

# YAHWEH, THE ANIMAL TAMER: JUNGLES, WILD ANIMALS AND YAHWEH'S SOVEREIGNTY IN THE APOCALYPTIC SPACE OF DANIEL 7:1-28

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## Abstract

*Jewish Apocalyptic imagination often treats politics as a wild jungle with kings and empire builders as beasts and monsters. Polemically situated in this jungle-like rhetoric, human kings are animalized and intentionally implicated in the theological arrangements of this horrifying sub-human space. Considering the active deployment of this literary device in apocalyptic genre, the paper engages the spatiality of the wild space from the recent discourses of the poetics of spaces in general and the specific appropriations of these critical works to biblical studies. Consequently, the study presents the poetics of the wild space in Daniel 7:1-28 in the subtle portrait of Yahweh as the "Animal Tamer" who rules over this apocalyptic jungle. Reading the entire book of Daniel in this zoological mapping, the paper underscores the extended use of wild space in the rhetoric of this particular passage, especially the apocalyptic poetics of Yahweh as the sovereign Lord of the wild space.*

**Keywords:** Animals; Apocalyptic literature; Polemics; Sovereignty; Hunting; Poetics, Daniel; Politics

## Introduction

The conceptual template of the apocalyptic writings generally employs extended imagery in the crafting of its narrative world.<sup>1</sup> Staged within this domain, characters are often represented in a symbolic universe which describes realities using zoological polemics. One common apocalyptic construct is the representation of politics as a jungle and the influential characters in this world as beast, dragon or—other fierce-looking animals.<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, the real world is staged as a habitat of

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher B. Hays rightly observed, "Throughout human history, writers and artists have used animal imagery extensively to describe something other than animals themselves, so that the animals function as metaphors." See Hays, C.B. (2007) *Chirps from the dust: The affliction of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:30 in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*. *JBL* 128(2), 307.

<sup>2</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, modern scholarship has recognized the presence and dominance of the horror genre. On this study, for example see Kalmanofsky, Amy. 2008. *Israel's baby: The horror of child birth in the Biblical Prophets*. *Biblical Interpretation* 16: 60-82. Similarly, this trend in biblical scholarship has explored the use of monster theory in understanding the representations of the Hebrew Bible. Concerning the varieties of perspectives of these studies see Grafius, Brandon R. 2017. *Text and terror: Monster theory and the Hebrew Bible*. *Currents in Biblical Research* 16(10): 34-49.

wild life and a horrifying space. Describing this apocalyptic representation, Rivka Ulmer observed,

In their [descriptions] of the past, many apocalypses utilized animals as symbols of nations and kingdoms; the texts frame history as if it were predictive prophecy with a new range of beasts to appear after each kingdom that ruled the land. (Ulmer 2007:50).

Interestingly, the representation of reality in this jungle template creates and intensifies the plot of the apocalyptic narrative since the cosmic drama is presented in “predator and prey” mode. In the represented world of apocalyptic narrative, the people of God are often represented as the prey and the evil world system as the predator.<sup>3</sup> Using this jungle construct, the apocalyptic literature further evokes the image of the political world as wild habitat, and the people of God, as the hunted and the evil empires as the hunter (Frilingos 2004). Located in the ideology of this discourse, kings and empire builders are often represented as wild beasts and the remaining humanity as their prey.<sup>4</sup> To further encourage the wildness of the apocalyptic world, the author often represents the kings and royalty in the forms of mythological creatures such as dragons, monsters and horrifying looking aliens.<sup>5</sup> In this representation, one sees invariably the fears of wild life by the ancient people, and the attending assumption that human society has actually become a jungle. In this jungle, humans are not represented as humans, but as wild animals.

On the other hand, Yahweh is absolutely distanced from this representation and his sovereignty as the lord of the wild space is directly underscored. Interestingly, in spite of the wildness of the human kings and kingdoms in apocalyptic literature, Yahweh’s supremacy as the lord of the wild space is clearly acknowledged. In fact, not only is he the lord of the human jungle, but he tames every beast in apocalyptic

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<sup>3</sup> For the importance of animal symbolism in the ancient world see Chikako E. Watanabe, Chikato E. 2002. *Animal symbolism in Mesopotamia: A contextual approach*. Wiener Offene Orientalistik 1. Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien. See also Annie Caubet, Annie. 2002. Animals in Syro-Palestinian art. in Collins, Billie Jean. (ed), *A history of the animal world in the Ancient Near East* HO 1/64 Leiden: Brill.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch*, nations are symbolically represented as wild animals. On this study see Tiller, Patrick A. 1993. *A commentary on the animal apocalypse of 1 Enoch*. SBLEJL 4. Atlanta: Scholar Press. On the close relationship between the book of Daniel and the *Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch* see Kvanvig, Helge S. 2005. Throne visions and monsters: The encounter between Danielic and Enochic traditions. *ZAW* 117: 249–272; Davila, J. R. 2005. The animal apocalypse and Daniel. in Boccaccini, G.(ed.), *Enoch and Christian origins: New light on a forgotten connection*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 35-38.

