Dining in the lions' den – Bel and the dragon, verses 28–42 (Old Greek/Theodotion)

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This article is part of a series of articles written on *Bel and the dragon*. This series of articles is an investigation into the Greek editor/author's use of body, space, narrative and genre in creating a new reality regarding the Jewish deity. A spatial framework is used to specifically examine the third episode of *Bel and the dragon*, entitled *Dining in the lions' den*. It is suggested that the third episode of *Bel and the dragon* should be read in a reciprocal relationship with not only *Bel and the dragon* but also the larger book of Daniel. Firstly, such an analysis indicates that the smaller episode is part of a larger clash of deities. Secondly, it shows that the editor/author utilises the episode to recreate a new cosmology. In this new cosmology, the God of Israel is an almighty deity whilst other deities are revealed as false and not real living gods. In his own way, the editor/author contributes to the way in which Jews regarded their God within the reality of the diaspora.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The aim with this article was to analyse Daniel 14 by means of new insights from developments in language studies. Until now, scholars tended to repeat each other in their analysis of Daniel 14. No attention was given to space, body or other aspects of new developments in the field of language. This article challenges the repetitive research previously done on Daniel 14.

Dining in the lions' den, an overview

The story of *Daniel in the lions' den* is probably one of the best-known Bible stories. However, few people know that there is a second version of this famous story. This second version is found in the Septuagint (LXX). More specifically, it is part of the apocryphal additions to the *book of Daniel*.[1] There are three of these additional stories in the LXX. The first is found in *Daniel* 3, *The prayer of the three men in the fiery furnace*. The second is called *Suzanna* and usually forms chapter 13 in the LXX Greek version of *Daniel*. The third story is actually a combination of three events (episodes). This third story is called *Bel and the dragon* and forms chapter 14 in the LXX *Daniel*.

There are two Greek versions of *Bel and the dragon*. The oldest version (dating from 100 BCE) is that of the LXX and is often called the Old Greek (OG) version. The second version is the Theodotion (Th) version. Not only is it considered to be the younger version (dating from the 2nd century) but also the more elaborate one. Both versions consist of 42 verses. This article mostly refers to the LXX or OG version of the text, but where necessary, references will be made to Th.

In the first episode of *Bel and the dragon* (verses 1–22), the character Daniel uncovers the deceit of the priests of the god *Bel*. Bel's temple is proven to be a space of fraud and lies, and Bel himself is proven a false and not-living deity. I call this episode the *Disempowerment of Bel*. The second episode (verses 23–27) demonstrates the character Daniel as a slayer of dragons. I therefore call the second episode *Daniel dragon-slayer*.

However, it is the third episode (verses 28–42) that is investigated in this article. The third episode of *Bel and the dragon* uniquely recounts the story of *Daniel in the lions' den*. In *Daniel* 14, the story is narrated as a consequence of the first two episodes. The Babylonians demanded the death of Daniel after he killed the priests of Bel and their holy dragon (δράκων). The king in this episode is incapable of taking a stand against the mob, and Daniel is thrown into a den (λάκκος) full of lions. Daniel, however, is rescued from death by the intervention of the Jewish deity. The prophet Habakkuk (Αμβακοθμ) is sent with food to nourish Daniel down in the lions' den, which suggested the title for this article: *Dining in the lions' den*. Thus, although similar to the events of Daniel 6, there are also unique differences between the two narratives contained in Daniel 6 and Daniel 14. One such difference is the reason why Daniel is thrown into the lions' den. In *Daniel* 6, the

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1. *Daniel* in italics is used in reference to the *Book of Daniel*. The character Daniel is referred to as 'Daniel' in normal script. This is done for a better distinction between the book and the character.

character Daniel is sentenced to death for praying to the God of Israel instead of to king Darius. In chapter 14, the Babylonians forced the king to sentence Daniel to death after he killed the priests of Bel, destroyed the temple of Bel and killed a sacred dragon. In Daniel 6, the mob instigated Daniel's death as part of a plot against him. Thus, the mob is the aggressor. In chapter 14, Daniel himself is the aggressor. The Babylonians only demand his death after he violates their religion. Another difference is that, in *Daniel* 6, the character Daniel only spends 1 day and night in the lions' den whilst, in the story of chapter 14, Daniel spends 7 days down in the lions' den. In addition, there is no mention of the prophet Habakkuk in *Daniel* 6 as opposed to *Daniel* 14.

