

Daniel 5, Elohim and Marduk: The Final Battle

JACOBUS DE BRUYN, NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY, POTCHEFSTROOM
CAMPUS

ABSTRACT

Daniel 5 forms part of a larger narrative that originates in Dan 1. The larger, more dominant narrative can be described as a deity war or a clash of deities. Utilising spatial markers, the author of Dan 5 shows his readers that the God of Israel has the ability to operate outside the spatial domain of the land of Israel. Not only can Elohim operate beyond the borders of Israel, He can challenge and defeat other deities within their own spatial domains of authority. In Dan 5 the God of Israel's supremacy is shown in that He bridges and conquers Marduk's last surviving god-space. When Elohim conquers the banquet hall as the last stronghold of Marduk, the conflict that started between them in Dan 1 is brought to an end. Marduk's appointed king is killed and his empire is given away by the God of Israel to other deities and their rulers. In his own way the author attempts to persuade his readers that the God of Israel's authority is universal and not bound to a particular spatial context.

A INTRODUCTION

Daniel¹ 5 relates the well-known story of mysterious hand writing on a wall during Belshazzar's royal banquet. This article aims to demonstrate that the text of Dan 5, as a construction of written words, might be built-up from the *spatial experience* of human cognition. Here it is argued that the language used by the author of Dan 5 to construct his narrative, mirrors certain fundamental properties and design features of the human mind.² At the same time it is postulated that the words of the Dan 5 text signify, or symbolise concepts which the author employs to communicate with his readers.³ In short, the author deliberately used certain concepts to construct his narrative. This article then attempts to tap into the cognitive paradigm of the author where Dan 5, as a textual medium of communication,⁴ seems to be imbedded.

¹ For a better distinction the term Daniel without italics will be used as an indication to the Book of Daniel. The term *Daniel* in italics will be used in reference to the character *Daniel*.

² Vyvyan C. Evans and Melanie Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (London: LEA, 2006), 5.

³ William Croft and D. Alan Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 7.

⁴ Uwe Becker, *Exegese des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 45.

The research, on which this article is based, forms part of a broader new development within the methodology of studying language and the way in which humans communicate. This new science is known as *cognitive linguistics*. Briefly put, cognitive linguistics involves the study of the complex relationship between language and the mind.⁵

In the article a so-called *spatial-body frameset* is used to analyse the text of Dan 5. In using a spatial-body frameset the article shows how the author of Dan 5 utilises specific spatial concepts, imbedded in his own cognitive worldview, to convey his narrative to his readers.

B PROBLEM

Scholars usually give ample attention to the *Sprachwelt* of biblical texts, yet no one has attempted an exegesis of the Book of Daniel based on cognitive linguistics. A few scholars like Pieter Venter wrote on *space* in Dan 1⁶, yet even he tended to fail in exploring the language of the Daniel texts as a mechanism used by the author to construct certain *reality-spaces* based on human experience, as proposed by Merleau-Ponty.⁷ While scholars acknowledge the *Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben* of biblical texts in their research, they seem to miss the possibility that the author's words are concepts produced by his mind as it embodies his culture and worldviews.

Research on the Book of Daniel and the narrative of Dan 5 can be summarised briefly as follows:

- Different themes such as: God who acts on faithfulness;⁸ Belshazzar's failure to acknowledge the God of Israel; loyalty to God, God's deliverance of the faithful and the acknowledgement of God by gentiles;⁹ protection for the faithful;¹⁰ the judgement of God punishing the pride and idolatry of the Babylonians.¹¹

⁵ Vyvyan C. Evans, Benjamin K. Bergen and Jörg Zinken, *The Cognitive Linguistics Reader* (London-Oakville: Equinox, 2007), 3.

⁶ Pieter M. Venter, "Space in Daniel 1," *OTE* 19/3 (2006): 993-1004.

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith; New York: Humanities Press, 2005), 335-342.

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel* (vol. 1; trans. Thomas Myers; Edinburg: Calvin Translation Society, 1852), 325-348.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 204-210.

¹⁰ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008); Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 429.

¹¹ Arthur Jeffrey and Gerald Kennedy, "The Book of Daniel," in *IB* VI:355-549.

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- Broad overviews analysing the Book of Daniel verse by verse.¹²
 - Historical problems; possible settings for Dan 5 at the time of the fall of the Babylonian Empire and the link with when the book was written in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanus; succession of kings.¹³
 - The structure and two languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) of the Book of Daniel as well as its apocalyptic nature.¹⁴
 - The interpretation of Dan 1-6 as court tales of contest with the main characters as *Daniel*, the friends of *Daniel* and the wise men of Babylon.¹⁵
 - The cultic motifs found in the Book of Daniel and the function of the concept "throne" in the narratives of Dan 5 and 7.¹⁶
 - The Book of Daniel as a Theophany of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Other issues in the study of Daniel are: "the son of man" in ch. 7; the textual form of the book; the genre; social setting; the history of interpretation and the theology and ethics of the book.¹⁸

¹² Edward E. Hindson and Woodrow M. Kroll (eds.), *The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary* (Vancouver: Nelson Publishers, 1994), 1627-1635; Gerhard C. Aalders, *Daniël* (Kampen: N.V. Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, 1962); Frederic W. Farrar, "The Book of Daniel," *ExpBib* 4: 351-432; John Joseph Collins, "Daniel," in *Hermeneia* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 237-256.