<sup>5</sup> The portrayal of the political life as a jungle possibly comes from the direct representation of ancient royalty in terms of animal symbols and totems. In fact, ancient and modern kings have often employed the services of fearful animal symbols or totems to represent their kingly authority. For example, in ancient Babylon, Babylonian kings used the popular winged lions to describe and represent their sovereign power and authority. In China, monster and theriomorphic masks are worn by the ruling elites. Concerning these monster masks, Ladislav Kesner observed, “the monster mask and other therio- and zoomorphic forms were used by the ruling class to frighten and manipulate the lower strata...” [See Kesner, L. 1991. The Taotie reconsidered: Meanings and functions of the Shang theriomorphic imagery. *Artibus Asiae* 51(1/2), 49]. In modern times, America uses the eagle, and Britain the lion in their presidential and royal insignias.

narrative to work in line with his sovereign and cosmic purposes. While the polemic character of this representation is no doubt obvious, the narrative importance of these zoological constructs in apocalyptic literature has unfortunately not received adequate attention.<sup>6</sup> In the framework of the foregoing, the present study shows the construct of apocalyptic reality as a wild space and the underlying significance of Yahweh's representation as the lord of the wild life in the pericope under study.

### **The Mapping of Wild Space and Apocalyptic Spatiality**

Using space theory at this point, Michel Foucault in his work, "Different Spaces," has described spaces in two interesting dimensions of "utopia" and "heterotopias" (Foucault 1998:175-185). According to him, the utopia spaces are spaces (or emplacements) that are not real—while "heterotopias" refer to spaces that are real places (Foucault 1986:22-27; Foucault 1998:175-185). To show this distinction, Foucault employed the example of a mirror to explain the double signatures of "real" and "unreal places" suggested in his usage of "utopia" and "heterotopias" for places (Foucault 1998:179). For Foucault, mirror situated in a particular space could capture or reflect an object outside itself thereby translating a tangible object from its space of realness to another dimension of unrealness through the reflection from the mirror (Foucault 1998:179). In this Foucault's analogy, the mirror itself is heterotopias because it is a real object—that is located in a particular place but the image or reflection from the mirror is in the domain of the unreal (or the utopia) because the projected image from the mirror is itself in an unreal space (Foucault 1998:179). From this perspective, the mirror has both the utopia and heterotopias qualities of space—it is physical but also transcends physical borders to include the imagined and projected reflections of the physical space.

On the other hand, Henri Lefebvre has engaged space from three descriptions: the physical (or perceived space), the mental (or conceived space), and the social space (or lived space) (Foucault 1999:15-43; Foucault 2000:23)9-244; Foucault 2001:1-18). This last category of space in Lefebvre's thought correlates perfectly with Foucault's heterotopias because it interprets spaces as a projected entity or a social construct embedded with endless imagined possibilities rather than just the description of space in the normal definition of a static matter, physical properties or even motion (Lefebvre 1991; Lefebvre 2014). This third dimension of space in Foucault and Lefebvre invariably translated any space into the domain of endless possibilities, symbolic inferences and new meanings.

Following this construct of space in Foucault and Lefebvre's thoughts, Edward Soja has also reiterated the triad character of space in terms of firstspace, secondspace and thirdspace (Soja 1996; Soja 2000). These three designations correspond to Lefebvre's perceived, conceived and lived spaces respectively but with the additional emphasis on the central importance of the thirdspace in the description of a given space. Similarly, David Harvey has employed different terminologies, namely material spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation to describe these three preceding dimensions of space descriptions

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<sup>6</sup> For the treatment of animal images in Proverbs see Tova Forti, Tova. 1996. Animal images in the didactic rhetoric of the Book of Proverbs. *Bib* 77: 48-63.

(Harvey 2009). The insights of these different spatial studies have been appropriated to works in biblical studies in a variety of ways especially in the recognition given to the symbolic and lived spaces—and the centrality of biblical spaces and cultural geographies as important sites of social construct, negotiations and contestations.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, in our discourses on jungle and wild space, we are primarily concerned with the descriptions of apocalyptic space in the dimension of Foucault's heterotopias, Soja's thirdspace, Lefebvre's lived space, and Harvey's spaces of representation. The major contribution of these various studies to biblical studies is that biblical spaces are not merely physical or mental entities, but have important imagined and symbolic functions.

