

The Book of Daniel – A study in four parts with Rev. Michaël Merle

Report by John-Peter Gernaat

Firstly, Michaël provided a context to the Book of Daniel.

The Book of Daniel forms part of the Tanakh, part of the Jewish scriptures. The Tanakh is a word comprising a condensation of three separate words: the Torah, the Law, these are the first five books of the Old Testament, considered to have been written, or inspired, by Moses; the Nevi'im, the Prophets; and the Ketuvim, which are the writings. The letters T N K with appropriate vowels make the word Tanakh, with the consonant h providing the pronunciation of the k sound. The Tanakh forms the basis from which the Christian Old Testament was taken, but there are some slight differences.

The Book of Daniel describes events that occurred in the sixth century BCE (before the common era) and it was written in the second century BDE, four centuries after the events it is describing. The stories of Daniel formed part of an oral tradition before they were written down. The Book of Daniel could reasonably form part of the Prophets or part of the writings. The Nevi'im contains the major prophets. They are major, not because of their importance but because their writings are more extensive. There are twelve minor prophets and for the Tanakh their writings are collected together. The three prophets whose writings are extensive and were considered major prophets by Rabbis are, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Catholic scriptures, the Catholic Church having been the major Christian Church in Western Europe until the Reformation, includes in the Old Testament the Book of Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah. Baruch was the scribe for Jeremiah. These two were included into the canon of scripture at a very late stage. They do not form part of the old traditional Tanakh. They appeared in the Septuagint which was a Greek translation of the Tanakh written about a century before Christ, translated for the many Jews in the diaspora, who no longer spoke Hebrew. The Septuagint formed the basis for the translation into Latin. In the Tanakh, the Book of Daniel forms part of the Ketuvim, the writings.

When the Protestant Reformers considered the Old Testament, they decided that the Book of Lamentation and the Book of Daniel were sufficiently extensive in the volume of writing to be included in the Major Prophets. Thus, in the Protestant view there were five Major Prophets. The Book of Daniel was seen by Christians to be part of the prophecies. However, the style of writing in the Book of Daniel is apocalyptic, it reveals something. It reveals spiritual truths and is not attempting to be historically accurate. There are real people and real events from the period of the Babylonian exile in the Book of Daniel. The Book of Daniel is concerned with eschatology, the revelation of what will conclude a period of time. The Book of Revelation is also eschatological, dealing with what will happen at the end of a certain period of time. Thus, apocalyptic literature deals with revelation of what will complete the picture, how the unfolding will come to its ultimate conclusion.

The Book of Daniel is the outstanding apocalyptic book of the Old Testament. Therefore, it has a lot of correlations with the Revelation to John. They are drawing from the same imagery to convey spiritual realities. The Book of Daniel is the journey of the human being on the earth connected with the spiritual world.

Daniel is the central hero of the book, and he has three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to give them their Hebrew (Aramaic) names, but they also known by their Babylonian names – the older Akkadian language names – as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Daniel is a Hebrew name, and he is also given a Babylonian name, but he is never referred by his Babylonian name alone. A large part of the Book of Daniel was written in Hebrew while a part of the book was written in Aramaic. The Book of Daniel is one of the few books of the Old Testament which was written in Aramaic. Aramaic was the language that was commonly spoken and could therefore be read by everyone. The first chapter, which may have been written much later as an introduction, was written in Hebrew. Chapters 2 to 7 were written in Aramaic while the last part of the book, chapters 8 to the end were written in Hebrew.

The Book of Daniel can be divided into two parts. The first part, often known as 'The Tales', or the 'Court Tales', tells the stories of Daniel and his three companions at the court of Nebuchadnezzar and at the court of Belshazzar. This part of the book concludes with Daniel in the lion's den. These are chapters 1 to 6. Chapters 7 to 12 concern visions of Daniel. Chapter 13 and 14 appeared in the Septuagint but were excluded from the Tanakh at the time when the Protestant Reformers reviewed the Old Testament. They have remained part of the Catholic canon of scripture but have been excluded from the Protestant Old Testament. A section of chapter 3 of the Book of Daniel was also excluded from the Protestant Bible. These excluded parts of scripture may be found in the apocryphal writings published by the Anglican Church, often forming a section at the end of each Testament. Michaël considers these parts of the Book of Daniel to be integral and part of the picture. In chapter 3 the excluded part is a prayer

and a song that are well known outside of the context of the Book of Daniel. Chapter 13 is the story of Susanna and chapter 14 contains the story of Bel and the dragon. Bel is a Babylonian name for the god Baal. The second part of the Book of Daniel, his visions, is what leads Protestant religious scholars to consider Daniel to be a prophet. However, the visions reveal something of the spiritual world rather than something of the future and are thus apocalyptic and not prophetic.

The Book of Daniel spans the reign of four rulers in Babylon. The historical elements in the Book of Daniel do not tie well with recorded historical events resulting in the Book of Daniel being dismissed by many. The reality is that the book is using the character of the people it includes, and their name – because the names mean something in apocalyptic literature and are thus important. Apocalyptic literature was very popular in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE in many cultures and used outside of scripture.

Now read chapter 1 of the Book of Daniel. Here follow accompanying notes.

The characterises that are desired from the young men that are to serve the king are not physical attributes but rather qualities of soul-spirit. We are looking at these young men of royal descent and nobility who carry a spiritual insight, who are already on a path of inner development and have worked in an esoteric stream. They have been devoting time to develop soul-spiritual qualities. Therefore, the handsomeness and lack of blemish are soul-spiritual qualities. They are ready to take on the task of advising a king, the one who manages and controls the life of all those in his kingdom. It is on his head that the crown is placed and therefore he carries the capacity to connect to the spiritual world through his thinking on behalf of all his subjects. He needs wise advisors who can help him make the connection and who understand how best to work with it.

This story occurs in the Chaldean Babylonian period.