¹³ Robert A. Anderson, *Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ITC; Edinburgh: The Handsel Press LTD, 1984), 51-63; Sharon P. Pace, *Daniel* (SHBC; Macon Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2008), 13-14, 159-194; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (NAC; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); André La Cocque, "Daniel," in *The International Bible Commentary* (ed. William R. Farmer; Colleagueville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 1085-1107.

¹⁴ Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel* (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978); Markus M. Witte, "The Book of Daniel," in *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament* (eds. Jan C. Gertz, Angelika Berlejung, Konrad Schmid and Markus Witte; New York, N.Y.: T&T Clark, 2012), 643-668; Paul L. Redditt, *Daniel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 4-5, 13.

¹⁵ W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 20-69; Anderson, *Signs and Wonders*, 51-63.

¹⁶ Winfried Vogel, *The Cultic Motif in the Book of Daniel* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010).

¹⁷ Gareth Crossley, *The Old Testament Explained and Applied* (Auburn: Evangelical Press, 2002), 601-621.

¹⁸ John J. Collins, "Current Issues in the Study of Daniel," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition & Reception* (vol. 1; eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2001), 1-15.

Some scholars such as W. Sibley Towner, Gareth Crossley, Amy Willis and Markus Witte stress the sovereignty of the God of Israel and even state that God is the director of time who has the power to act outside the land of Israel.¹⁹ Yet none of these scholars connects this theme to any aspect of cognitive linguistics. The research done in this article will also emphasise the sovereignty of God and his ability to act in foreign god-spaces, but it will uniquely do so from the vantage point of cognitive linguistics. In this way this article takes the new developments in the study of languages into account.

This article is unique in that it differs from previous research in two ways. Firstly, it uses a *spatial-body frameset* based on cognitive linguistics to analyse the text of Dan 5. Such an approach to Dan 5 has not been used by biblical scholars before. Secondly, as shown above, most scholars identify the main characters of the narrative as *Daniel*, Belshazzar or the Babylonian wise men. Some of the abovementioned scholars identify the God of Israel as director of time and judgement. Yet no scholar interprets Dan 5 as being part of a larger narrative that stretches from Dan 1-5(6) and that can be described as either a *clash of deities* or a *deity war*. This article shows that Dan 5 is a narrative about the final clash between the God of Israel and Marduk in a battle for authority over the Babylonian Empire. Not only does the author of Dan 5 demonstrate to his readers that the God of Israel can operate outside the land of Israel, but he also shows that the Israelite God is the supreme ruler of all kingdoms and other god-spaces. It is true that other methods could be used to indicate God's capability to act outside Israel, as Towner²⁰ suggests, but up until recent research Dan 1-6 are interpreted as stories about *Daniel* and *his* friends maintaining their faith with God acting on their behalf. However, this article uniquely treats the stories of Dan 1-6 as stories about the God of Israel. Furthermore this article treats these subordinate stories as events that can be linked together into a larger and more primary narrative about the God of Israel as the main character. In the different events of Dan 1-6 the author utilises *Daniel* and his friends, the different temples, cities and locations as *spatial markers* to construct the reality of the God's supremacy. This different nuance in approaching the text is only possible because of cognitive linguistics.

C METHODOLOGY

Studies in the field of linguistics show that space outlines one of the most vital basic conceptual domains of human cognition.²¹ Linguistic research conducted

¹⁹ Towner, *Daniel*, 20-29; Crossley, *Old Testament*, 601-621; Amy C. M. Willis, *Dissonance and the Drama of Divine Sovereignty in the Book of Daniel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); Witte, "Book of Daniel," 643-668.

²⁰ Towner, *Daniel*, 20-29.

²¹ Martin Haspelmath, *From Space to Time: Temporal Adverbials in the World's Languages* (München: Lincom Europa, 1997), 1.

by Haspelmath²² and Jordan Zlatev²³ found that *space*, as well as the metaphorical use of the human *body*, form essential parts of human thinking and that all human behaviour is located in *space* and constructed from it.²⁴ The research also claims that space forms an integral part of the way in which people express themselves.²⁵

Zlatev²⁶ and Merleau-Ponty²⁷ argue that as people experience the world around them, they construct spaces to help them make sense of their environment. Through these experienced structural *spaces* specific phenomena can be categorised or described, for example *below* a bridge, *on top* of a mountain, *inside* a house, *outside* a house, *under* a tree, et cetera. Some environments, such as those of the church or temple, are even experienced and treated as a *holy* or *sacred space*. By cognitively constructing such spaces we sometimes instinctively use our bodies to describe these spaces in an abstract sense. Two examples follow: The *head* of the table is normally the space where the *head* of the family or an honorary guest sits. The space where a river flows into the sea is called the *mouth* of the river. Thus, interaction with the world around us, as well as our experience of it, occurs through the metaphor of our bodies. It also means that we as humans give meaning to the spaces we live in through our bodies.²⁸

In this article a spatial-body frameset is employed to interpret the texts of Dan 5. The author's use of *sacred* and *contested* space is investigated specifically. An overview of cognitive spatial markers in texts, as well as an overview of the ancient worldview of the author is thus given.

1 Spatial Markers for Embodied Spaces

Human experience and consciousness takes spatial and material form in different *locations* and *entities*.²⁹ Cognitively, these different locations and entities are defined as *embodied space*. There are thus different ways in which spaces can be created by human experience and consequently, different ways that spaces can be defined by the use of language.

²² Haspelmath, *Space to Time*, 1.