This links *Dining in the lions' den* to the narratives of *Daniel* 5 and 6 by giving it a Persian setting and in addition also identifies the king in *Bel and the dragon* as Κῦρος ὁ Πέρσης (Cyrus the Persian). As stated in my second article (De Bruyn forthcoming [a]), it links *Bel and the dragon* to the time after the Persians overthrew the Babylonians. This could explain why Daniel takes a much bolder stance against idols in *Bel and the dragon* than in *Daniel* 1–6. It should have been easier to convince a Persian king that the Babylonian gods were not real gods, especially when one takes into consideration the cosmology of the time (cf. below under the heading: *Words, the building blocks of realities and genre; ibid*.).

Scholars such as Collins (1993:405–419) and Charles (2004:655) suggest that these two accounts of *Daniel in the lions' den* did not originate from one single tradition, but that it developed as separate stories within different communities. Whatever the case, this article focuses on the editorial unity of the *Greek Daniel* and the three episodes of *Bel and the dragon*. The possibility of a Persian setting for *Dining in the lions' den* and its connection with Daniel 6 will be taken into consideration.

Past research and lacunae

This article is part of a series of articles written on the Greek editor's or author's[2] use of body, space, narrative and genre in creating a new reality regarding the Jewish deity.[3] Three articles have been written on the subject: The first (De Bruyn forthcoming [b]) was designed to identify some lacunae in previous research on *Bel and the dragon*. The purpose of the second (De Bruyn forthcoming [a]) and third (De Bruyn forthcoming [c]) articles was to apply the recommendations made in the first article to episodes one and two of *Bel and the dragon*. Correspondingly, this article applies the recommendations of the first article to the third episode (vv. 28–42) of the narrative.

In their research on *Dining in the lions' den,* scholars tend to echo each other in following the well-travelled road.

Few scholars, if any, try to incorporate insights from new developments in language and text studies. Customarily, scholars focus on *Bel and the dragon* as a complete but loose-standing narrative. Almost no consideration is given to the individual episodes of *Bel and the dragon.* The editorial purpose of *Bel and the dragon* as *Daniel* 14 in the *Greek Daniel* is also not reflected.

A brief summary of past research is given here:

- the narrative's polemic use against idolatry (De Silva 2002:239; Jones 2003:24–26) with the theme: 'Who is the living God' (Nickelsburg 2005:24–26), as well as new insights into how the authors' use of space in narratives which makes it possible to examine this theme more comprehensively than before
- the investigation of the intertextual relationship between *Bel and the dragon* and Isaiah 44–46 and Jeremiah 51 (De Silva 2002:240; Nickelsburg 2005:24–26)
- evaluation of differences in the narrative between the OG and Th as well as the history of these two text versions (Collins 1993:237–256; Di Lella 2001:586–607; Jones 2003:139–140; Van den Bergh 2009:310–323)
- the motif of humour and irony in the narrative (Gruen 1998:137, 167–187; Nickelsburg 2005:24–26; Smith-Christopher 1996:17–152)
- the relationship between the court tales of *Daniel 1–6* and *Bel and the dragon* (Collins 1993:405–419)
- the motif of food in the sense of 'eating' and 'not eating' as a theme in the narrative (Bergmann 2004:262–283), made possible by the study of space and the creative properties of language to read the use of food as a spatial marker whereby different god-spaces can be identified
- ample research on the place and date of origin of *Bel and the dragon* and its different text versions (Charles 2004:656; De Silva 2002:240; Gruen 1998:168–170; Nickelsburg 2005:24–26)
- similarities and dissimilarities between OG and Th as well as the *Hebrew Daniel* and its Greek versions (Jones 2003:139–140) where scholars tend to lose track of the narrative as a whole and of its meaning despite the insight into the roots of the story
- the original language of *Bel and the dragon* (Charles 2004:655)
- the tolerance of the king towards Daniel and his God (Collins 1993:335–345)
- the character of Daniel as a weapon of attack and defence through the ages (Jordaan 2008:45–53), which is combined with a spatial framework, making it possible to indicate that the editor/author utilises Daniel not only as a weapon but also as a vessel of the God of Israel.

Cognitive linguists such as Evens, Bergen and Zinken (2007), Lakoff (2008) and Croft and Cruse (2004) as well as narrative critics such as Foucault[4] introduce new themes such as body, space and narrative structure. There is scant research on space and body in Daniel. Nel (2014) and Venter (2004:607–624, 2006:993–1004) wrote on space in Daniel 1

4.The details of these scholars' work are given as the article progresses.

and 9 but not on space in *Bel and the dragon.* Van den Bergh (2009:310–232) regarded the differences in location in the story of *Bel and the dragon.* These scholars did valuable work, but none of them considered the possibility of combining space with the creative properties of language, and thus, the possibility that the author or editor utilised space as a device to create realities was never considered.