The number 3 in the period of the training the young men receive is important because the number 3 signifies that it is a true initiation. Hence, the 3-day temple sleep of the old initiation. After a 3-day sleep one awakes to new sense of oneself because one has crossed a threshold and returns from the threshold with spiritual insight. One will have experienced the spiritual world as much as a human who has not died can experience the spiritual world. The three-year training tells us that these young men are going to cross a threshold and gain an insight that they cannot gain by simply reading scripture. They gain the insight by taking what they have studied from scripture with them in their thinking and in how much they have internalised it, across the threshold where they encounter something in the soul-spiritual world to which they can connect so that they return across the threshold wiser than they were before.

The four young men of this story are named: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. We have a powerful image: Daniel is accompanied by his three soul faculties each represented in one of his companions: his thinking, his feeling and his willing. We also see Daniel accompanied by three friends who each have a very strong connection to the angelic world; each to an angel whose name they also carry. Hananiah, who is named Shadrach, means 'Yah is gracious' (Yah is short for Yahweh or YHWH). This could also be 'God is gracious'. The grace of God is the strength for the human being; we are strengthened when we receive the grace of the Divine. Another interpretation of Hananiah's name is 'God is my strength' which in Hebrew is the name Gabriel. Hananiah is connected to the Gabrielic stream. Mishael, who becomes Meshach, bears the name 'Who is like El is?'. El is the Canaanite name for the Almighty, supreme and absolute God. Mishael is connected with Michael. Azariah, who becomes Abednego, has the name 'Yah has helped', that can also be translated as 'Yah has healed' which is Raphael's name. Daniel is accompanied by friends who are connected with the strength, the power and the inclination of activity of Gabriel, Michael and Raphael, the three angelic beings mentioned in scripture. We can also ascribe the soul aspects of willing, feeling and thinking to Daniel's companions. Daniel and his three companions represent a wholeness of community. This is important when the three companions are put into the fiery furnace. When Nebuchadnezzar looks into the fiery furnace he sees a fourth person in the furnace, not just the three who were placed in the furnace. This fourth person is a representation of what Daniel represents in the story.

Reading on in chapter 1 we hear that Daniel's name is changed to Belteshazzar. Belteshazzar is a feminine name. The masculine name is Belshazzar. The name Belshazzar is a request that means: 'Bel protect the king'. Belteshazzar implores the feminine counterpart of Bel to protect the king. Bel is the word that the Babylonian used when speaking of Marduk, the great god of the city of Babylon and therefore Belteshazzar references the spouse of Marduk. Bel meant lord, as does the Hebrew word Adonai, the word used by the Hebrews when referring to YHWH; it means Lord. Bel comes to us through Greek as Baal which should be Ba'al because it means the Lord in connection with "Al" or "El" (the

almighty God), and so could be used in place of using the name of God, hence referring to 'the lord god'.

Belteshazzar is often translated as 'the Lady protect the king'. Daniel means 'El is my judge' or 'God is my judge'. This can also be translated by replacing God with the Lord, thus: 'the Lord is my judge'. We have, in Daniel, 'the Lord is my judge' and 'the Lady is to protect the king'. Both these names could apply to Jesus of Nazareth with the Christ force infused in him. Daniel becomes a prefiguring of the one who can bear the Divine and he therefore reveals something of what that nature might be. It is absolutely possible for Jesus to say: "the Father God is my judge, He is the one who sent me, no one else can judge me". Jesus says this to the Pharisees. We also know that Jesus needed protection before the Christ entered into him at the Baptism in the Jordan. The spiritual task of protecting Jesus fell to his mother: the Lady who protects the King He is to become, as we know from the Book of Revelation, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. A title ascribed to Mary early in Christian tradition is 'our Lady', known by many in the French tradition as 'Notre Dame'. Several cathedrals in northern France are known as Notre Dame.

Daniel is given a feminine name which means that he becomes a whole person; he becomes an Adam and an Eve: physically male and in his life force, that which protects and guides the development of this human being, feminine. This is as Rudolf Steiner describes, he has a masculine physical body and a feminine etheric body; he gets a wholeness with his soul companions. The three companions represent the soul qualities of the human being while Daniel represents the I-organisation, the true Ego, of the human constitution. Daniel accompanies his friends rather than being incorporated into the very being of his friends, in the way that was the experience of the time for human beings. Now we experience our earthly I-organisation incorporated into us, and not just accompanying us. This is so following the Mystery of Golgotha. This concept is found in chapter 3 then the three forces of the soul: thinking, feeling and willing, are cast into the fire. They undergo a trial by fire which purifies them and makes them stronger. They are seen to be accompanied by a fourth figure: one like a son of the gods. This fourth figure is the quality of the divine expression of the human being: the I-organisation, represented in this story by the person of Daniel.

Reading on in chapter 1 the chief eunuch is asked by these four friends to not provide them with meat and alcoholic wine. The latter part of the Babylonian civilisation is characterised by an intoxication with earthly delights and power. This is a cutting off from the spirit and full spiritual insight. Wine dulls the independent human consciousness and fills the human being with a different consciousness, not the one we can use to work at developing a spiritual development. The eunuch is concerned that if these young men do not receive the strength and spirit from the food of the king they will become physically and spiritually emaciated. Daniel then asks the chief steward to test them for ten days – ten symbolising that this is a complete testing of these young men – on the diet of their choice, being vegetables and water – the diet understood by the Rabbinical order who knew that the diet of the human being from Creation to after the Flood would have been a diet based on what the plant world would provide. Our season of Ascension is ten days meaning that the Ascension is complete after the ten days, and we move into a new season: Pentecost. The meat and wine from the king's table would have been offered to the Babylonian gods and Daniel and his companions do not wish to defile themselves. They wish to remain true to YHWH (Yahweh of the Elohim, the true representative of El, the Almighty God). The meat would not have been kosher and would still have contained the life force of the animals because it would not have been bled out. They do not wish to defile themselves with the symbols of a false consecrated life: blood and wine. They want nothing to do with a life that belongs to Bel or Baal, a defiled life. They wish to live by their own life forces or those that have been graced them by El (God) through YHWH. After the ten days they were stronger and healthier than the young men who ate the king's meat and drunk his wine.