²³ Jordan Zlatev, "Spatial Semantics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics* (eds. Dirk Geeraets and Hubert Cuyckens; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 318.

²⁴ Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1.

²⁵ Zlatev, "Spatial Semantics," 318-319.

²⁶ Zlatev, "Spatial Semantics," 318-319.

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 335-342.

²⁸ Venter, "Space in Daniel," 993-1004.

²⁹ Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, *Anthropology of Space*, 2.

To identify *spaces* within a text, scholars indexed *markers* by which different *embodied spaces* can be recognised. These spatial markers can be summarised as follows: *the human body* as a vessel of the *self*; *body-space*, which centres on the human body; *gendered spaces*; *inscribed spaces*; *contested spaces*; *trans-national space*;³⁰ *trajectory*; *landmark*; *frame of reference*; *region*; *path*; *direction* and *motion*.³¹ Some of these *spaces* will overlap. The way in which humans experience these different *spaces* is naturally defined by and imbedded in people's worldview and culture.³² Thus it can be concluded that *spaces* are domains of human thinking.³³

In this article different aspects of these spatial markers are combined with the human experience of *sacred* or *holy space*. *Sacred space* facilitates human interaction with their environment on a spiritual level.³⁴ For the inexperienced eye it may seem that *sacred spaces* overlap with other forms of *embodied spaces*. A tree may seem to be part of a larger forest and a building could be understood as just another house or office, but because of a religious experience a specific tree could be singled out as a *holy tree* and therefore treated differently as the rest of a forest. In the same way buildings such as temples or churches are religiously experienced as *sacred* and therefore treated differently. In the HB the Temple differs from other houses for it is revered as the house of the Israelite Deity.³⁵ The same can be said of Mount Zion. It is not just a *landmark*; it is the Holy Mountain of God.³⁶

2 Spatial-Hermeneutical Frameset

The ancient worldview of the HB can broadly be described as follows (see figure 1 below).³⁷ The cosmos was divided into the mystical world and the physical world. Usually, the mystical world is associated with the heavens as the dwelling place of the gods or the underworld as dwelling place of the dead. For the purposes of this article, only the heavens, as *living space of the gods*, are important. Cognitively, the heavens can be described as *god-space*. The physi-

³⁰ Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, *Anthropology of Space*, 1-37.

³¹ Zlatev, "Spatial Semantics," 318-350.

³² Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, *Anthropology of Space*, 24-25.

³³ Haspelmath, *Space to Time*, 1.

³⁴ Frederick J. Murphy, *Early Judaism: The Exile to the Time of Jesus* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 35-39.

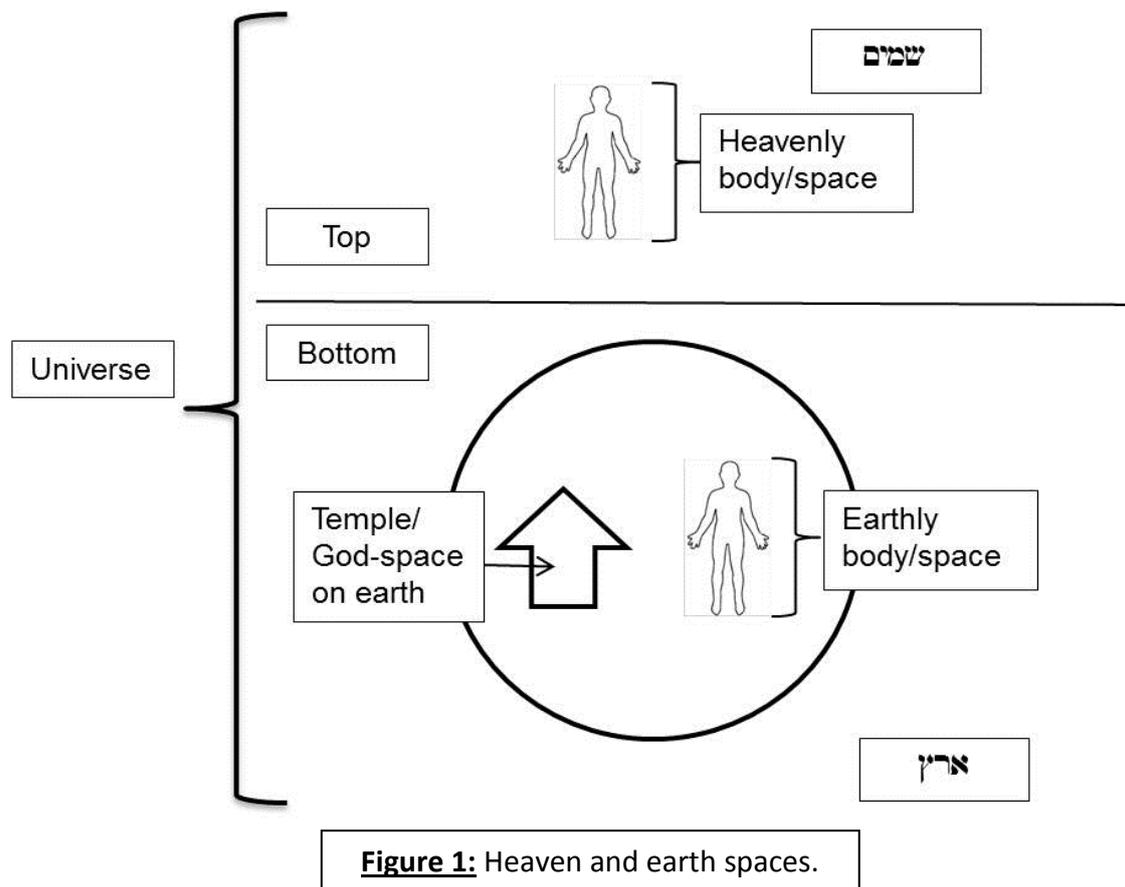
³⁵ Cf. Pss 5:7-8; 79:1, and Hab 2:20.