For example, in the Bible, forest, jungles and wild spaces occupied an important place in rhetorical strategy. All three descriptions of jungle and wild space in terms of physical, conceived and social spaces existed in the Hebrew Bible. Thus in these Biblical representations, kings exploited the physical timbers of this space for woods (Neh 2:8 cf. Ezek 39:10); idol industries of ancient Israel are crafted from choice trees grown in this particular space (Isa 44:13-14); Yahweh declared his ownership of the forest (Psalm 50:9-11) and supplies the needs of the animals in the wild space (Psalm 104:20-22; Isa 56:9); and Yahweh also promised to protect Israel from wild animals (Ezek 34:25); Yahweh's judgment will fall on Israel by decimating her forests (Isa 10:18-19; Ezek 20:46-48; cf. Zechariah 11:1-3); important battles are fought in Israel's forests (2 Sam 18:6), and the jungles are designated space which is given as an inheritance to brave warriors (Josh 17:14-18). On the other hand, kings protect the forest space for aesthetic purposes (1 Kings 10:21); the forest offers protection and refuge for the hunted and the oppressed (1 Sam 22:5), the cutting of trees and clearing of forests signify the fall of kings and people (2 Kings 19:22-24); Israel's existence is also analogous to the wild space (Micah 5:8); the trees of the forests are expected to sing for joy at the sight of God's judgment (1 Chron 16:33); and the voice of Yahweh exercises authority and dominion over the forest space (Psalm 29:3-9).

Drawing from these different semantics of forest/jungle in Biblical thought, the book of Daniel appropriated this motif to assert the lordship of Yahweh over the political structures of the entire earth (Pippi 2008). The apocalyptic space has often appropriated various important perspectives on spaces in order to assert its theological agenda. The apocalyptic writings have often employed the services of some reoccurring spaces in its delivery of eschatological messages. The common apocalyptic spaces are the battleground, the palace space (or the throne room), the temple space, the harvest space, the angelic/demonic space, the persecuted space of the faith community, the dystopia/utopia spaces, musical/singing scenes, and the spaces of festivity, victory march and celebrations. In Christian apocalyptic thoughts, there are additional spaces such as the marriage/prostitution scenes and

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<sup>7</sup> For a recent description of modern scholarship in the appropriation of space theory to biblical scholarship see Schreiner, Patrick. 2016. Space, place, and Biblical studies: A survey of recent research in light of developing trends. *Currents in Biblical Research* 14(3): 340-371. Also see Prosic, Tamara. 2016. The 'threshing floor' as sacred space in the Hebrew Bible: A spatial and anthropological perspective. in de Vos, J. Cornelis Økland, Jorunn Wenell, Karen J. (eds), *Constructions of space III*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 58-74.

spaces devoted to the building of a new city as seen in the end of the book of Revelation. In such Christian apocalyptic thought, animals and wild spaces are featured especially in the theological mapping of the apocalyptic visions in the book of Revelation—in the images of the lamb and the lion of the tribe of Judah for Christ, and the beasts and the dragon for anti-Christ and Satan respectively.

Seen from this perspective, we approached the spatiality of the apocalyptic wild space from the theological foundations of the preceding biblical thoughts, and the theoretical trajectory established in the works of spatial philosophers highlighted in the preceding discourse. Specifically, we explored the spatial dynamism of wild space as presented in Foucault's heterotopias, Lefebvre's lived space, Soja's thirdspace and Harvey's spaces of representation. Appropriating these philosophical thoughts in our discourse on apocalyptic wild space, the space moved from its physical and geographical character in apocalyptic literature and—in the book of Daniel in particular—it becomes a lived space which subtly asserts the sovereignty of Yahweh over the representations of political actors as beasts and wild animals of the jungle. As we shall see, this apocalyptic arrangement of wild space underscored the power of Yahweh as tamer and lord of the wild space.

### **The Jungle and Wild Animals of Daniel 7:1-28**

According to E.U. Lucas, "the bizarre animal imagery" in the book of Daniel 7-12 has "no precedent in Hebrew prophecy" (Lucas 2000:68). This part of Daniel has also been described as "allegorical animal vision" which starts from "political oracles" to eschatological ones (Goldingay 1989:146). The same apocalyptic imagery is also found in the Animal Apocalypse in I Enoch where "the entire history of the world was described as a conflict between the clean and unclean animals" (Murdock 1967:172, 167-187). Within this apocalyptic template, the political space is often conceived as a wild sphere. In the book of Daniel, for example, while kings are closely associated with the glamour and prestige of the royal life, they are also directly connected to the animal world.<sup>8</sup> In the rhetoric of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar was turned into a wild animal because of his pride and failure to recognize the sovereignty of Yahweh.<sup>9</sup> In describing the story, the narrative reads:

You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes (Daniel 4:25).