Reading on in chapter 1 we read of the gifts given by God to the four young men. At the end of their training these four were selected by Nebuchadnezzar to join his court. He found that they were ten times better – completely better – in all matters on which he consulted them, than his other advisers – the enchanters and magicians of his kingdom. Magicians were men who were ordained for a task; they were priests: magi. Enchanters were people who can bring about something through the power of the words that they speak – speak the words of the divine into reality in human life. They were also an ordained class. Here we have people who speak the words of the Divine into reality and people who offer the right sacrifice. We have both of these in the Christian concept of priesthood. It is the priest who proclaims the gospel, and it is the priest who speaks the words of transubstantiation.

In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and he sets his enchanters and magicians the task not only of interpreting the dream, but also tasking them to tell him his dream. He wants his advisors to know

what the significant dream is, preventing them from interpreting the dream as he tells it. Only if they can divine the dream can they also truly interpret it. Daniel finally is asked to tell him the dream. Daniel here has a strong connection to Joseph, the son of Jacob, who interpreted dreams for Pharaoh. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that he dreamed of a mighty statue that could reach to the heavens with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a lower body and upper legs of bronze or copper and feet that were a combination of copper and clay. We can recognise here a picture of the Son of the Human Being as it is transformed in the Book of Revelation. In the dream a rock smashes the statue and becomes a mountain. Daniel interprets the dream as great kingdoms that follow on each other. Nebuchadnezzar is the golden head and after him will follow successively lesser kingdoms until there is a mixed kingdom, one that has taken the greatness of the previous kingdom and mixed it with a more earthly understanding. It represents a fall from the Chaldean Babylonian era which still had a connection with the spiritual world falling into the later Babylonian Kingdom, falling into the Greek Kingdom and finally a fall into the Roman Kingdom. This is a possible interpretation. The interpretation of the dream elevated Daniel to royalty – wearing a robe of purple – and a golden chain of office. This picture is also one that prefigures the mocking corrupted picture when Jesus is dressed in a robe of purple and given a crown of thorns. The mountain that is established from the rock is the Mountain of God, it is Zion, the spiritual mountain on which Jerusalem is established.

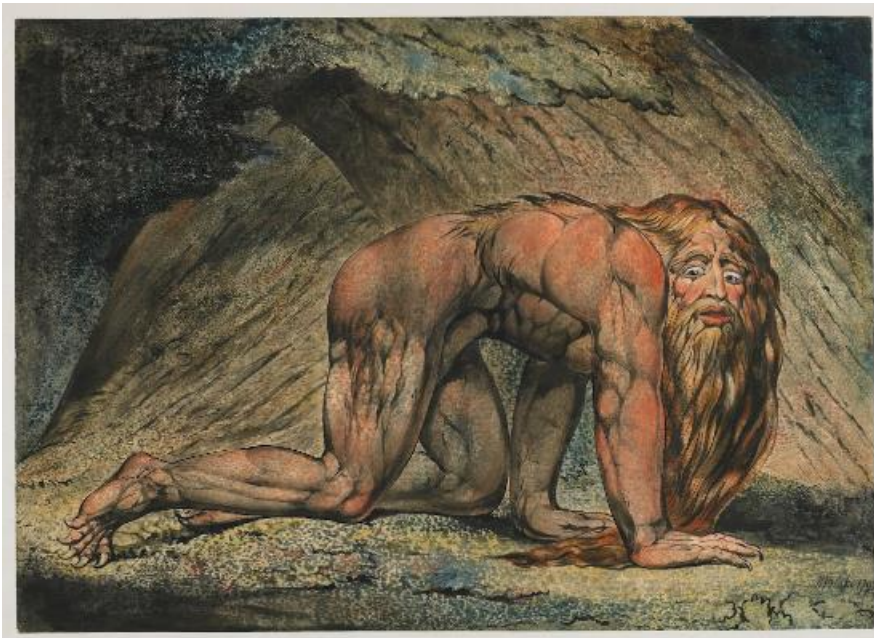
We then hear the story of the golden statue placed in the plain of Dura, meaning a meeting place, and everyone who is recognised as having a position from every place in the kingdom is commanded to fall down and worship the golden statue when any music is played. The statue represents the power of Babylon and the power of Baal. Anyone who does not obey the command will be thrown into a furnace. The three companions of Daniel do not obey the command. Daniel is not present in this chapter. Certain Rabbis suggest that Daniel is travelling as an ambassador on behalf of Nebuchadnezzar. Historically, this would have been Nebuchadnezzar II. Nebuchadnezzar means Nabu – also one of the gods of Babylon – protects the first-born son, the god that protects the first-born. It is a reference to the Father God protecting the Firstborn. Nebuchadnezzar represents a corruption of that divine conceptualisation. The furnace is made seven times stronger meaning that it is made stronger for all cycles of time. The strength of the fire will last through all the cycles. It could also mean that this is the fire that could refine all seven of the ancient metals; which are the gifts of the seven mobile stars; the sun, the moon, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn. When the three companions are sought in the furnace the next day, they are walking around and come out untouched by the fire, because they have already gone through the trial of fire. There are three trials for spiritual development: the trial by fire, the trial by water and the trial by air that allow the human being to live through the trials and tribulations of an earthly life with spiritual development. Rudolf Steiner describes that today succeeding in the trial by fire, developing resilience through times of great adversity and sorrow, gives us a new sense of self confidence, one that is based on our spiritual human capacity and allows us to experience a strength, courage and fortitude. In the furnace Azariah prays a prayer that is not found in a Protestant Bible, only in a Catholic Bible or in the Apocryphal writings in an Anglican Bible. This is followed by what is known as the Song of the Three Holy Children, of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They have the spotless purity of being as a child; they have become as little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Find a copy to read the Song of the Three Holy Children in the links provided with this report. This song becomes the structure behind the Canticle of Francis of Assisi.

Chapters 2 to 7 of Book of Daniel are told in a structure known as a chiasmic structure – ABCCBA – things that bring the story to a central event and the central event is mirrored, and then things that take the story from the central event that mirror those that brought the story into the central event. The main point of stories with a chiasmic structure is in the middle of the story. The first is the dream of the four kingdoms replaced by the Kingdom of God and Daniel's three companions in the fiery furnace. Then there is another dream of Nebuchadnezzar that needs interpretation and then Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall. Then the mirror of the three in the fiery furnace with a fourth person walking amongst them. (Nebuchadnezzar sees a fourth in the furnace who is one like a son of a god, which could be an angel, and is the representation of the I-organisation, the earthly 'I', a son of God who is seen among the soul forces. To mirror the story of the fiery furnace is the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Then there is a vision of four world kingdoms replaced by a fifth which mirrors the dream of Nebuchadnezzar of the four kingdoms.