³⁶ Psalm 48.

³⁷ Joseph J. de Bruyn, "A Clash of Gods – Conceptualising *Space* in Daniel 1," *HvTSt* 70/1 (2014): forthcoming; Joseph J. de Bruyn, "Creating God's Own Right-Hand Man – A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to Psalm 110," *EPhar* 94 N.S. 23 (2012): 456-470; Joseph J. de Bruyn, "A Clash of Space: Reaccessing Spaces and Speech: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to Psalm 2," *JSem* 22/1 (2013): 193-209.

cal world is the dwelling place of humans and can therefore cognitively be described as *human-space*.

Furthermore, heavenly-space or *god-space* can be described as an *embodied vessel* within which the gods live. In the same way *human-space* can be described as an *embodied vessel* within which humans live. Interaction between *heavenly god-space* and *earthly human-space* is possible through people's experience of *holy* or *sacred spaces* on a religious level (figure 1). These *sacred spaces* can manifest in various forms, from something as simple as a river to a complex entity such as a building, an altar or statue and or even the persona of the king.³⁸ Within the cultural worldview of the ancient Near Eastern people, *sacred spaces* were experienced as extensions of the gods' *heavenly god-space*. *Sacred spaces* indicate that specific locations (*human-spaces*) are under the protection and authority of specific deities (as in figure 1).



Most cultures of the Ancient Near East believed that each deity or pantheon of gods had their own spatial domain of power and authority on earth.

³⁸ Joseph J. de Bruyn, "Creating," 94 (2012) N.S. 23, 456-470; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Ada, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 212, 278; Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 35-49.

Usually, specific deities' authority was confined to the national boundaries of the people who worshiped them.³⁹ Traces of this ancient religious worldview are also reflected in the texts of the HB. A short summary follows:

- Textual criticism on Deut 32:8-9 narrates that the peoples of the earth were each given their own territory according to the number of the gods.⁴⁰
- 1 Kgs 20:23 describes how the Arameans assume that the God of the Israelites' authority was confined to the mountains and not the plains.
- Exod 19:5-6 together with Deut 14:2 state that as a nation, Israel was the sacred property of God.
- Jerusalem was accepted as the sacred city of God, while Mount Zion was His holy throne.⁴¹
- The Temple in Jerusalem represented the heavenly dwelling place of the Israelite Deity.⁴²
- Together, Zion and Jerusalem were religiously experienced as the *axis mundi* between heaven and earth.⁴³
- The Davidic king is also accepted as an earthly extension of the Israelite God's *heavenly god-space*.⁴⁴

From all this one can conclude that in texts cities, mountains and temples can be viewed as more than mere geographical landmarks. Based on the ancient worldview of the Ancient Near East cities, mountains, temples and even specific people can be viewed as *sacred spaces* or *vessels*.

Additionally, during wartime, each nation called upon their gods to protect them. If a nation lost a battle it was assumed that this nation's gods were not strong enough to protect its people or to give them victory. It was also believed that if a nation and its gods lost a war, the spatial territories of the losing deities became subjected to the authority of the gods and nation who were victorious. Hints of this belief are reflected in Ps 137 and Isa 36.

In Ps 137 the Israelites are challenged to sing about Zion as the stronghold of their God, although they were not physically near Zion. Many Israelites

³⁹ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern*, 97-102.

⁴⁰ See textual criticism on v. 8 in BHS; Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 159.

⁴¹ Psalm 48

⁴² Cf. Ps 29; Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern*, 113-135; Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 68.

⁴³ W. Lee Humphreys, *Crisis and Story: Introduction to the Old Testament* (Illustrated ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 61, 64-67.

⁴⁴ De Bruyn, "Creating," 456-470.

refused to sing their songs of worship in the land of foreign gods for they feared the possibility that their God did not have the power to operate in foreign territory.⁴⁵

In Isa 36 the Assyrian king warns Hezekiah not to trust in YHWH, for He could not protect his city of Samaria. The Assyrian king states that no other gods are able to protect their people against the king of Assyria and his gods.

It is quite possible that the author(s) of Dan 5 wrote this narrative in answer to the doubts people may have about God's authority in foreign countries. This possibility is examined from a viewpoint based on cognitive linguistics.

3 Clarifying Terminology

For a clear distinction between the different deities of Israel and Babylon, the following descriptions are used: The Babylonian gods are described collectively under the name of the Babylonian high-god Marduk, also known as Bel.⁴⁶ In the text of Dan 5 the God of Israel (*Daniel*) is named and described as Elohim.

A distinction is also made between a *larger/dominant narrative* and *lesser/subordinant narratives*. The phrase *larger narrative* is used to signify the theme that stretches from Dan 1 to Dan 5, unifying them in a single narrative that is described in this article as a *clash of deities* or a *deity war*. At the same time the phrase *lesser narrative(s)* is used to signify the narrative(s) that can be identified in Dan 5 as *the last battle between the God of Israel and Marduk*.

D APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY

In its final form Dan 1-6 is much more than just stories about *Daniel* and his friends at foreign courts. Analysing Dan 5 from the viewpoint of a spatial-body frameset indicates that the narrative is a story about the God of Israel who challenges the Babylonian gods. Daniel 5 forms part of a larger narrative that already originates in Dan 1. This more overriding narrative can indeed be described as a *deity war* or a *clash of deities*.⁴⁷ Utilising spatial markers, the author of Dan 5 shows his readers that indeed, Elohim has the ability to operate outside the spatial domain of the land of Israel. Not only can Elohim operate beyond the borders of Israel, He can challenge and defeat other deities within their own spatial domains of authority.

In the final form of the Book of Daniel, the events or stories of chs. 1 to 6 are linked together by the author who utilises spatial-body concepts to con-

⁴⁵ Frank L. Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (vol. 3 of *Psalms*; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 515-516.

⁴⁶ Tzvi Abusch, "Marduk," *DDD*: 1014-1025.

⁴⁷ De Bruyn, "A Clash of Gods," forthcoming.

struct a more dominant narrative about the God of Israel and his supreme rule.⁴⁸ In Dan 1 this larger narrative, that encompasses the whole of the Book of Daniel, is set in motion by the invasion of the God of Israel's god-space (Jerusalem and the Temple) by the Babylonian high-god Marduk. This invasion of Elohim's god-space is, however, overturned and becomes an incursion into Marduk's own god-space.⁴⁹ In Dan 3 the tension rises because the invasion of Marduk's god-space is taken to the next level, i.e. as a *clash of images*. Marduk's authority over the plain of Dura is publicly challenged by the God of Israel. In the smaller narrative of Dan 3, it is shown that the plain of Dura does not belong to Marduk's god-space, but that it is part of the god-space of Elohim.⁵⁰

In this bigger narrative that stretches from Dan 1–5,⁵¹ the denouement of the clash between Elohim and Marduk is found in ch. 5. What started as an invasion of Elohim's god-space is overturned and leads to the destruction of Marduk's own god-space, the Babylonian Empire. Again the author utilises spatial features to convey this message to his readers. The Babylonian Empire does not belong to the god-space of Marduk, but to the god-space of the God of Israel. Not only does Marduk's god-space belong to the God of Israel, but He can also do with it as He sees fit. In this way Marduk himself, falls under the

⁴⁸ In Dan 1 spatial markers such as the cities of Jerusalem and Babylon, the temples of Marduk and the God of Israel, the kings of Judah and Babylon as well as *Daniel* and his friends are used to narrate how the God of Israel starts to invade the god-space of Marduk. First He starts by invading the palace of Marduk's king. In ch. 2 it is shown that no other deity can withstand the invasion of their god-spaces by the God of Israel. In Dan 3 it is shown that not only is the palace of Marduk's king under Elohim's authority, but also the Province of Babylon. In ch. 1 Elohim's king was captured. In Dan 4 Marduk's king is humiliated until he acknowledges the God of Israel as supreme. Daniel 5 shows that what started as a small invasion of Marduk's god-space by Elohim in ch. 1 leads to the downfall of the Babylonian Empire. However, the Babylonian Empire is not ended by the Medes and Persians, but by the God of Israel himself. This is stated in ch. 5 and shown in Dan 6 by the fact that king Darius has no power over *Daniel* who is saved by the God of Israel from the lions. The gods of the Medes and Persians had no power to stop the God of Israel from protecting *Daniel*.

⁴⁹ De Bruyn, "A Clash of Gods," forthcoming.

⁵⁰ The narrative of Dan 3 is not so much a question of God's ability to protect his people from the fire, but rather, it questions to which deity the plain of Dura belongs. When God rescues Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace, the furnace cognitively becomes an image (beacon) to indicate that the plain of Dura belongs to the god-space of the God of Israel and not that of Marduk. In this regard *protection* and *authority* are linked together. If the God of Israel can protect his people without being stopped by Marduk, it is only logic that Elohim's rule is supreme.

⁵¹ Daniel 6 is not included here for the events described in the chapter are not part of a Babylonian setting.

authority of the God of Israel as the God of gods.⁵² The arguments for this cognitive interpretation are presented below.

1 The Narrative of Daniel 5

A broad overview of Dan 5 is given.

Verses 1-4 serve as an introduction. King Belshazzar holds a banquet. The Temple treasures of Elohim are brought to the festivities. This is not done for worship, but as a symbol of degradation. While Belshazzar and his wives eat from Elohim's gold and silver plates, the Babylonian gods are worshiped.

Scholars such as Pace,⁵³ Anderson,⁵⁴ La Cocque⁵⁵ and Collins⁵⁶ are of the opinion that this banquet was held at the royal Babylonian palace the night just before the city of Babylon was captured by Cyrus in 539 B.C.E. Thus, it can be argued that the author suggests that the city of Babylon was under siege while Belshazzar held this royal banquet. In Dan 6 the Medes and Persians has taken over enhancing the suggestion that Belshazzar was killed while Babylon was under siege in ch. 5. It is important to remember that the author is retelling history while utilising Daniel as a spatial marker.

Verses 5-9: Tension begins to rise. A mysterious hand appears on the wall. The words that the hand writes cannot be read by the king or his Babylonian advisors. The king becomes afraid and promises that anyone who is able to read and interpret the word on the wall will be appointed third in rank in the Empire.