This article tries to fill some of the research lacunae in several ways, namely:

- Features of narrative critique are combined with the creative properties of language. No commentary, as far as could be established, has considered this possibility before.
- Space and body are viewed as indicators exploited by the editor/author to create specific realities.
- The narrative itself is read as a mechanism to create a new identity of the Living God and Jewish devotees within the reality of the Diaspora.
- *Dining in the lions' den* (episode 3 [vv. 28–42]) is read within a reciprocal relationship with not only *Bel and the dragon* but also the rest of *Daniel.* The purpose of the episode within the larger *Daniel* narrative is thus also reflected.
- The episode is read against the apocalyptic genre for which *Daniel* is known.
- Narratives are regarded as structural units demarcated by spatial markers.
- *Daniel dragon-slayer* is treated as a short episode within a narrative about a clash of deities.

Theory and method

This article uses a body-space framework to analyse the text of episode three of *Bel and the dragon. Dining in the lions' den* is a narrative set within a specific genre and, therefore, the appliance of a body-space framework must be done within the parameters of the narrative and the genre. It is postulated in this article that the editor/author utilises different creative properties of language as building blocks to construct different realities. These building blocks can be identified as aspects of narrative critique, genre, body and space.

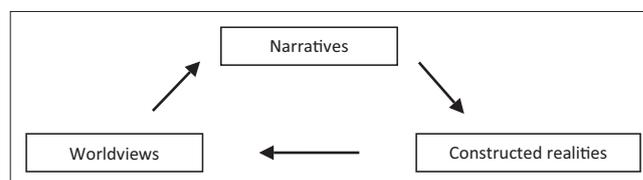### *Words*, the building blocks of realities and genre

Words are the result of a necessity to communicate. Words convey concepts and are a product of the human mind. Words are also the building blocks of language. In the process of communicating, words (and thus also language) have the ability not only to reflect realities but also to create them (Evans & Green 2006:179, 190–243). For different people, different realities exist, but whether it is the reality of school, work or even a holiday, all these different realities are structured as narratives. School is regulated by laws and syllabi, work is guided by rules and ethics whilst holidays are marked by structured time periods. All these laws, syllabi, rules, ethics and time periods are constructed by language. In this way, language formulates specific narratives for particular situations. These structured narratives help humans to make sense of the world and to create societies. However, each

human society experiences the world differently. Therefore, each group of people may structure their society differently. Consequently, each society has its own narratives which they employ to create their own worldviews (cosmologies). It is important to understand that, in each social group or society, there is a link between their narratives, worldviews and the creative properties of the language they use to communicate (Figure 1).

The same conclusion can be reached from another angle. It is also true that all of life can be explained as narratives (Lakoff 2008:21–93). All narratives have power. Some narratives are used to reflect or explain realities. Others such as laws are used to create realities, but narratives also have the power to hide conflicting 'truths'. Narratives are structured in the brain, and when they are communicated, language is used to construct them. The building blocks for these narratives are words. Thus, words have the ability to create frameworks in peoples' minds through the narratives they structure. Throughout history, people's worldviews were and are real. It was and is the way in which the world functions. What people believe, they experience as real. Truth is thus something that people believe to be real, but truth can also be created by constructing powerful narratives. It is this link between narratives, constructed realities and worldviews that is used by crafty politicians and newspapers to influence the way people think. For example, it was by creating powerful narratives around the events of 9/11 (2001) in New York, when planes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre, that President George W. Busch could legitimise America's invasion of Afghanistan. These events and the narratives that were told influenced the world in such a way that, depending on what narrative you believe, you either believe all of Islam are terrorists or not.

The editor/author of the *book of Daniel* also used this technique to influence the way in which the people of his time thought about their world. He shaped his book as well as the episode of *Dining in the lions' den* in such a way that he creates a new reality about the God of Israel. With this new reality of his, the editor/author challenged the popular worldviews of the gentile world.

Dining in the lions' den is first and foremost a narrative episode within a larger narrative called *Bel and the dragon.* However, insights from *Redaktionsgeschichte* show that both *Bel and the dragon* and *Daniel dragon slayer* were utilised to create the *Greek book of Daniel* (Becker 2005:8–9, 77). Each chapter of *Greek Daniel* was strategically placed to create the larger

Source: Author's own creation

FIGURE 1: The on-going process of creating worldviews, realities and narratives.

Daniel narrative.[5] Therefore, it is important to recognise that each chapter of *Daniel* as well as each episode of *Bel and the dragon,* has a reciprocal relationship.