Chapter 4 is expressed in the first person. It is told about Nebuchadnezzar as if he is telling it himself. This is unusual in scripture and even more unusual in that it is a foreign king. It is also referred to as 'the king's letter' in that this type of expression was not unusual for a king of that time to use in writing to his people informing them of the things he would do. It would have been read out in public squares and written on clay tablets in cuneiform and placed in public places where the people could read it.

Thus, this chapter is either from a letter of the king or written in the style of a letter from the king. After all the wise men of the realm could not interpret the dream that Nebuchadnezzar relays, Daniel is called in. Daniel is referred to as Belteshazzar and, in this case, Nebuchadnezzar says Daniel is named after his god, whereas Daniel is really named after Nebuchadnezzar's god's companion. Nebuchadnezzar expresses an understanding that there is a holiness to his god in a way that we understand to mean that the Babylonians understood that there was a holiness to all gods. The Babylonians do not see the holiness that Nebuchadnezzar recognises in Daniel's God, and he does not see the holiness Daniel worships as foreign, but rather as a version of what he understands. The Babylonians were incorporative, willing to take into their culture other versions, understandings and perspectives on the Divine. We also see this in that Daniel and his companions were trained to become part of the ruling class of Babylon and given office.

Read the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 of the Great Tree. He describes the dream as an interior vision. He sees a Holy One descend from Heaven who he describes as 'a watchman'. Here we are introduced to the concept of the Babylonians that angels were divided into two groups, messengers of the gods and watchmen: the ones who look and watch. They witness what happens on earth. In our understanding archangels are the ones who bring messages from the Divine, while angels are the ones who watch over the development of the human being and over the communities that we establish, they are largely silent. Angels hold the record of what we do. The Holy Watchman in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar orders the Great Tree to be cut down. The story then switches to the tree being described as a human being. Nebuchadnezzar understands that there is a connection between the tree and the human being. This connection is established throughout scripture: the tree that can no longer bear fruit, or the tree that must be cut down, or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The human's heart is to be replaced by the heart of a beast and pass over him seven times. This reference to seven is a reference to time, a full cycle of time. Daniel's interpretation is that the dream is about Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar is struck down a year later as he is speaking and becomes like an animal, losing his reason and he eats grass like an ox for seven years. He will fall into the lower nature of the constellation of Taurus. Taurus and Leo represented two very powerful impulses for the Babylonians. Taurus represented the strength of the masculine while Leo represented the strength of the feminine.



Nebuchadnezzar by William Blake

The story then describes that after seven years Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to the heavens and his reason is restored and he praises the Most High. He is restored to his position and he becomes great again but now not out of himself but out of his relationship to the Most High. There is a big debate as to whether it is a moment of reason that leads to him turning his eyes to heaven or whether turning his eyes to heaven returns his reason. It is a question about how we have our reason. Nebuchadnezzar gives the Most High a title: King of Heaven; that establishes, in the Book of Daniel, the idea that God

will be understood in the symbolism of Kingship. Therefore, we can enter a throne room of God in the Book of Revelation where there is a throne in the centre of a court. This is the first, and only time in the Old Testament, where here there is a reference to God as the King of Heaven.

Read the end of chapter 4. In this story we come to understand that when we rely entirely on the strength given to us by Taurus; we are overcome and descend to our lower nature. Leo was the symbol of Ishtar and Daniel's name references Ishtar and Daniel is able to have power over the one-sided strength of Taurus. Daniel's Babylonian name is 'The Lady Protects the King', Daniel is the king. We are each a king, and we are protected by the power that we can have over the lion not to devour us, but that which we can tame in ourselves to become acts of great courage.

Chapter 5, Belshazzar's banquet attended by 1000 nobles, a "complete attendance completely": 10 times 10 times 10. Under the influence of wine, he loses his reason. Here he is described as the son of Nebuchadnezzar; if that king was Nebuchadnezzar II then Belshazzar was, historically, his grandson, and never ascended to the throne. Belshazzar orders that the precious vessels brought from the temple in Jerusalem be brought into the banquet and defiles them. Nebuchadnezzar captured these vessels but did not defile them. A quality that is still represented in Nebuchadnezzar is lost in Belshazzar. He will need his counterpart, Belteshazzar (Daniel) to help him as a consequence of his actions. He orders wine to be drunk from the vessels and they become intoxicated. We have an understanding that becoming intoxicated means not taking charge of oneself; they lose their reason. Those who defile the vessels praise the gods of the seven ancient metals. These are mighty gods, as the god of gold is the god of the Sun as the Babylonians understood that the metals has been gifted by the seven mobile stars (the Sun, Moon and planets). They also praised the elemental gods (of stone and wood) who provide the building materials for the homes humans build. Then a hand writes on the wall. Only Daniel of the all the wise men in Babylon, can read the writing and is, as a result, as promised, clothed in a robe of purple, wear a gold chain around his neck and be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom. This mirrors the rewards of Nebuchadnezzar and again references the robe of purple and the crown of thorns placed on Jesus. MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. These words mean: "MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and put an end to it; TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; PARSIN, your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians." (These words are transliterated differently in different bibles.) The scales are the power of the archangel Michael and the scales of the Egyptians used to weigh the human heart against a feather. The Medes are brought into this story because they were the mediating peoples between the Babylonians and the Persians. Historically they had already been conquered by the Persians. Darius the Mede is a figure who only occurs in the Book of Daniel, while historically Babylon falls to Cyrus the Persian.

