given the longest distant view — God knows well why — and the privilege is with him right to the hour of death. And now for the first time he can see past the narrow horizons to where the last morning dawns, and the day breaks which is followed by no night. ¹³ *But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age.*"

But why stand we here gazing up into heaven? The bell has not yet rung for our evening rest. Perhaps we are not yet on the way to Babylon at all, and all that happened to Daniel is still awaiting us. We *"stand in the fight, day and night"*.

¹⁴⁰ Daniel 2:25; 6:13

¹⁴¹ Deuteronomy 34:7

Anyway the "*time of tribulation*" is in front of us rather than already behind. We are asked by this Daniel whether we are willing to stand by, body and soul, in life and in death, where it is a question of God's Kingdom and interests in this world. And whether we desire the eternal inheritance, seek the goodly pearl, strive for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness — in a word, whether we are willing to be included in that Book in which are written the names of the Redeemed? The man in Babylon, to whom is promised the final inheritance, was no mere hanger-on. He was an 'inscribed member'.

But when is one an 'inscribed member'? You are inscribed there at the Cross, and nowhere else. With blood is your name entered in the eternal Books. And whoever is so inscribed will once at the end of the day hear the words:

*"Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*¹⁴²

¹⁴² Matthew 25:34