Verses 10-12: The character of *Daniel* is introduced as a *vessel* of the gods. Tension continues to rise. Will *Daniel*, a Jew, be able to decipher the writing on the wall and thus succeed where all the wise men of Babylon have failed?

Verses 13-16: The tension continues rising as *Daniel* is brought before the king.

Verses 17-21: With these verses the tension in the narrative rises even more. Daniel is identified not as a vessel of the Babylonian gods, but as a messenger and vessel of the Israelite God. The same God that previously showed that He has the power to not only operate within the god-space of the Babylonian high-god Marduk (Dan 1), but that He can also defeat the Babylonian high-god (Dan 3). *Daniel* explains to Belshazzar that God has the power to do

⁵² Deuteronomy 10:17 and Ps 82.

⁵³ Pace, *Daniel*, 159-193.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Signs and Wonders*, 51-63.

⁵⁵ La Cocque, "Daniel," 1085-1107.

⁵⁶ Collins, "Daniel," 237-255.

what he pleases with kings and kingdoms, just as He did with Belshazzar's predecessor Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4).

Verses 22-24: In these verses it becomes clear that it is indeed the Israelite God who has a message for Belshazzar. *Daniel* states that Belshazzar did not honour the Israelite God just like his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar, who had learnt to do so the hard way.

Verses 25-28: Now the tension in the narrative reaches its climax. *Daniel* interprets the words on the wall: the kingdom of Belshazzar will be given to the Medes and the Persians.

Verses 29-30: The denouement of the narrative takes place in these last verses. *Daniel* is elevated in rank and Belshazzar is killed.

Daniel 6 starts by relating that Darius the Mede is king. From this it can be derived that according to the Book of Daniel, the Babylonian Empire ended with the death of Belshazzar. The Babylonian Empire was taken over by the Medes-Persian Empire and their gods. However, the narrative of Dan 5 clearly indicates that it was the God of Israel who gave the Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians.

2 Marduk and Elohim's Final Battle

In Dan 5 the god-space of Marduk is indicated by the following:

- the Babylonian king, Belshazzar;
- the images of the Babylonian pantheon;
- the banquet hall;

The smaller narrative of Dan 5 starts with no indications of any spatial markers embodying the God of Israel. Dan 5 thus starts in the same way as Dan 3, for the narrative of Dan 3 starts out with no spatial embodiments of the God of Israel either. Within the cognitive worldview of the ancient Near Eastern people, this would have been expected since the story is set deep within Marduk's god-space. No foreign gods were supposed to have any spatial authority within the god-space of the Babylonian high-god. Only one high-god can hold authority over a specific god-space. The exact reasons for the banquet held by Belshazzar are not indicated in the text of Dan 5. However, in v. 4 of the narrative it is stated that Belshazzar and his guests praised the images of their gods. In light of the possibility that the city of Babylon was under siege by the Medes and Persians, it is possible that the banquet was an opportunity to call on Marduk's protection against the foreign invaders. As high-god Marduk was the

protector of not only Belshazzar,⁵⁷ his king, but also of the entire Babylonian Empire. As protector of the realm, Marduk is called upon to take a stand against the enemies of Babylon and to defend his god-space. It is only natural then to assume that no embodiments proclaiming the authority of foreign gods would be present, except for when such embodiments can be used for humiliation and degradation of other deities in the presence of Marduk in order to honour the high-god.

According to vv. 22-23, the degradation and humiliation of the God of Israel was the exact reason behind Belshazzar bringing Elohim's Temple treasures to the banquet. This sacred treasure was originally made to glorify the God of Israel, but since He was supposed to be a conquered Deity, Elohim's Temple treasure was now used as a symbol of mockery by the Babylonian king. This is in congruence with the reason why Elohim's Temple treasures were brought to Babylon and placed in Marduk's temple in the first place (Dan 1:1-4).⁵⁸ In the eyes of the Babylonians the God of Israel was a conquered Deity whose god-spaces belonged to Marduk who had invaded Elohim's holy city of Jerusalem as well as his Temple. According to *Daniel* (Dan 5:22), Nebuchadnezzar was the predecessor of Belshazzar. Despite Nebuchadnezzar's victories over the kingdom of Judah, the Babylonian king and his high-god Marduk soon learned that the God of Israel is not restricted to structured god-spaces as most ancient near eastern cultures believed deities were. Not only could the Israelite God operate within Marduk's god-space, but even as a so-called degraded deity, He could still defeat Marduk within his own god-space. Elohim's power and ability to operate outside cognitive structured god-spaces, was later recognised by Nebuchadnezzar.⁵⁹ Belshazzar seemed to have forgotten the lessons his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had learned with regard to the God of Israel. Later on in the narrative Belshazzar's error is pointed out to him by *Daniel* (Dan 5:22). Instead of calling on Elohim for help, Belshazzar possibly still believed that Marduk would protect him and his kingdom. This is not stated by the text, but it is stated that Belshazzar in his arrogance set himself up against Elohim.

On Belshazzar's command (Dan 5:2) the Temple treasures of Elohim are brought to the banquet. The king and his guests want to use these treasures for their pleasure and in doing so, humiliate Elohim – the conquered God. The narrative of Dan 5 now takes an interesting turn. Although the banquet hall starts out as part of the god-space of Marduk, it soon becomes what can cognitively be described as *contested space*.⁶⁰ Just as in Dan 3, Marduk's authority is challenged unexpectedly.

⁵⁷ Collins, "Daniel," 243.