Chapter 6. The night after the writing appears on the wall, Babylon is overrun by Darius the Mede who is 62 years old. He is one year away from completing nine cycles of 7 years. In his 63rd year he is the ruler. Darius appoints 120 satraps over which are three administrators, one administrator over 40 satraps. Forty is the period of gestation, a giving birth. Three great births have to take place. One of the three administrators is Daniel. Daniel becomes popular and the other administrators ask Darius to proclaim a law prohibiting the worship of other gods for thirty days; only the king may be worshiped. Anyone defying the king is to be thrown into the lion's den. Again, the king is concerned having been forced to punish those he most highly prized. But Daniel (no longer referred to a Belteshazzar – he has accomplished the task for which he carried that name) is protected by his God. This story mirrors the story of the fiery furnace, the trial by fire. It establishes that the human being can overcome the devouring power of the lion when a mighty angel aligned to one's spiritual development can shut up mouths of the lions. We carry the real power of the lion in us, we have the courage. This is the idea of the lion as the symbol of Ishtar. The power of the feminine is always pictured in the form of a male lion.

Darius proclaims a decree that the whole nation will revere the God of Daniel. This is the ascendancy of the God of Daniel becoming recognised throughout the world as the leading divinity – the one who is really in charge of human affairs.

The structure of chapter 6 is chiasmic: the introduction to Daniel's success, Darius' edict and Daniel's response; Daniel's opponents plot his death; Darius hopes for Daniel's deliverance; Darius witnesses Daniel's deliverance (the central part of the story mirrored); Daniel's opponents are sentenced to death; Darius gives an edict and a doxology; and the story concludes with Daniel's success – ABCDDCBA. In the edict are echoes of Christian salvation, of being made whole, not just being saved. There is also an echo to parts of the Lord's Prayer "Mighty are his works in heaven and on earth".

Chapters 7 to 12 is the heart of the Book of Daniel. These are the visions that Daniel has. We can interpret the visions of Daniel as applicable to the historical events following shortly thereafter, but we

can also understand these visions as being related to spiritual realities that we find repeated time and again in historical events. This makes the Book of Daniel relevant to all times: the time of Daniel in Chaldean Babylon; the time some centuries later when the Hebrew people were able to return to the Promised Land and the reestablishment of the Temple; what transpired for the Maccabees, and all that takes us to last centuries before Christ; for the present time; and for times to come. The events of the visions may also be used to interpret the great battle within the human soul. We can see them as the spiritual powers at work that find their true home on the battlefield of the human soul. We can see in the visions how the human being was, is and will be. We can understand the evolution of the human being and the unfolding of the spiritual forces connected with the development of the human being. This is the great drama of *earth exitance*, what it means to become a full human being, a Son of the Human Being (a "Son of Man"). By developing who we are, the full picture of the Human Being can emerge. We have in the Book of Daniel the picture, in the fiery furnace of one who is like the Son of the Human Being, a great and mighty human being, almost angelic in appearance. This is a depiction we recognise in the Book of Revelation. The Book of Daniel introduced the picture language that we need to grasp in order to better understand the Book of Revelation.

Reading chapter 7: Vision of the Four Empires. This chapter mirrors the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar of the mighty statue of three metals descending in quality from the head down to a mixed state of metal and earth. This dream can also be interpreted as the human being still golden in their connection to the spiritual world slowly descending as the human being becomes silver, copper and eventually fully earthed as a mixture of copper and clay, at which time it becomes necessary to smash the picture and establish a new spiritual reality. This chapter returns to king Belshazzar. In the vision we must understand that the beasts Daniel sees are real beasts. We can see in the distortion of the beasts as Daniel sees them, a distortion of the human being. This is what happens when we do not develop as we should, or when our spiritual development is hijacked and taken over by a destructive spiritual force. There is a mystery language connected with heads and horns. Horns represent a physical organ that represents an etheric force. One could say that all of our organs are densified etheric forces. The purpose of the horn is to be able to connect to the spiritual world. A horn always represents a desire to connect spiritually. A head represents a complete understanding, a full expression of the universe contained, a full cosmos. We should need only one head as there should be only one picture of the cosmos. The more heads a beast has the more distortions there are. Each head carries a distorted picture of the cosmos. The fourth beast has 10 horns and is therefore completely horned. It can receive all spiritual messages, good and adverse. The little horn that replaces the horns that are plucked out becomes a beast in its own right. Following this we have the first vision of a heavenly court, of a king on a throne. It is a throne surrounded by fire and worship. Those worshipping are described as thousands which is a complete picture in all dimensions. The enormously destructive fourth beast with a little horn that is itself a complete beast with attributes that are clearly described, is destroyed, while the power is taken from the other three beasts although they continue to exist until a fixed time. This is an idea of cycles of time that end. We can divide cycles of time in half with the turning point always in the middle. After the midpoint there is a new relationship to the end point. These are strong realities that we encounter in apocalyptic literature. In this vision the beasts stay alive after the midpoint, but their power is reduced and therefore they can be overcome. There is then the picture of the Son of the Human Being who comes and dominion, honour and kingship are given him and there is hope for the future. This picture is, no doubt, a picture of the Christ but it is also a picture of the human being that finally attains the level of future full spiritual human being as a consequence of Christ incarnating into Jesus of Nazareth, as a consequence of the Mystery of Golgotha, as a consequence of the Easter Resurrection. It is what happens when we finally, as a human community, attain our status as the tenth hierarchy, find our way into the whole cosmic spiritual order of creative activity and we have finally fulfilled our spiritual evolution to the point where we can fully participate in the activity of the Divine and become creative agents in our own right. This is only achieved because such creative activity is bestowed on us by the Divine.

Daniel is troubled and, like John in Revelation, turns to one who is at hand and asks what this means. Daniel receives an interpretation of the vision. We should imagine that the four beasts are four stages in the kingship of the human being where we can easily be overtaken by forces that want to thwart our development and we live then in a way that is not true to our essential nature as it should manifest. It is important to always bring the picture back to the development of the human being. There is a hopeful picture that after great trials and tribulation, where there is enormous conflict, we can realise our true destiny.

Read chapter 8 that has another vision. Many of the visions occur at rivers where one is on one side and there is no bridge to the other side where one wishes to arrive. The Mystery of Golgotha has not

yet taken place that allows us to cross to the spiritual world in a way that we can manage. The ram comes from the east where all spiritual things arise. The he-goat arises from the setting sun where we go into darkness. There is a picture of 'the beautiful land' which is the human being when we have landed in ourselves on the earth. One can imagine in the ram with the two horns the two-petaled lotus of the third eye. There is a perversion of this when there is only one horn in the he-goat. This vision can be read as a prediction of the historical events that follow Daniel, but it can equally be read from a spiritual view as what transpires repeatedly for the human being. Daniel hears a voice that speaks to Gabriel. Later we again hear of Michael and everything to do with healing (a making whole), which represents Raphael. The Book of Daniel is infused with the power of these three archangelic beings. The human voice from over the river is the voice of the future human being, the one we can become but only through the power of Christ that is to come.