The editor/author sets his narrative within the genre of apocalypticism (Clifford 2003:3–29; Collins 2000:157; Redditt 1999:13). Apocalypticism reflects a unique worldview of which aspects are found in *Daniel.* These features are as follows: the dualistic distinction between a physical world and a spirit world, an eschatological war between good and evil amongst deities, life after death. Elements of wisdom, prophecy and mythology are combined into one unique genre. As an apocalyptic narrative, *Daniel* wants to place the suffering of the Jewish people within the perspective of a larger clash of deities. The editor/author comments on a power struggle that he and his people experienced. The Jews should understand that their suffering is due to a cosmic struggle between their God and false gods. However, in the final days (ἔσχατος, cf. Dn 10:14 to the end of Dn 12), evil is vanquished, and God will emerge as the victor.

The power struggle between the God of Israel and the deities of the gentile world can be described as a struggle between a dominant narrative and a challenging narrative (Foucault 1979:113, 1980:109–133, 1984a:202). The dominant narrative of the Ancient Near-Eastern world would have been somewhat as follows.

Ancient Near-Eastern people believed that each nation had its own deities and that those gods were confined within the boundaries of the people who worshiped them. Nations called upon their gods to protect them and to give them victory in times of war. It was believed that, as nations engaged in war, their gods also engaged in the fighting. Supposedly, the nation with the strongest gods won the war. The loser's gods became subordinate to the victor's whilst their earthly territories became part of the winning deity's powerbase (cf. Murphy 2002:159; Walton 2006:97–102). As a result of this worldview, the God of Israel was seen as defeated by the Babylonian gods at the time of the exile. Consequently, the gentile world saw the God of Israel as a degraded deity without real power. During the diaspora, this worldview created a crisis for the Jews. During the Second-Temple Period, Jews were continuously challenged to reconsider their belief system (cf. Ps 137; Is 40).

The body as building block

What people believe about themselves and the world around them is structured in the form of narratives. These are produced in the minds of people, that is, in their bodies (Lakoff 2008:21, 93). Worldviews and opinions are formed as and when humans experience the world around them. Experiencing the world happens through the human body and is then communicated as narrative. In this way, the human body plays an important role in the construction of narratives. The human body is used in diverse ways

5.This is true of both *Greek* and *Hebrew Daniel*.

(De Bruyn 2014:1–6; Lakoff 2008:27; Lakoff & Johnson 1999:555–557), namely:

- for interaction with and experience of the world
- for conceptualisation and forming of worldviews or cosmologies and opinions
- for the construction of spaces, frameworks and concepts, which in turn are communicated via the body in the form of words (written or spoken)
- to function as a space or vessel in itself where specific concepts or experiences can be embodied (cf. 3.3 below)
- for comprehending world events in relation to what human bodies can or cannot do.

Not only is the body used as a referential tool, but it is also used as a building block within a narrative. Authors/editors build or compose narratives around bodies in the form of characters (Foucault 1984b:170–178, 1984c:179–187). In the episode of *Dining in the lions' den,* one finds the bodies of the gentile king, Daniel, the Babylonians, Habakkuk, an angel, the God of Israel and the lions. Thus there are heroes and villains, a king and his subjects, protagonists and antagonists, humans and deities, humans and beasts as well as messengers, those who send them and those to whom they speak. These bodies are utilised to construct a reality where the God of Israel is not a degraded deity but the all-powerful living God of both heaven and earth. Two opposing narratives or realities exist in *Dining in the lions' den*: one about the cosmologies of the gentile world and the other about the God of Israel. The different characters in the story are utilised in such a way that, by the conclusion of *Dining in the lions' den,* a new reality about the God of Israel and what he can (or will not) do is created. As Jewish readers began to form a new understanding of their God, they also began to comprehend something of his identity.

Space as a building block

This article investigates the editor/author's use of the creative properties of words that are associated with specific spaces. Human thinking revolves around space (Haspelmath 1997:1). Space is also the basic structure within which the body functions. Humans construct spatial paradigms as they experience the world through their bodies (cf. under the heading: The body as building block). Humans use these spatial frameworks to categorise phenomena such as below, above, inside, outside and under (De Bruyn 2014:1–6). For example, by means of the experience of sitting under the cover of a tree, or in its shadow, different spaces can be identified. Words are then created to reflect or identify these different spaces as under the branches of the tree, inside the shadow of the tree or outside the shelter of the tree. These types of spaces are usually more physically identifiable via the different senses of the body. Thus, they may be described as primary experienced spaces. Secondary spaces, in contrast, are more abstract and bound to the cultural or religious frameworks of people. Private space, such as a homestead, is an example of a secondary space. Other examples of secondary spaces are defined by words such as temple, church or synagogue. These specific spaces are experienced as holy or sacred

spaces due to the religious paradigms of some people. Body and space can also be combined in what may be described as embodied spaces. These embodied spaces are the way (and sometimes place) in which (where) human experience and consciousness takes spatial and material form in different locations and entities (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:1). For example, throughout history, people believed that entities such as shrines, altars, cities and even kings or priests can embody deities and their spatial realms (Gärtner-Brereton 2008:53; Walton 2006:87–134). These sacred embodied spaces can be defined as god-spaces.