⁵⁸ De Bruyn, "A Clash of Gods," forthcoming; La Cocque, "Daniel," 1085-1107.

⁵⁹ Daniel 3:28-30 and Dan 4.

⁶⁰ Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, *Anthropology of Space*, 1-37.

Suddenly a hand appears and begins to write on one of the walls. This frightens the Babylonian king who is devoted to Marduk. Neither he nor his counsellors could read the words the hand had written. It is safe to argue that Belshazzar would have assumed that the written words were a message or omen from the gods. But why then was he, as the representative of Marduk (see fig. 1), and his wise men unable to read the written words? As the narrative progresses it turns out that the message was indeed not from Marduk, but in fact from a deity who challenged Marduk.

The challenge to Marduk's authority comes from a deity who was supposed to have been defeated and his territories conquered. The challenger turns out to be the same Deity whose Temple treasures were used by the king as a symbol of degradation. The queen persuaded the king to call on the Jew *Daniel*, for he is someone in whom the gods reside (vv. 10-12).

However, when *Daniel* is brought before the king it becomes clear that he is not a vessel of the Babylonian gods, but a vessel of the true God of Israel. *Daniel* was thus a vessel of the same God who previously challenged Marduk on more than one occasion and who had even defeated Marduk within his own god-space (Dan 1 and 3). In this way, the author utilises *Daniel* as a spatial marker Elohim.⁶¹ The message on the wall was from the God of Israel.

As stated above, Dan 1–5 forms a larger narrative that describes the war between two deities (i.e. Elohim and Marduk). In Dan 1 and 3 Elohim showed that He had the ability to overpower Marduk within the high-god's own god-space. In Dan 1, the God of Israel starts to invade Marduk's god-space. In Dan 3-4 it is shown that Marduk loses authority over his own territory (i.e. the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon) and his king. Cognitively the battle between Elohim and Marduk enters its final round in Dan 5. Marduk took up his defences in Belshazzar's banquet hall. All the other Babylonian gods are present as well. Ultimately Marduk's last defences are defeated.

From the context of the subordinate narrative of Dan 5 it is clear that the hand that wrote on the wall was sent by Elohim. Cognitively speaking the hand is an extension of Elohim's authority and god-space. It can be considered as Elohim Himself who wrote on the wall. As with *Daniel*, the author utilises the hand on the wall as a spatial embodiment of Elohim. On a cognitive level two things happened when Elohim wrote on the wall. Firstly Elohim bridged Marduk's last defences by connecting the space outside the banquet hall with the space of Marduk inside the hall (see figure 2 below). From the larger more dominant narrative of Dan 1-5 it is clear that at this stage in the battle between the two deities, the space outside the banquet hall (i.e. the plain of Dura and the

⁶¹ Pierre Jordaan describes *Daniel* as a weapon for attack and defence. See Pierre Jordaan, "Daniel as Weapon for Attack and Defense Through the Ages," *EPhar* 90 N.S. 19 (2008): 45-53.

province of Babylon) already belong to Elohim and not Marduk. In this way the banquet hall becomes what can cognitively be described as *contested space*. Secondly, through the writing on the wall, it becomes what can cognitively be described as *inscribed space*. When Elohim inscribed the wall He cognitively proclaimed that the royal banquet hall also belonged to his god-space and not to that of Marduk. Two tests are now given to Marduk and if he passes, he can still proclaim his authority. The first test posed to him is to give his wise men the knowledge to read and interpret the writings and the second test is to protect his king and thus the city of Babylon.

Marduk fails the first test for not only could his appointed king not read the writings on the wall, but neither could the king's wise men. *Daniel*, as a vessel of Elohim, was the only one who could read and interpret the writing on the wall. The message proclaims the authority and power of Elohim. According to the writing, Elohim will conquer the last of Marduk's god-spaces and then He will give Marduk's god-space (i.e. the Babylonian Empire) to the Medes and the Persians. Thus cognitively, Elohim proclaims authority over the Medes and the Persians and even their gods too. It is not the gods of the Medes and the Persians who conquered the Babylonian Empire, but Elohim and on his command Marduk's god-space will be given to them (see figure 2). As the supreme Deity, the God of Israel can give territories to whomever He wants. This correlates with Ps 82, Isa 45-47 and 2 Macc 1:10-17.

That night Marduk also failed the second test for he could not protect his appointed king or his city. The same night Belshazzar, the son of Marduk and as such the embodiment of the Babylonian high-god on earth (fig. 1), is killed (v. 30). La Cocque states that on the same night Cyrus captured the Babylonian city without resistance, during an orgy at the royal palace.⁶² With the death of his king and the capturing of his city by the enemy, Marduk loses the deity war that started in Dan 1 between him and Elohim.

What started out as a glorious conquest for Marduk in the beginning of the Book of Daniel is turned around into a shameful defeat for the Babylonian high-god by the God of Israel. Thus, even though the narrative of Dan 5 starts with no indication of spatial embodiments of Elohim, the narrative ends proclaiming not only the banquet hall for Elohim, but marking the whole Babylonian Empire as Elohim's god-space.

⁶² La Cocque, "Daniel," 1085-1107.