In fulfillment of the words of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, the text describes the expulsion of Nebuchadnezzar from his palace and his relocation to the wild

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<sup>8</sup> There are frequent ancient Near eastern parallels to the study of this passage. For the study of these parallels see Jurg Egger, Jurg. 2000. *Influences and traditions underlying the vision of Daniel 7:2-14: The research history from the end of the 19th century to the present*. OBO 177. Fribourg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

<sup>9</sup> On the turning of Nebuchadnezzar into an animal, Helge S. Kvanvig observed, "It is when Nebuchadnezzar enters into a hybridic state, boasting like a divine king to honour his own power, he is transformed to an animal (4, 25–30)." See Kvanvig, "Throne Visions and Monsters," 264.

habitat.<sup>10</sup> In this wild space, Nebuchadnezzar is directly connected to the wild life, and his physical form and nature were altered in order to conform to this new space (Mobley 1997:230-33). Describing the fulfillment of this event, the story said, “Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird” (Daniel 4:33). The king is connected directly to cattle and an eagle in this representation. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar became a horrible animal that is reminiscent of the other subsequent animals found in the main apocalyptic text.<sup>11</sup> While ancient kings are directly connected to wild animals or animal totems, the representation of Nebuchadnezzar as becoming an animal makes a direct mockery of royalty—and seems like a preview of the later association of kings and empire builders with the animal world. In this representation of Nebuchadnezzar, Yahweh’s sovereignty is acknowledged and the reason for his expulsion (or exile) from human society to the animal world came from the failure of Nebuchadnezzar to rightly acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh.<sup>12</sup> Kvanvig rightly observed, “It is when Nebuchadnezzar enters into a hybriistic state, boasting like a divine king to honour his own power, he is transformed to an animal” (Kvanvig 2005:263). In the rhetoric of the book, the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar back to human society and his kingship was based on his open confession and acknowledgment of Yahweh’s sovereign control over human kings. Importantly, at this point in the book of Daniel, the relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Yahweh in the matrix and rhetoric of Daniel appears to be the relationship between an animal and its owner/ tamer. From this perspective, Yahweh, as an animal tamer, naturally exercised his sovereign power over Nebuchadnezzar by turning Nebuchadnezzar into an animal and turning him back into a human being again. In the narrative ideology of the present text, Yahweh is represented as the sovereign lord of the world by his ability to change the status of Nebuchadnezzar to that of an animal.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, Yahweh controls powerful earthly kings like a herdsman controls his cattle. It is no accident that a reference is made to Nebuchadnezzar “eating grass like cattle” in verse 33. Since ancient kings are connected to eagles, it is not surprising that a reference to the hairs

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<sup>10</sup> For the study of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness see M. Henze, M. 1999. *The madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern origins and early history of interpretation of Daniel*. JSJSup, 61. Leiden: Brill; *Idem*, 2001. Nebuchadnezzar’s madness (Daniel 4) in Syriac literature. in Collins, John J. and, P.W. (eds), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and reception*. VTSup, 83; 2vols. Leiden: Brill, 550-71.

<sup>11</sup> Hays conceived the animal references in the representation of Nebuchadnezzar’s illness to imply that his affliction was from God. He also notes the use of these animals mentioned in relationship to Nebuchadnezzar’s sickness to connote the presence of demonic assailants. See Hays, “Chirps from the Dust,” 305-325.

<sup>12</sup> Using Bakhtinian criticism, David M. Valeta has suggested that Daniel 1-6 is a satire against the imperial powers and hence directly asserting the supremacy of Yahweh. See Valeta David M. 2008. *Lions and ovens and visions: A satirical reading of Daniel 1–6*. Hebrew Bible Monographs, 12, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

<sup>13</sup> In most apocalyptic texts, according to Ernest Käsemann, one primary question dominates over others, namely “To whom does the sovereignty of the earth belong?” It appears the same question is at the heart of the confrontation between Yahweh and Nebuchadnezzar. See Ernst Käsemann, Ernst. 1969. On the subject of primitive Christian apocalyptic. in *New Testament Questions of Today*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969, 135.