Spatial markers are indications of embodied spaces within a text. Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003:1–37) state six spatial markers: the human body as a vessel of the self; body-space, which centres on the human body; gendered spaces; inscribed spaces; contested spaces and transnational space. Zlatev (2007:318–350) adds another seven markers, namely: trajectory, landmark, frame of reference, region, path, direction and motion.

In *Dining in the lions' den,* the bodies of Daniel, the angel and Habakkuk are not only utilised as characters (cf. under the heading: The body as building block) but also as spatial embodiments. Daniel is utilised as a vessel of the God of Israel, whereas the angel and Habakkuk embody God's care. At the same time, the angel is utilised as an extension of the God of Israel's power and might. Thus, Daniel, Habakkuk and the angel embody aspects of the God of Israel's god-space.

To read *Greek Daniel* as a larger narrative, as well as reading it within a spatial-body framework, has interesting consequences for a reader's comprehension of the book. The larger *Daniel* narrative shows that what began as an invasion of the God of Israel's god-space (Dn 1) is turned around into the invasion and destruction of the Babylonian deities' god-space. This larger *Daniel* narrative goes on to end with the killing of the Babylonian gods in *Daniel* 14 (De Bruyn 2014:1–6).

Applying theory and method
In relation to Bel and the dragon

Dining in the lions' den follows directly after Daniel, as a priestly embodiment of the God of Israel (OG, v. 1), demonstrates that Bel's temple is a space of deceit. Bel's temple is destroyed, the priests of Bel are killed and the Babylonians' sacred δράκων is also killed. With these events, Daniel demonstrates to king Cyrus (Th, vv. 1–2) that neither *Bel* nor the holy δράκων are real living gods. Bel is not a true god for he does not eat whilst the δράκων ate but died. Neither of these two deities have the power to protect their priests or themselves. In the narrative, eating and not eating are used as features in recognising a deity. In *Bel and the dragon*, life and death are embodied in food. To live is connected with eating whilst death is connected with not eating. In *Daniel* 14, the clash between deities emerges with the underlying questing: 'Who is the living God?' This question is utilised as a mechanism to

create a new identity for the God of Israel. The editor/author deliberately places the three episodes of *Bel and the dragon* in a specific order so that the new identity of the Jewish deity is created progressively (Becker 2005:8–9, 77). Thus, each episode is a stage in the process of recreating realities. *Dining in the lions' den* is the final phase in this process.

Episode 3

It is possible that this episode could be a repeat or different version of the events of *Daniel 6.* It might even be that the legendary character Daniel was thrown in a lions' den twice. This article, however, focuses on how the episode is utilised to create a new reality about the God of Israel and not on the possibilities of earlier traditions.

Challenging the God of Israel

In the previous two episodes, the character Daniel was utilised not only as a defender of the God of Israel's authority but also as a challenger to the worldview of the gentile world. In *Dining in the lions' den*, the situation is turned around. The challenge in episode three comes from the gentile world whilst the defender is not so much the character Daniel as it is the God of Israel himself. In both the previous episodes, Daniel proclaims twice that only the God of Israel is a real living God (Th, vv. 5, 25). Daniel, therefore, refuses to revere Bel (episode 1) or the holy δράκων (episode 2). Daniel proclaims the authority of the God of Israel against the cosmology of the gentile world. In episode three, the editor/author utilises bodies and spaces such as the king, the Babylonians, Daniel, the lions' den, the prophet Habakkuk and food to demonstrate the worldview of Daniel as the only true reality. The editor/author structures the events of *Dining in the lions' den* in such a way that the entire narrative becomes a proclamation of the reality that the God of Israel is all-powerful and that his divinity is unique.

The two cosmologies that are opposing each other are summarised as follow:

- The Babylonian worldview:
  - Bel and the δράκων are living deities for they eat a lot.
  - Daniel should submit to the Babylonian gods for they defeated the God of Israel when Nebuchadnezzar invaded his god-space (Dn 1).
  - Within the god-spaces of Bel and the δράκων, the God of Israel should not have power for he is a degraded god.