Chapter 9 has the prayer of Daniel and the prophecy of 70 weeks, a complete time cycle. The time from the building of Jerusalem (in us) until the coming of the new Jerusalem there will be a full cycle of time. The wars and tribulation are part of the labour pains of us getting it wrong which is the decree: that we must struggle our way through all of this. He will impose his law for a week which represents a cycle of time and in the middle of the week he will put a stop to the sacrifices and offerings. At this point the devastator will place the abominable idol in the temple until the ruin decreed by God comes upon the devastator. This is an important term: the abominable idol, which is also translated as the abominable desolation. This term reappears directly in Mark 13 in a Greek translated from Hebrew. Read Mark 14 about the idol of the oppressor where it is put where it should not be. This would be the I-organisation being replaced by something else. The centre of the human being that is managed by the gift of the Christ, the I-organisation, the earthly 'I' aligned to the higher 'I' which is aligned to the Christ 'I', is replaced by an idol, that which we want as earthly human beings that cuts off us off from the spirit. We replace the 'I' with the idol of earthly desire and so have in our centre, in the temple of the spirit, an idol in place of the Christ gifted I-organisation. Madsen rendering Emil Bock into English describes it as: "Then when you see the aberration of the human self set up, a hideous form, let the reader penetrate what he reads with his thinking." The direct translation from Hebrew would be: "on the side of abominations shall be one who makes desolate". In the Greek translation the literal meaning is that this is a moral horror that comes to God as a stench. Rudolf Steiner speaks of the sense of smell in the future being replaced by the sense of morality. There is an aspect of being human which is the essence of having an 'I' that is a gift of Christ birthed in us by the power of the Holy Spirit which, when we know what this is then we realise that without it we suffer the abhorrence, the emptiness of desolation. These words are spoken in the Sunday Service for Children as: "Without love human life becomes desolate and empty". This describes the desolation we feel when we place any idol instead of love at the centre of who we are. Gabriel comes to Daniel and says he has come to teach him a word and then does not mention the word. Yet, we can understand from a broader context that the word is 'love'. Love is the centre of the experience of being human. Rudolf Steiner said that the earth was created so that the human being could learn the lesson of love.

Chapters 10 and 11 is the fight between the king of the north and the south. We can read this as the tension between the parts of us that want to become the king of us and invade us. Again, we hear of 'the beautiful land'. In chapter 10 there is a description of the Son of the Human Being: a man clothed in linen with a band of pure gold around his waist, his body was like chrysolite (a golden precious stone), his face was like the brilliance of lightning, his eyes like the brilliance of torches and the sound of his words were like the noise of a great crowd. He speaks of a time, two times and a half time. This is the midpoint of a cycle of time: $3\frac{1}{2}$. Then it will be fulfilled although not yet fully unfolded. When we come to the activity of the fourth beast, when we reach a point where living on the earth can lead only to death, something needs to turn around so that the future can happen. Daniel is promised the reward of becoming like one who is clothed in white linen, a future human being.

Chapter 12 speaks of Michael.

The visions have less to do with historical events and more to do with every struggling human being. The great message of the Book of Daniel is what happens when instead of love and the true 'I' of the human being at the centre of our constitutional development is replaced by anything else because then that thing becomes detestable, that is abhorrent, that idol is empty, that leads to desolation which leads to feeling cut off and feeling empty: "Christ is the teacher of the love of the human being" (Sunday Service for Children). This is the message of Daniel in its most hopeful and fulfilled reality because we live after the midpoint, we live in the time when Christ has come, but not the Christ that has come, but in the time when Christ is always coming, always at the centre, always in process. That is what is

happening in us as we become evermore the human being that was intended in the mind of the Divine, the human being that is in the image and likeness of God.

At the beginning of the last session, the fourth Saturday presentation Michaël began with a recap before concluding the insights he shared on the meaning of the stories and images in The Book of Daniel.

The Book of Daniel is interesting in that part of the book is written in Hebrew and part of it in Aramaic. It is unusual to find as much Aramaic writing in a book of scripture as we find in this book. The Aramaic parts of the Book of Daniel are written in an interesting style that mirrors events around a central idea. The first event is followed by a second and a third event. The third event may be the heart of the story and is reflected in the fourth event, the fifth event is a reflection of the second event and a sixth event is a reflection of the first event in a sequence we could write as ABCCBA. There can be multiple events leading into and out of the central event. We find this structure in chapters and also over several chapters in the book.

There are two expressions in the Book of Daniel that are found nowhere else in the Old Testament. They are picked up as ideas in the New Testament. The first of these expressions is describing the Most High God as the 'King of Heaven'. In other parts of the scripture of The Old Testament He is described as being in the heavenly heights; as being Lord over life on earth; described as the Lord is my Shepherd alongside other analogies in the Psalms to earthly activities that were seen by the ancient world in the cosmos as signs in the Zodiac or in the movement of the stars: in scripture of the Old and New Testament we come across the images associated with Aries, for example: the Good Shepherd, the Hired Man, the Ram, then the Lamb; but never as the 'King of Heaven'.

The other expression is the 'abominable desolation' or the 'abomination of the desolation'. This is what happens when one takes from the very centre of the Temple the heart of the activity and replaces it with a false idol. The emptiness, the sense of desolation or of isolation that we experience when we are not connected to the central experience of the Divine in human life. This is a reminder that the Book of Daniel can be read as a description of human development, as can the Book of Revelation.