and claws of Nebuchadnezzar are connected to an eagle.<sup>14</sup> But in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, he is a powerless eagle because he cannot fly. He has become caged and rendered powerless by the sovereign power of Yahweh.<sup>15</sup> In the discourse of the book, the sovereign power of Yahweh is greatly asserted by his representation as a powerful deity who had turned an egoistic king such as Nebuchadnezzar into an animal—and forced him to live in the animal habitat. In this regard, Yahweh exercises his sovereign power over Nebuchadnezzar thereby taming his pride and challenging his political authority. Nebuchadnezzar, in the rhetoric of Daniel, becomes an animal—and his condition as an animal only changes when he acknowledges Yahweh's sovereignty over his creation.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to this representation of Nebuchadnezzar, king Darius was also connected to the animal world by his ownership of the den of lions (Van der Toorn 1998:626-40). Even though it was Daniel that was thrown into the lions' den here, the lions themselves are royal representatives and executioners kept by the king in order to bring about punishments on royal offenders.<sup>17</sup> Seen from this perspective, the lions' den becomes in itself a miniature version of the jungle in the palace. In this sense, the lions' den itself becomes an artificial creation of the jungle within the palace. Since the subsequent apocalyptic text connects royal personalities with these lions or beasts, the protection, provision and the artificial transfer of lions from their original habitats to the walls of the palace suggests that there is an intriguing relationship between beasts/animals and their royal owners. In the later apocalyptic text, their owners became the beasts themselves, placing a masked irony in the possession of these lions by king Darius. Interestingly, there is a wordplay between the sealing of the mouth of the den by Darius and Yahweh closing the mouth of the lions. To this end, Donald C. Polaski observed, "Daniel speaks of God and Darius in similar fashion. Just as Darius closed (and officially sealed!) the mouth (דַּפ, 6:17[18]) of the den, so God closed the mouths (דַּפ, 6:22[23]) of the lions" (Polaski 2004:664). Technically, Yahweh had here directly tamed the lions in the den. Significantly, the same act of taming or control by Yahweh will also be

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<sup>14</sup> The eagle is a favourite bird employed to represent royal authority in ancient world. For the use of the eagle to represent the power of Rome see Warren Carter, Warren. 2003. Are there imperial texts in the class? Intertextual eagles and Mathean eschatology as 'light out' time for Imperial Rome. *JBL* 122(3): 467-487.

<sup>15</sup> Kvanvig has shown the close relationship between the transformation of the savage Enkidu in Gilgamesh and the turning of Nebuchadnezzar into animal here. For this study see Kvanvig, "Throne Visions and Monsters," 267-8.

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, recent studies in Daniel had ignored this symbolic template on which the narrative of Daniel is ideologically staged. See David M. Valeta, David M. 2008. The Book of Daniel in recent research (Part 1). *Currents in Biblical Research* 6(3): 330-354. See also Collins, John J. 2001. Current issues in the study of Daniel. in Collins, John J. and Flint, P.W. (eds), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and reception*. VTSup, 83; 2vols. Leiden: Brill, 1-15.

<sup>17</sup> While the casting of an offender into the lion den is a common punishment, it is rare to throw an offender into the fiery furnace. On this study see Beaulieu, Paul-Alain. 2009. The Babylonian background of the motif of the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. *JBL* 128(2): 273-290. He notes "The executions recorded in Daniel 6 and in the story of Bel and the Dragon, effected by throwing the condemned into a lion's pit, appear more feasible and on the surface more believable than the punishment in the fiery furnace. However, such a mode of execution finds no parallel in the ancient world." See Beaulieu, "The Babylonian Background of the Motif of the Fiery Furnace in Daniel 3," 287.

subtly underscored in description of Yahweh's relationship with the beasts of Daniel 7.

However, from a different perspective, the artificial creation of a jungle within the palace called a den describes the interpenetrating presence of the wild animal world in the palace which also points to the intriguing association of these two worlds in the discourse of Daniel. In this concrete jungle, the kings owned the lions, and they are his servants to execute punishment on people who have disobeyed him. In the same sense, Yahweh is portrayed afterward as the owner of the wild animals of the political spheres and his power to control and put them under his sovereign power is greatly underscored.

While the jungle is in the palace in Daniel 6, in chapter 7 the palace and its kings have become the jungle and the wild animals. Accordingly, "the dream animals of chap. 7 follow on the real animals of chap. 6" (Goldingay 1989:158). Interestingly, the first beast in the vision of Daniel in chapter 7:4 "was like a lion." It seems the politics of human society has become a wild habitat like the den of lions. To be sure, the imagery of the jungle is now transferred metaphorically to human society and the powerful kings of the earth are conceived as ferocious beasts. In the rhetoric of the apocalyptic text here, it is not only Daniel that is in the lions' den, but the entire world, especially the people of God. In this extended representation of political life as a jungle, one also understands the description of Nebuchadnezzar in 4:10-18 as a mighty tree where the animals of the jungle find shade. In this text, the narrator said,

These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed (4:10-12).

The text further presupposes the imagery of a wild habitat with trees and animals used as descriptors of the political life. One realizes also that the narrator, rather than describe Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom in terms of the beasts, uses the tree as a description for him. Considering this, Nebuchadnezzar's political and military campaigns are within this context depicted within the conception or extended symbolism of a jungle. Also, the narrator described the fall of Nebuchadnezzar in this same literary framework. Concerning the fall and demise of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, the narrator observed,

'In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. 'Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed

from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him (4:13-16).