- Daniel's worldview:
  - Bel and the δράκων are not-living deities.
  - Only the God of Israel is a real living deity.
  - The God of Israel is not a degraded deity.

The king first of all embodies those people with doubts about the God of Israel. Despite the fact that Daniel demonstrated to the king that the gentile cosmology of their time is false, the king succumbed to Babylonian pressure. When the Babylonians heard what happened to the idol of Bel and their holy dragon, they started to plot against the king (OG/ Th, vv. 28–30). In their eyes, the king was supposed to be

the extension of their gods. He was supposed to protect their worldviews, but instead, the king allowed Daniel to violate their beliefs. The Babylonians then accused the king of having become a Jew (Ιουδαῖος γέγονεν ὁ βασιλεύς; OG/Th, v. 28). This accusation was a reaction to the king's failure to protect the Babylonian cult rather than any expression of attachment to Judaism (Collins 1993:335–345, 1993:415). According to Th (v. 29), the Babylonians even threatened to kill the king if he does not hand over Daniel. Under all this pressure, the king decided to let Daniel be killed (OG, v. 30).

Episode three narrates that there was a pit containing seven lions (OG/Th, v. 31–32). Apparently it was used to execute people who conspired against the king, in other words, high treason (OG, v. 31). In *Daniel* 6, the character Daniel's offence was that he upheld his own religion despite the decrees of the king. The same is true in the narrative of *Bel and the dragon*. Daniel refused to give up his own beliefs and to submit to the gods of his capturers. He thus resisted the process of becoming a good citizen (cf. Dn 1). In the eyes of the gentile world, Daniel's treason was in not revering the 'true gods.' For the Babylonians, Daniel's actions demanded his death. Similarly to *Daniel* 6, the lions' den (pit) in episode 3 is a space of punishment. It embodies the power and authority of the king and also that of the gentile worldviews. Also, the lions' den embodies death. However, the editor/author turns this space of punishment into a god-space for the God of Israel.

The God of Israel is now challenged to protect his priestly vessel, Daniel, and to demonstrate that Daniel's proclamation about him being the only true living God is indeed a true reality. Unlike in *Daniel* 6, Daniel spends 7 days in the lions' den (Th, v. 40). Collins (1993:417) states that we may have some echo of the Sabbath in this 7-day time period. It could function as a mechanism by which the editor/author recalls the tradition of the Jewish deity being the Creator of heaven and earth just as Daniel had proclaimed (Th, v. 5). Humans cannot go without food or water for 7 days. The statement that Daniel was in the lions' den for 7 days is in itself thus a mechanism to proclaim the extraordinary capability of the God of Israel to protect. Furthermore, to be in a dangerous space such as pit full of hungry lions for 7 days without being eaten goes beyond human belief structures. With his 7-day-scheme, the editor/author starts to recreate the identity of the God of Israel from a degraded deity (according to the gentile worldview) to an extraordinary deity. In this way, the editor/author is showing his readers the Jewish deity's capability to sustain life. In the previous episodes, it was shown that the deities of the gentile world did not have the power to sustain life, for they are dead gods. The editor/author is thus starting to demonstrate to his readers that the Jewish god is different from the gentile gods. Simultaneously, the lions' den that was supposed to be an extension of the king's authority and a space of punishment now becomes a challenged space. This means that the narrative is questioning who is really in control of life and death.

The motif of food (vv. 33–39)

The capability of the God of Israel to sustain life is also demonstrated when he nourishes Daniel in the lions' den. According to the gentile worldview, a deity was identified as a god by the fact that it eats much and is nourished by humans (cf. below under the heading: Challenging the God of Israel). This belief is turned upside down in a unique way in this third episode.

The prophet Habakkuk is called by an angel of the Jewish deity to take food to Daniel in the lions' den. This happened on the 6th day. The angel himself took Habakkuk directly to Daniel inside the pit. Bergmann (2004:278) describes the motif of food as boundary marking, meaning that food is used to establish a hierarchy between the different characters in the narrative. I postulate that the food also embodies life and death. In the third episode, the food is used to sustain Daniel's life, in other words, it is used to give Daniel life in death. The food is commissioned by the God of Israel. Unlike the previous two episodes where so-called deities are fed by human hands, Daniel is nourished by the God of Israel. The God of Israel himself does not eat. Nowhere in Greek Daniel is there any mention of the God of Israel being fed by humans. On the contrary, the Jewish deity is always described as the one sustaining life and nourishing the lives of Daniel and his friends (cf. Dn 1). Greek Daniel is thus framed with two accounts of the Jewish deity sustaining life by special nourishment (Dn 1 and Dn 14). Again, in his own way, the editor/author is influencing the way his readers think. He is recreating the identity of a deity in such a way that only the God of Israel can meet the criteria. The editor/author is demonstrating to his readers that a true living god does not need nourishment. Rather, a true living deity is one who sustains others.