In the Book of Daniel are some beautiful examples of the picture of the human being in the story. A very good example are the three companions of Daniel who, in their Chaldean names are Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but those names are a Chaldean translation of the Hebrew names, the meaning of which are the meaning of the names of the Archangelic Beings mentioned in the Bible: Gabriel, Raphael and Michael. One can see these companions as angelic companions rather than simply human companions, but they can also be seen as the components of Daniel's soul, his thinking, feeling and willing. This would give Daniel the experience of a whole four-fold human being. When the three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are thrown into the fiery furnace and after the night in the furnace they are walking about unharmed by the flames, the flames having not touched them, a fourth is seen to be with them in the fiery furnace. This fourth element is described as 'like the son of a god'; 'like the son of the gods'. One could say, like that component of the human being, the spiritual part of us, the I-organisation which is, of course, truly in the image and likeness of the Divine, that element which comes to us as a gift of the Christ, that spiritual element which incarnated into our human constitution and which understands and experiences the world at hand of the capacities of soul: thinking, feeling and willing. So, these are the capacities of soul unharmed by the fire, in fact, they do not need to be purified by this fire because they are pure. Daniel's thinking, feeling and willing capacities are pure, they are in alignment with the essence of a certain divinity. This is interesting in the Book of Daniel because the 'I' appears in the fire, but only in its spiritual qualities, not yet incarnated into an earthly person that can be thrown into the fire alongside the others. So, the soul capacities, thinking, feeling and willing, are experienced as part of us but there is another element that accompanies us that is not yet incarnated as part of the human constitution. At the time of the writing of the Book of Daniel there is a strong companionship that appears to be there alongside but is not yet part of the whole picture.

So if we see the three young elements of the soul, also described as the three young children, our burgeoning capacities to think, to feel, to act; if we see those, not as three young people, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but rather as a metaphor alongside this story that we can see in the story for the capacities of soul, then we might want to consider the four beasts that appear out of the sea in the seventh chapter somewhat differently. Scripture scholars have tried to align these beasts with four kingdoms in the world, that were violent, destructive and problematic for our best human development and they thwarted the sons of God in the sense of the sons of Israel, the people following YHWH. Michaël suggests that we should consider these four beasts as living in the human experience of life,

not out there as an external kingdom but in us as an internal reality. The beasts, in Daniel, come to him through a dream that he has, and in the dream the vision unfolds.

“I saw that the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea; four great beasts emerged from the sea...” Is this a geographical sea or a metaphor of a sea? It could be seen as the great sea of chaos, that part which belongs to where we have come from, not to where we are now. So, the water from which we came, not the earth upon which we live now. The chaotic water existence belongs to our past and to a different nature for the human being than living on the earth as we do now. The reason for suggesting this is that in the Book of Revelation we come to a vision of the future in which the sea is no more. In other words: the chaos of the past is no more. We know the great sea monsters described in other parts of the Old Testament become a representation of this element of chaos which leads to death, not an element of constructive creation, of things unfolding according to a Divine plan. Out of the chaos, out of the turmoil, out of the waters of the deep which are unformed and unstructured something can be taken and placed into the form and structure on the land, which is the human being. There is an understanding here that we have come from the waters and are now living on the land. This is where we belong, and we cannot keep going back into the chaos. Every time things rise up in us which are negative, destructive and do not serve us, it is like monsters rising out of that chaotic deep, great sea.

The four beasts are negative and they are not to be understood exactly as they are described. They are always ‘like’ something, it is not the thing itself. The first is *like* a lion that has had its wings torn off, the second is *like* a bear which is very one-sided, *like* a leopard with four heads and horns, and the final beast with ten horns and one horn that grows, destroying three of the other horns. The last beast, one of great destruction with teeth that tear things apart and destroys them, one has the impression of a kingdom, possibly with ten kings – each horn representing a king – and then a little one arrives who is not a true king and overthrows three of the kings, are possible interpretations. However, if one understands what a horn and head represents one is dealing with a mythical beast where the myth is telling a true story about an element within the human being. When Daniel asks what the vision means, the description that is given to him is that they represent four kingdoms, think of them as each an element within the human being that can rule the human being if the human being does not take charge of the beast and rule it. The last of the beasts is described as being destroyed after three and half cycles. This is halfway through a span of a cycle represented by seven. In this cycle something shifts at the midpoint, so we move from the beginning to the midpoint, experience a shift and move from the midpoint to the end. At the midpoint one like a Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven and faces the One of Great Age, and dominion, honour and kingship are given to him and at that point his kingdom will never be destroyed. The fourth beast and the little horn that has grown out of the fourth beast, that has eyes like a human being and a mouth that utters insolent or arrogant words, is destroyed. The other three animals have their power removed but they remain for a time.

We can see the fourth beast as death. This is the Mystery of Golgotha, the Mystery of Resurrection, the Christ has conquered death. Death is no more. We will still go through the gate of death, but death has no power over us, not if we are united with Christ in the Mystery of Resurrection. That beast is taken care of. As we live our life, we have nothing to fear of death. But the other three beasts remain. Although they have no power they are still there, and we may give them power. We might give in to them which gives them power over us. What could the beasts like a lion, like a bear and like a leopard be? They are probably the three difficult elements in the human being that we must overcome. Anthroposophy speaks of them as the beasts of fear, hatred and doubt. They sit in our will, in our feeling and in our thinking. Here again we have the soul companions that each in turn can be overcome by a beast.

Plato used certain elements to ascribe what it is to be human, something beyond nature, something we would have to learn, something we would have to incorporate into ourselves. He described these as virtues that make us human. Three are very well known to us, the fourth comes to us when we live on the earth and manage the other three, then the fourth one appears. Plato referred to these virtues as cardinal meaning ‘hinge’ because he suggested that our humanity hinges on these virtues being developed. These virtues were known as fortitude, temperance and prudence. We can call them courage, self-control and wisdom. We need to act out of a wisdom that allows us to “enter the temple of higher wisdom” (Rudolf Steiner). If we don’t act out of our wisdom our thinking is corrupted, and we *doubt*. We second guess all the time. We must “look before we leap” but “he who hesitates is lost”. Steiner speaks of these beasts of the soul as doubt of the spirit. We doubt that the spirit exists and that we are spiritual beings or have a connection to the spirit. It is the doubt that counters our capacity to actually be human, which is an expression of spirit. Then the bear is the beast of *hatred* where we have no self-control because hate takes over in the heart, because hate is an intense passion that leads us in a destructive way rather than to be able to control ourselves. It is a counterforce to feeling when we

hate the spirit; when we hate all that is spiritual, and we fight it instead of controlling ourselves to encounter it. The lion whose wings have been torn off is the beast of *fear*, so instead of being able to soar like the true winged lion which becomes the symbol for St Mark, the gospel writer and forms part of a different picture of the composition of the lion, the bull, the eagle and the human, there is the cowardly lion whose wings of courage have been severed. A counter-power to willing. Steiner speaks of three trials by fire, by water, by air and if we are able to overcome these spiritual trials, he speaks of us being able to become courageous, to be able to control ourselves and to be able to act wisely. This is where, in *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* he says we can enter the temple of higher wisdom when we have gone through the third trial.

