CHAPTER TWO

A VISION OF WAITING

"Blessed is he who waits."

Daniel 12:12

The book of Daniel is imbued with the tensions of waiting. Daniel wrote against the background of exile. His book starts with the exile and all his stories and visions take place there. Daniel and his people are waiting for the restoration. This is explicitly stated in Daniel's prayer in chapter 9, the only prayer pronounced in the book, the only passage where Daniel is concerned with the actual destiny of his people. The prayer stems from the consultation contained in the "books" in which restoration is outlined. It starts with the prophecy of Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2); then it develops
into a long plea for forgiveness, and finally closes with a pathetic cry: "do not delay!" (9:19). The whole prayer was directed towards this theme of waiting.

Daniel's "impatience" for the descent of God pervades his own experiences. The first ten days spent in Babylon are days of tense waiting. Daniel and his companions wait for the result of their act of faith and for a miracle from God. The expression "at the end of the days" (1:18), which is associated with the result, at the same time reveals the passion of waiting. The last verse of chapter 1 concludes by suggesting the same disposition of waiting: "thus Daniel continued until . . ." (1:21).

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 bring out this motif by opposing the non-waiting mentality of the pagan king to the waiting attitude of the Hebrews. In chapter 3, the king wants the everlasting kingdom now. As a response to his dream warning him that he was going to be only the head of gold (2:38-40), implying an end to his kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar makes a whole statue of gold (3:1). In chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar is again concerned with the Babylon of "today," enjoying the kingdom of the present (4:30). Similarly in chapter 5, Belshazzar is only interested in the present, engaging in revelry praising the visible gods which provide immediate satisfaction (5:4, 23).

On the other hand, while the king refers to the present and immediate condition, "if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately" (3:15), the Hebrews refer to the future. "Our God will deliver us from your hand" (3:17), and they even dare to point to the far future beyond their present existence, "but if not . . ." (3:18). In the same way chapter 6 tells us about Daniel's reaction to the threatening king's decree (6:7). Daniel at once went home and opened his windows toward Jerusalem. His prayer is not so much concerned with the holy place, geographically speaking, as it is with his longing to return there. This look to Jerusalem should not be interpreted in terms of space, but in terms of time. Daniel wants and hopes for a better time of free worship. Furthermore, he goes beyond the mere waiting; as the text says, he keeps waiting, he prays three times that day "as was his custom since early days" (6:10). Daniel is "patiently patient."