In his own way, the editor/author is showing his readers that only the Jewish deity has real power over life and death. Daniel, who was supposed to die, is raised from death by a deity, who, according to popular belief, was supposed to be powerless.

The prophet Habakkuk

As Collins (1993:416) indicates, Habakkuk prophesied in the Babylonian era shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. He would therefore have been very old if he was still alive at the time of Cyrus. It is possible that Habakkuk is utilised by the editor/author as an embodiment of hope. God will provide and sustain the life of his chosen people no matter how dire their situation may be. In the Book of Habakkuk, chapter 3:16–19, the author narrates that the God of Israel will sustain life even though there may be no more food. God will preserve his people. Habakkuk 3:18b states: 'χαρήσομαι ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου' (LXX) [I will rejoice in God my saviour]. This is exactly what happens in *Dining in the lions' den.* The God of Israel acts as Daniel's saviour. God sustains Daniel's life by giving him food when he had none. By employing Habakkuk as a character (body) in the narrative, the editor/

author wants his readers to consider the Habakkuk tradition in identifying a true living deity.

God's power extending from Judea

Th (v. 33) reports that, from where he was in Judea, the prophet Habakkuk was taken to Babylon by the angel. Judea was the homeland of the Jews. It was also part of the god-space of the God of Israel. According to popular worldviews, the Jewish deity was confined to the borders of Judea. Thus, he was not supposed to have power in Babylon, especially since he had been degraded by Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of his temple and the holy city of Jerusalem (Dn 1). However, the editor/author of *Dining in the lions' den* utilises Judea to demonstrate that the Jewish deity's power and authority is not bound to specific locations. The editor/author validates his claim by narrating that the angel of God can move freely outside of the borders of Judea. Even more so, he can breach the god-spaces of other deities such as the lions' den, the pit of death.

By having God entering the lions' den and rescuing Daniel from death, the editor/author demonstrates to his readers that the God of Israel's god-space is universal. It extends everywhere, even in death itself.

Echoing Psalm 23

In Psalm 23:5, we find the words: תַּעֲרֹ֬ךְ לְפָנַ֨י ׀ שֻׁלְחָ֗ן נֶ֥גֶד צֹרְרָ֑י [You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies] (New International Version [NIV]).[6] In a way, this is exactly what the God of Israel does for Daniel in the lions' den. Daniel is nourished in the face of his enemies. As a living deity, the God of Israel is shown to have the power to go with Daniel through the valley death (Ps 23:4; LXX Ps 22:4: ἐὰν γὰρ καὶ πορευθῶ ἐν μέσῳ σκιᾶς θανάτου).

It is possible that similar to how the editor/author utilises Habakkuk as an embodiment of hope, he intentionally exploits traditions of nourishment and life from the Psalter. In the narrative of *Dining in the lions' den*, Psalm 23:4 and 5 becomes a reality. In turn, it helps to recreate the identity of the God of Israel as an all-powerful, real, living deity.

Who is the real living god? (vv. 40–42)

The struggle to determine the real living god is now brought to its conclusion. On the 7th day, the king comes to the pit to mourn Daniel. However, instead of finding Daniel dead, he finds him alive and well! For the king, there is only one explanation: Daniel's god is indeed the true living God. Daniel's proclamations about the God of Israel were not empty words. It was a reality, a reality that the king can no longer ignore. At the sight of Daniel alive, the king proclaims: 'The Lord God is great, and there is no other besides him' (OG, v. 41). With these words, the king admits that the gods of the gentile world are false. With this proclamation of the king, the editor/author's recreation process is completed.

6.LXX Ps 22:5: ἡτοίμασας ἐνώπιόν μου τράπεζαν ἐξ ἐναντίας τῶν θλιβόντων με.

There is no argument anymore. Daniel's worldview is proclaimed as reality whereas the cosmology of the gentile world is declared false.

As a final statement of the gods of the gentile world's incapability, the conspirators against Daniel and the king are thrown into the lions' den and immediately devoured by the lions. Since their gods are dead gods, there is no one who could protect them from death. Only one God controls the elements of life and death, namely the God of Israel. Where the lions' den started out at the beginning of the episode as part of the worldview of the gentiles, the episode ends with the lions' den being part of the god-space of the God of Israel. The lions' den thus becomes a shrine (space) demonstrating the power of the Jewish deity. In this way, the lions' den is demythologised. This is similar to the events of Daniel 3 and 6. In these chapters, the narratives also end with the fiery furnace and the lions' den being part of the god-space of the Jewish deity even though it started out as part of the god-spaces of foreign deities.