Of course, the conceptual domain of the passage also evokes the wild space. In fact, the conceptual world of the present narrative is a jungle where the falling down of a tall tree causes the other creatures of the jungle to take cover. For the author of Daniel, the punishment of Nebuchadnezzar's refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of God caused the literal turning of Nebuchadnezzar into an animal-like creature. Interestingly, Nebuchadnezzar in the rhetoric of the book was directly described both as a "tree" and an "animal." There is an irony here because the symbolic representation of Nebuchadnezzar as an animal and a tree both occurred within the rhetoric of the book. In the first description, Nebuchadnezzar was described as a tree, but for his punishment he was sent to live with wild animals. In both ways, the previous life of Nebuchadnezzar and his later exile to the wild life suggest the understanding of life within the artistic frame of a jungle, thus asserting the importance of wild space in the conceptual imagination of the narrator of the book of Daniel.

### **Yahweh's Sovereignty and the Animals of Daniel 7:1-28**

In ancient societies, royal hunting and taming of wild life was a common imperial practice.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the representation of Yahweh in control of the political wild space comes from these royal hunting/taming customs.<sup>19</sup> For example, Michael B. Dick has shown the importance of royal hunting in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions and the ideological importance in the representation of Assyrian kings within this conceptual frame (Dick 2006:243-270). In particular, he observed that the quest by the Neo-Assyrian kings to conquer the wild space directly underscores and boosts their image as "shepherds" and "protector" of people against the chaos and savagery of the wild life (Dick 2006:254, 257). In fact, the hunting of wild life is seen as a cultic act with the king fully dressed in priestly attires and commissioned to openly assert his kingship and reign over the wild space. Libations are offered and other priestly functions are carried out in these hunting exercises (Watanabe 1992:91-

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<sup>18</sup> Concerning hunting in the ancient world, Yigal Levin notes "The motif of the king as a mighty hunter, especially of lions, seems to be a particularly western theme. It is known from a late fourth millennium stele from Uruk, but then disappears from Mesopotamia for over two thousand years. The theme is well-known in Egypt, mentioned in 18th century Mari and appears in sculpture and painting at Mycenae and Tiryns and in Homeric and Classical Greek literature. The first Mesopotamian ruler to boast of prowess in hunting was Tiglath-pileser I of Assyria (1115-1077 BCE), who tided himself, 'valiant man, armed with the unrivaled bow, expert in the hunt.' He reports slaying wild bulls, elephants and 920 lions. The theme was renewed almost four centuries later by Ashurbanipal." See Levin, Yigal. 2002. Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad." *Vetus Testamentum* LII, n. 3, 364.

<sup>19</sup> Beyond this hunting practice, the Babylonian and Assyrian kings are expected to "journey from the cultured center into the chaotic wilderness, the natural habitat of terrible beings: lions and serpents, ghosts and demons, and horrifying composite beasts. In this journey to gain status, wisdom, and insight, the [kings] must conquer that 'heroic space' and its inhabitants to reach the edge of the world and then return home safely again." This journey termed "first discoverer" motif is a common storyline found in Babylonian and Assyrian sources which praise the exploits and achievements of many kings. See Jones, Scott C. 2011. Lions, serpents and lion-serpents in Job 28:8 and beyond. *JBL* 130(4), 680.

104). Importantly, the hunting and the taming of wild life in these Assyrian reliefs and inscriptions suggest also that royal hunting and the quest to conquer the wild space are seen as parts of the “coronation requirements” of Neo-Assyrian kings because in this exercise they seek to extend their kingdom beyond civilized society to the domain of the uncivilized wild habitat.

Similarly, Ryan P. Bonfiglio has studied royal archery in the iconographic representation of the Achaemind period (Bonfiglio 2012:507-527; Mitchell 2008). In the study of the seals and coins of this period, Bonfiglio observed that kings are often represented in combat mood with their bows and arrows aimed at some beasts. In addition, the Achaemind kings in these iconographies are represented as half-animal from the torso downward and their hand positioned on the bow to shoot at animals (Bonfiglio 2012:518). While dealing with the general court style representations of kings shooting arrows at rearing lions and other beasts, Bonfiglio conceded that “the royal hunter motif is widely known in Mesopotamian art” (Bonfiglio 2012:520). In this tradition of royal hunt and quest to assert kingly authority over the wild space, one also finds a resonance with the representation of Yahweh in his enigmatic relationship to the wild beasts of Daniel 7:1-28. With this royal hunting in mind, it seems the apocalyptic space of Daniel 7:1-28 reveals the representation of Yahweh’s sovereignty over the wild space in this conceptual framework. Considering this possible background, four wild animals are mentioned in the vision of Daniel 7:1-28 with a description of their fierce animal features. Commenting on these animals, Goldingay comments,

Each is fierce and dangerous. They are also ominous in a narrower sense. The first three, at least, are anomalous creatures, resembling one kind of animal but also having the features of another or being deformed in some other way. In Babylonian lore such actual or theoretical anomalies were believed to portend specific historical events. (Goldingay 1989:161)