Michaël suggests the three beats have everything to do with this. Death is overcome, but these beasts can still live in us until we are able to overcome them.

In this picture, we move to the stories of Susanna and the stories of Bel and of the dragon. These stories tell us something of the journey of the human being, the journey of the soul, the courage it takes to face the adversity of life, the challenges we come across.

The story of Susanna is found in chapter 13 and the stories of Daniel and priests of Bel and the of Daniel and the dragon is found in chapter 14. These are part of the Book of Daniel that are considered by some Christians to be apocryphal. The Catholics see it as a second inclusion into the canon of scripture – deuterocanonical – because these chapters, along with a few other books, were included into the first translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, about two and a half centuries before Christ, into the Septuagint.

The Story of Susanna may be read at the link provided. Susanna was God-fearing and spiritually law abiding. The Hebrew community is respected in Babylon at the time, but the Hebrews had to live differently than they would have done in their own home country. They were not living in a condition of slavery as they had been under the Egyptian culture. This book describes how Daniel is part of group of young men taken to be trained to become officials in the Babylonian court and carry authority and to be wise sages who could interpret the signs of the time. We read about the wicked men who fall for the beauty of Susanna. They lust after the purity of Susanna to which they cannot attain. They create a condition in which, of the two options she can choose, she will be condemned. She chooses to remain honest. Daniel intervenes and interrogates the two men separately who then tell a different detail in their story thus proving Susanna's innocence.

The four cardinal virtues of which Plato speaks are courage, moderation, wisdom and justice. In *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* by Rudolf Steiner we read of the three trials by which we must be purified by the fire of life that makes us courageous so that we can take a stand; overwhelmed by water that develops a capacity to control ourselves and not be overwhelmed by other forces; and instead of suffocating we can breathe the air because we can relate to a new-found capacity for wisdom. These three trials speak to three of the cardinal virtues. The trial of living on the earth is the fourth trial, in managing our thinking, feeling and will we do justice to what it is to be human, and so we will be found to be just. This is the fourth cardinal virtue. Susanna represents the purity of soul who does not succumb to the corruption of the two elder judges and because she remains pure, she experiences justice. It is a tale of the purity of soul that lives on the earth with courage, with wisdom, with self-control and hence justice is done.

Read the story of Daniel and the priest of Bel. Bel is the Babylonian name for Baal or Ba'al, the lord, the Great Lord of Babylon whose companion was a dragon, a mušḫuššu or mushkhushshu. We should understand the mushkhushshu as a spiritual force. The dragon is a spiritual force that exists in the world, not in us. We must see such forces for what they really are and not fall down and worship them. This is an image that we encounter again in the Book of Revelation. The desire of the dragon is to derail our spiritual development.

In the story of Bel, we encounter him as an idol and not as a true god. The numbers in the amounts of food offered to the idol are significant; twelve represents the full span of a year and the wholeness of something, forty is a gestation period, six as the number just one short of seven, which are the six days of work before the day of rest – the six days of creative activity. In the description of the idol Daniel speaks of it as being clay inside of the bronze skin. This references the dream of Nebuchadnezzar where he sees a statue with legs and feet that are a mixture of clay and bronze. This mixture of clay and bronze (copper) will not hold but will break apart because it is a corruption of the purity of the metals. Daniel displays the cardinal virtues of courage, self-control and wisdom and expects justice to come when he can hold all three. The number of priests of Bel was 70 representing a complete span of time. Daniel receives justice for holding to the three cardinal virtues and he destroys the idol.

This story also references the historical development of the God of the Hebrews gaining importance. We know from Paul that there is no more temple to which we can go. The only temple is the human being. It is in us that Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell. Therefore, the true picture of who we are to become is in us, not a false idol, but the divine living God. The Book of Daniel points to a future in the hope that it will be realised. We are living proof of its realisation.

Now for the story of Daniel and the dragon in chapter 14. Daniel prepares what is not nourishment and the dragon in his gluttony eats it and is destroyed. The dragon is a creature who does not exercise the cardinal virtues of self-control, courage or wisdom and therefore the justice it receives is that it is destroyed. Daniel is again thrown into the lion's den where he remains for six days. In the den were seven lions. The prophet, Habakkuk, in Judea, is transported by his head, his thinking, through the power of an angel, to feed Daniel. Daniel holds in him the virtues to be human which enables us to recognise one like a Son of the Human Being, the future human being who we are to become.

The aim of presenting the Book of Daniel is to see it as an extraordinary book that looks at our development and anticipates something of the future that is to come. This is taken up in the vision and experience of John and much of what we encounter in the imagery of Daniel lives on in the Book of Revelation that reveals to us the continued picture of the development of the human being on earth and the continued picture of the earth as it moves forward in various cycles, into, finally, the full realisation of what it will be for us when we become the human being of the future, a Son of Man, or in the worlds of Anthroposophy, a Spirit Human, and we have arrived and achieved what many describe as our status as the tenth hierarchy in the angelic world and we become fully co-creators with the other angelic beings in the future unfolding of the great creative activity of God. Daniel anticipates this in terms of what is imminently to come, the turning point of time. This makes it appropriate to present in the season of Easter.

The Book of Daniel is more than a collection of stories but rather these stories tell the human story, what it is to be a human being, to have our full capacities of thinking, feeling and willing, to have a soul that is pure and dedicated, to live in a way that we act courageously, with self-control, with wisdom and anticipate and get to know what it is to experience justice.