At the end of Bel and the dragon, the following reality survives:

- All foreign gods are false and no real living gods.
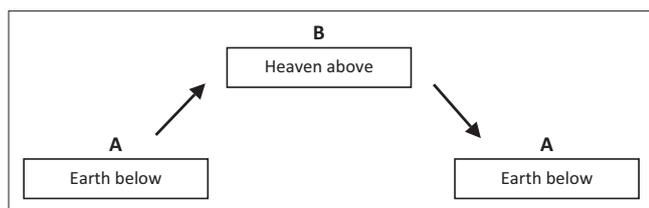- There is but one God and that is the God of Israel.

The new identity of the Jewish deity is as follows:

- He is not degraded.
- He is not bound to human perspectives and worldviews.
- He does not need nourishment.
- He nourishes others.
- He sustains life and controls death.
- He is all-powerful and omnipresent.

In relationship with the *book of Daniel*

Dining in the lions' den has a reciprocal relationship to both the rest of *Bel and the dragon* and the larger *book of Daniel*. There are two major spaces in the larger *Daniel*, namely earth below and heaven above (Figure 2). As the larger *Daniel* narrative progresses, the reader is taken from earth below to the heavens above and then back down to earth again. This movement in space gives the book a pyramid structure. With this structure, emphasis is placed on the events in heaven (Ch. 7–12). These events describe the cosmic struggle between the God of Israel and the forces of evil which embodies itself in earthly kingdoms such as the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Seleucid empires. From a heavenly vantage point, Daniel is shown that God is in total control of everything that happens in heaven above and on earth below. The God of Israel is victorious in the struggle with evil (in the end, the ἔσχατος).

The God of Israel's victory over evil is already becoming a reality on earth (Ch. 1–6, 13–14). No foreign worldview can stand before the reality of the Jewish deity's authority and power. Not even death can stand against the God of Israel. God therefore promises Daniel life after death in 12:13. This

Source: Author's own creation

FIGURE 2: The movement of space in the narratives of Daniel.

promise is demonstrated as a 'true' reality in *Dining in the lions' den*. Daniel is rescued from the clutches of death in that God nourishes and sustains Daniel's life. It has already been said that the *Book Daniel* begins and ends with an episode where the Jewish deity nourishes and sustains life by the provision of food.

Consequences for the reader

The reader may know that everything that befalls him or her is a consequence of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. As I stated in my articles on the first and second episodes of *Bel and the dragon* (De Bruyn forthcoming [a] [c]), the editor/author utilises Daniel as a mechanism to give 'inside' knowledge to the reader. As the larger narrative unfolds, the reader is taken along with Daniel in his discovery of not only God's new identity as universal but also of God's heavenly strategy. At the end of *Daniel* 14, the reader knows what Daniel knows, and in this way, the editor/author creates a new cosmology in the minds of his readers.

Within this new cosmology, Jews should not fear foreign worldviews, other so called deities or kings such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes who imagined himself to be a god. The God of Israel is in total control. All other gods are not only deemed as powerless but also as false.

Furthermore, God does not need people to enact him in this world as the priests of Bel enacted their god in this world (episode 1). As a priest, Daniel may be a vessel of God, but God is not dependent on people to proclaim his god-space. He himself proclaims his god-space by protecting his chosen vessels. As vessels of God, his chosen people are instruments of his will and command. When necessary, God's chosen people may become visible embodiments of God's power just as Daniel did. However God's chosen people are not actors to an elusive deity, but they are instruments of the true living God. The Jews living in the diaspora should therefore remain faithful to God. Religious syncretism and foreign religious practises should not be tolerated.

Conclusion

The application of a body-space framework combined with aspects of narrative critique, editorial critique and genre indicates the following:

• The episode called *Dining in the lions' den* is part of a larger war between deities.

• *Dining in the lions' den* has a reciprocal relationship with *Bel and the dragon* as well as with the rest of the *book of Daniel*.

• *Dining in the lions' den* is utilised as part of a process of recreating the identity of the Jewish deity.

• The editor/author creates a new cosmology according to which the God of Israel is all-powerful and omnipresent.

• Within this newly created worldview, all of God's chosen people can be embodiments of his authority, just as Daniel was in the narrative.

• With his new worldview, the editor/author makes it possible for Jews to remain faithful to their God even in the face of persecution and death.

Acknowledgements

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