However, Kvanvig has located the sources for the representation of these monsters from Babylonian demonic imagery, particularly the list of fifteen demons in *The Assyrian Vision of the NetherWorld* (Kvanvig 2005:260). He has shown how each of the four monsters corresponds to the description of some of the fiends of this Babylonian underworld.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, John J. Collins has suggested the Ugaritic Baal myths as the conceptual framework which influenced this representation, especially the cosmic battle between Baal, the rider of clouds, and Mutu, the prince of death, or Yammu, the prince of primeval waters (Collins 1993a:286-294; Collins 1993b:121-136). Beyond the quest to locate the source of this animal imagery in the cultural pool of ancient Near Eastern mythology, it seems the present pericope conceptually perceives the political space in terms of a wild habitat with Yahweh simply asserting his presence or control over this wild jungle. Consequently, the representation of the political world here suggests the narrator’s

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<sup>20</sup> In the same sense, Hays also observed, “Ancient Mesopotamian portraits of the underworld (or world of the dead) made extensive use of animal imagery, even from Sumerian times.” See Hays, “Chirps from the Dust,” 308.

understanding of the political space as a terror-stricken jungle, and thus suggests the possibility that ancient royal hunting expeditions in the jungle more likely formed the basis for this conceptual apocalyptic representation than the mythological sources proposed by the contemporary interpreters of this pericope. Looking closely at the conceptual wild space, the first beast is described as a “lion” with the wings of an eagle.<sup>21</sup> For Goldingay, “In isolation, what happens to the lion-eagle might be read negatively: it is reduced from being able to soar above the earth to experiencing the limitations of mere humanity. The removal of the eagle’s wings, reducing the creature to a mere four-legged animal, could be an act of judgment paralleling the one Nebuchadnezzar experienced in chap. 4” (Goldingay 1989:161). The association of kings and political figures with animals subtly echoes divine punishment in exiling Nebuchadnezzar into the animal kingdom. Like Nebuchadnezzar—these leaders are also placed in animal habitat—and are directly transformed into animals. Similarly, “The lion-eagle becom[ing] humanlike...anticipates or foreshadows the judgment of the beasts and the bestowal of their authority on the humanlike figure of v 13” (Goldingay 1989:161). On the other hand, the second animal was a bear with three ribs in its mouth. Concerning this particular animal, Goldingay added: “The description of the bear as lifted up on one side is often taken to indicate that it was rearing up on its back legs or had one paw raised ready to strike or was half-crouching ready to spring, though this is not clearly expressed; perhaps more likely the phrase refers to a physical anomaly” (Goldingay 1989:161). Rather than physical anomaly, it is possible that the representation here described the merging of two animals into one. Concerning this, Scott C. Jones observed that in the ancient world, “animals that might be quite distinct according to modern systems of classification were sometimes connected metaphorically on the basis of their power and threat in the animal kingdom” (Jones 2011:671). The third beast was “like a leopard” (7:4-6). “The four wings and four heads” of the leopard “indicate that the creature is not a real or ordinary leopard but a heraldic figure, or more likely an anomaly; as a winged predator, it resembles the first creature” (Goldingay 1989:161). The last beast seems to be a dragon with ten horns. The representation of the political world in the category of wild beasts or ferocious animals seems interesting because it suggests the predatory character of human political structure which continually seeks to terrorise and prey on the vulnerable.<sup>22</sup> Since these animals represented are clearly predators, the apocalyptic association of human political structures of power with them inevitably demonised them. By describing political kingdoms or kings as predators and ferocious animals, the apocalyptic author of Daniel polemically also suggests the oppressive and predatory character of these human political institutions. However, beyond this polemic, the author of Daniel did not leave the world and its political structures in the hands of

<sup>21</sup> The representation of established authorities by animals such as lion and eagle is common in the ancient world. For example the priest Alexander Jannaeus is often represented as an “angry lion.” See Schofield, Allison and Vanderkam, James. 2005. Were the Hasmoneans Zadokites? *JBL* 124, no. 1: 73-87. See especially pages 80, 81. For the general study of lion imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East see Strawn, Brent A. 2005. *What is stronger than a lion? Leonine image and metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East*. OBO, 212. Fribourg: Academic Pres.

<sup>22</sup> On this terrorizing aspect, one could also underscore the importance in ancient Egypt for the representation of the Pharaohs by the feared Uraeus/cobra. See Provençal, Philippe. 2005. Regarding the noun *@rf* in the Hebrew Bible. *JSOT* 29(3): 371-379.

these “wild animals.” In the rhetoric of the present text, rather than describing the everlasting kingdom of Yahweh as “another beast,” he interestingly describes the coming of Yahweh differently (7:9-14). After the description of the judgments of these beasts (7:9-10), the text reads:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (7:13-14).