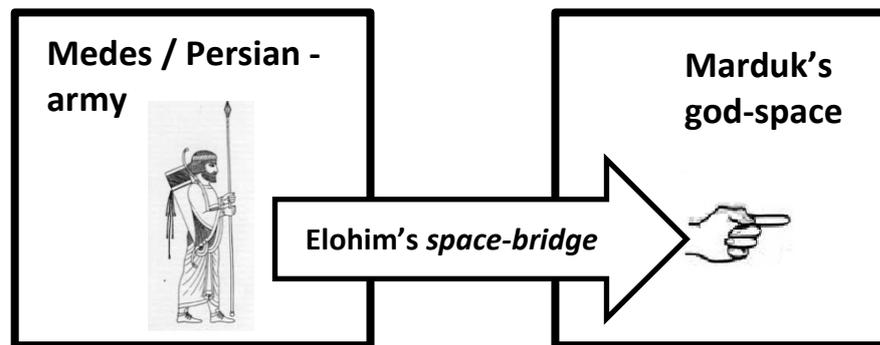


Figure 2: Elohim bridging Marduk's defences.
"The hand against the wall"

With the subordinate narrative of Dan 5 as well as with the more dominant narrative of Dan 1-5, the author shows his readers that Elohim's authority and rule are not regulated by earthly structured *god-spaces*. In narrating his story within a *spatial-frameset*, the author demonstrates to his readers that Elohim's rule is supreme, seeing that Elohim can operate within the jurisdiction of other gods and they are unable to prevent Him from doing so. The author once again answers any doubts that people may have as to the authority of Elohim. The Babylonian gods are exposed and defeated: they are not stronger than the god of Israel. If the God of Israel can operate within Marduk's god-space and can even defeat the high-god and give his god-space to other gods and their kings, the God of Israel can operate anywhere. Therefore the Jews should not be afraid to sing God's praises, even within a profane and foreign world, as it seems to them, according to Ps 137.

The God of Israel's god-space is shown to reach everywhere and it even includes the territories of other deities. In the light of this assurance God's chosen people do not have to fear the profane world, neither other nations nor their gods who want to challenge Elohim's rule on earth. The God of Israel has not forgotten His people and furthermore is not incapable of being present and operating in Babylon, as some may have thought at that time (cf. Isa 40:27). On the contrary, the God of Israel is omnipresent, seeing as His god-space is universal.

This cognitive analysis of Dan 5 is in congruence with the apocalyptic nature of the Book of Daniel.⁶³ According to an apocalyptic worldview a distinction is made between the spiritual and natural world. The challenges and hardships that God's people experience is due to a battle in the spiritual world between the forces of Elohim and the forces of evil. The sufferings of Elohim's

⁶³ Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 126-136; La Cocque, "Daniel," 1085-1107.

people is thus not because of His incapability to protect them, but it is part of a bigger universal picture where the battle between the God of Israel and his opponents extends to every aspect of the cosmos, including human life. Ultimately all the kingdoms of the earth are part of Elohim's god-space.⁶⁴

It is important to remember that the Book of Daniel was written to guide the Jews who lived under the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.⁶⁵ These Jews faced prosecution on a daily basis.⁶⁶ For these Jews the narratives of Dan 1, 3 and 5 meant that they should not fear the Hellenistic onslaught and the foreign gods. They were given the assurance that even though they may suffer as a nation, Elohim's rule was considered to be supreme and He would help and protect His people throughout their suffering. As shown in Dan 5 Elohim is in control of all the kingdoms of the earth. It meant that God is also in control of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Seleucid Empire. In this regard the narrative of Dan 5 corresponds with the narrative of 2 Macc 1. In 2 Macc 1 the author narrates that even though heathen kings like Demetrius or Antiochus IV defiled God's city of Jerusalem and his Temple, they cannot conquer His god-space for God's authority is universal. Therefore when Antiochus died in the temple of Nania, it was proclaimed that it was not the goddess Nania who defeated Antiochus, but the God of Israel, because ultimately all deities are under his control (2 Macc 1:10-17) as it is reflected in Ps 82. In correspondence with Dan 5, it was not the gods of the Medes and the Persians who defeated Marduk, but the God of Israel. Therefore the Jews should keep to their faith, just as *Daniel* and his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did in the narratives of Dan 1-5.

G CONCLUSION

The application of a spatial-body frameset to the narrative of Dan 5 shows that it is part of a larger narrative that already starts in Dan 1. Utilising spatial markers, the author of Dan 5 demonstrates to his readers that the God of Israel is not bound to humanly-structured god-spaces as other deities are. Not only can the God of Israel act outside of the land of Israel, He can defeat other deities within their own territories, thus showing that his authority is supreme.

In Dan 5 Elohim's supremacy is shown in that He bridges and conquers Marduk's last god-space. When the God of Israel conquered the banquet hall as the last stronghold of Marduk, the deity war that started between them in Dan 1 is ended. Marduk's king is killed and his empire is given away by Elohim to other deities and rulers. In his own way the author attempts to persuade his readers that the God of Israel's authority is universal and not bound to a particular spatial context. Thus this article reveals that Dan 1-5 (and 6) are not stories about *Daniel* and his friends, but rather didactic narratives about the God of

⁶⁴ Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 126-136.

⁶⁵ Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 126-136, 152.

⁶⁶ Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 152.

Israel. This more dominant narrative is built up by the events of the subordinate stories found in Dan 1-5 (6). These lesser stories are linked together in that the author utilises spatial markers such as *Daniel* and his friends, the wall and banquet hall to tell a larger narrative that can be described as a *deity war*.

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Joseph Jacobus de Bruyn, School of Ancient Languages and Text Studies, North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). *Email*: jacobus.debruyn@gmx.com.