Kvanvig notes that the “one like the son of man” represents “mythic-realistic symbols for God, who is assumed to exist outside” of the animal-like order (Kvanvig 2005:262). For Kvanvig, there is a “supposed difference between the beast imagery and the heavenly imagery in the vision” (Kvanvig 2005:262). Significantly, the preceding animal kingdoms were stripped of their powers and authority. In their place, “one like the son of man” (and not another animal) was given dominion over them. Yahweh and his representative appeared to have tamed, stripped and rendered these preceding wild animals powerless. They subjugated the wild space and enthroned another new kingdom which was different from the one of the earlier animal ones. Min S. Kee said, “In the visions of Daniel 7 a judgment court is held and the 'beast' is put to death (vv. 11-12) and the 'one like a human being' is empowered (vv. 13-14)” (Kee 2007:263). Consequently, in the representation of this narrative, Yahweh and his human-like representative, the son of man, are subtly described as animal tamers who brought to an end the preceding kingdoms of ferocious and wild animals. In particular, the passage suggests Yahweh sovereign control and authority over the wild space of human politics. Considering this connection, Goldingay observes, “The tension between the human and the bestial that appeared in chaps. 4 and 6 becomes a key motif: bestiality is now turned on God himself... but he puts an end to the reign of the beast and gives authority to a humanlike figure” (Goldingay 1989:158). For the apocalyptic writers, it seems that every wild animal in the human worlds of politics cannot thwart Yahweh’s ultimate purposes and plans for his people. Consequently, the apocalyptic author of Daniel underscores the sovereign power of Yahweh as lord of the wild space through his representation of Yahweh, and his representative, as conqueror of the wild space.

## **Conclusion**

Apocalyptic literature has variously been described as a horror and a scary narrative which is pessimistic in its worldview and representations. In symbolic terms, animal conceptual frame is often used to describe the real world. Since “Nature, more particularly the animals,” according to Ronald Boer, “function...as a figuration of a larger entity...” in the Hebrew Bible, it is not surprising to see the dominance of this perspective shaping apocalyptic imagination (Boer 1997:111). Grounded on the philosophical discourses of Foucault, Lefebvre, Soja and Harvey on the limitless

possibilities in the social construct of space, the present work engages the mapping of apocalyptic poetics of wild space in Daniel 7:1-28.

In the apocalyptic world of Daniel, politics is conceived in an extended metaphor of a jungle wherein kings and political figures are represented as ferocious beasts and monsters. Interestingly, while Daniel was in the lion den in chapter 6, Nebuchadnezzar was to live among the wild animals in chapter 4.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the latter, he ate grass like cattle and spent seven years in the wild space, while the former was in the lions' den for a night. Both stories describe the changed location of a prophet and a king from mainstream human society to the habitat of wild life. In these stories also, as we have already seen, the wild space was an important aspect of the major plots of the stories.

In the same way, the plotting of the apocalyptic stories in the subsequent chapters of Daniel explores the motif of wild life further. Drawing possibly from the ancient royal hunt, the study suggests that the narrator of Daniel 7 uses and explores the animal habitat in an extended symbolism to convey his description of the hostile social and political orders which strive to destroy God's people. In this sense, the narrator of this apocalyptic text saw the entire society as a concrete jungle where political officers and influential people are represented as vicious and ferocious wild animals. Kvanvig observed, "The depiction of the monsters represented a reality for the recipient" and the narrator "just as real on earth as the divine court was in heaven" (Kvanvig 2005:263). However, in spite of the ferocity or wildness of these animals, the narrator described Yahweh's sovereignty over the wild space. In fact, all of human politics and its jungle-like existence are placed directly under the sovereignty of Yahweh. In this representation, Yahweh has tamed or directly placed the jungle under his control. Factored into this representation, the apocalyptic narrative provides immediate comfort to the audience particularly in its critique of the present world and the assumption that the animal-like insensitive political structures are under the sovereign control of Yahweh. In short, the audiences do not need to worry about the chaos and hostility of the present oppressive order because Yahweh has authority over the jungle of human politics. In this sense too, Yahweh is not only a tamer of the wild beast, but he is represented as one who will ultimately cage these animals and fully assert his sovereign power over them. Consequently, the apocalyptic text assumes and underscores the sovereignty of Yahweh in its critiques as well as representation of politics as wild jungle. Within this conceptual bearing, even though the entire world from the perspective of the narrator has become a den of beasts, Yahweh still sovereignly controls the den and the jungle-like politics of human society.

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<sup>23</sup> Kvanvig described Daniel 2 and 4 as an "intertextual" connection to Daniel 7 in the animal/beast imagery. See Kvanvig, "Throne Visions and Monsters," 263.

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