

## DANIEL 3, CONTESTING SPACE FOR CLASHING IMAGES

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### ABSTRACT

It becomes clear that the narrative of Daniel 3 is part of a larger narrative that already starts in Daniel 1 when one applies a spatial-body-frameset to the story. Utilising spatial markers, the author of Daniel 3 demonstrates to his readers that the God of Israel indeed has the ability to operate inside the spatial authority (domain) of foreign gods. The narrative is not so much a question of Elohim's ability to protect his people from death; it rather asks which deity has authority over the plain of Dura. Due to Elohim's rescue of the three men, the fiery furnace cognitively becomes an image of Elohim's god-space and power. In this way the author indicates that the plain of Dura does not belong to the authority domain of Marduk, but to the god-space of the God of Israel. Daniel 3 is not a story about three faithful men, but rather a story about the God of Israel. In his own manner the author attempts to persuade his readers that Elohim's authority is universal, and not restricted to a particular spatial context.

### INTRODUCTION

This article aims to indicate that the text of Daniel 3, as a construction of written words, might be a structure built up from the spatial experience of human cognition.

Studies in the field of linguistics show that space outlines one of the most vital basic conceptual domains of human cognition (Haspelmath 1997:1). Linguistic research conducted by Haspelmath (1997:1) and Zlatev (2007:318) found that space, as well as the metaphorical use of the human body, form fundamental parts of human thinking and that all human behaviour is located in space and constructed from it (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:1). The research also claims that space forms an integral part of the way in which people express themselves (Zlatev 2007:318-319).

Zlatev (2007:318-319) and Merleau-Ponty (2005:335-342) 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 as 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 at the end of a bed is described as the “foot” of the bed. Thus, interaction with the world around us, as well as our experience of it, occurs through our bodies.

The above research forms part of a broader new development within the methodology of studying language and the way in which humans communicate. This science is known as cognitive linguistics. Briefly put, cognitive linguistics involves the study of the complex relationship between language and the mind (Evans, Bergen & Zinken 2007:3). Supporters of cognitive linguistics differ in their approach from other methodologies mainly by assuming that language mirrors certain fundamental properties and design features of the human mind (Evans & Green 2006:5). In this new cognitive approach to the study of language, it is postulated that words signify, or symbolise, concepts (Croft & Cruse 2004:7).

Four basic ideas from cognitive linguistics are useful when approaching biblical texts for exegesis (Haspelmath 1997:1; Jordaan & Nolte 2010:527-529; Evans & Green 2006:179, 190-243):

- words are concepts produced by the human mind which embody human culture and worldviews;
- humans use their bodies as a metaphorical framework to interact with the world around them;
- language is not merely a reflection or representation of reality; reality is also constructed by language; and
- space forms an integral part of human cognition.

Texts are mediums of communication (Becker 2005:45), and as such they are also embedded in the cognitive paradigm of the people who wrote them. This article attempts to demonstrate that a cognitive linguistic approach to biblical texts can enhance biblical scholars’ understanding of these texts. In this article a cognitive spatial-body frameset is employed to interpret the text of Daniel 3. The analysis of Daniel 3 offered in this article corresponds to similar research on Daniel 1, Psalm 2

and Psalm 110 (De Bruyn 2012:456-470). This article forms part of a series of articles on Daniel 1-6.

## PROBLEM

No scholar has yet attempted an exegesis of the book of Daniel based on cognitive linguistics. This comes despite the attention awarded to the *Sprachwelt* of biblical texts in the exegetical process. Biblical texts are usually analysed within their own *Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben* (Hays & Holladay 2007; Barton 1984:8; Preuss 1984), yet no scholar has explored the language of the Daniel texts as a mechanism used by the author to construct certain reality-spaces based on human experience and the cultural or religious worldview of the Daniel narrator(s), as is proposed by Merleau-Ponty (2005:335-342).

Research on the book of Daniel and Daniel 3 can be briefly summarised as follows:

- Different themes can be identified such as: the faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; divided loyalties; loyalty to God; God's deliverance and protection of the faithful; and the acknowledgement of God by gentiles; YHWH as the director of time (Witte (2012:643-657; Fee & Stuart 2002:204-210; Miller 1994; Towner 1984:46; Jeffery & Kennedy 1956:314-349; Calvin 1852).
- Possible date of origin and historical overview; connecting the narrative of Daniel 3 to the conflict between the Maccabees and Antiochus IV Epiphanus; excursion on the golden statue and the possible connection to Seleucid times (Smith-Christopher 1996:17-153; Collins 1993:180-181; Towner 1984; Farrar 1979:351-432; Jeffery & Kennedy 1956:314-349).
- Analytical verse by verse approach (Aalders 1962).
- Structure, language and apocalyptic genre of Daniel (Steinmann 2008; Miller 1994; Towner 1984; Hartman & Di Lella 1978).

This article is therefore unique in that it differs from previous research in two ways. First, it uses a spatial-body-frameset based on cognitive linguistics to analyse the text of Daniel 3. Such an approach to Daniel 3 has not previously been used by biblical scholars. In its spatial-body approach to Daniel 3, this article demonstrates that cognitive linguistics might improve biblical scholars' understanding of texts. Secondly, as shown above scholars usually describe Daniel 3 as a story about three

Hebrew men, their faithfulness to their God and how their God acts on their behalf. This article, however, shows that Daniel 3 is not so much a story about the faithfulness of three men as it is a narrative about the clash between deities and the victory of the God of Israel. The God of Israel is victorious in that he shows his capability to protect his people in foreign lands. This victory demonstrates his authority over foreign gods.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Spatial markers for embodied spaces**

The location in which human experience and consciousness takes material and spatial form is cognitively defined as embodied space. These embodied spaces can take the form of a variety of entities (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:2). This means that there are 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.

To identify spaces within a text, scholars have indexed markers by which different embodied spaces can be identified. These spatial markers can be summarised as follows: the human body as a vessel of the self; body-space, which centres around the human body; gendered spaces; inscribed spaces; contested spaces; trans-national space (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:1-37); trajectory; landmark; frame of reference; region; path; direction and motion (Zlatev 2007:318-350). Some of these spaces will overlap. The way in which humans interact or experience these different spaces is naturally defined by and imbedded in people's worldview and culture (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:4-5). From this one can infer that spaces are domains of human thinking (Haspelmath 1997:1).

In this article different aspects of these spatial markers will be combined with the human experience of sacred or holy space. Sacred space mediates human interaction with the environment on a religious level (Murphy 2002:35-39). For the untrained 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 from 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 Old Testament the temple differed from other houses, for it was revered as the house of the God of Israel (cf. Pss 5:7-8; 79:1

and Hab. 2:20). The same is true of Mount Zion. It is not just a landmark; it is the Holy Mountain of God (Ps. 48).

### Spatial-hermeneutical frameset

This article applies a so-called spatial-hermeneutical frameset to the text of Daniel 3. To understand the author's use of sacred and contested space in Daniel 3 better, it is important to understand the cognitive frameset and worldview of the ancient Near Eastern people in Old Testament times. This is no easy task for modern worldviews differ from what those of ancient times. Furthermore, the worldviews of ancient cultures are only assessable through the remainder of their literature and archaeological artefacts.

The ancient worldview of the Hebrew Bible can broadly be described as follows (see Figure 1): The cosmos was divided into a mystical world and the physical world. Usually, the mystical world was associated with the heavens above as the dwelling place of the gods or the underworld as dwelling place of the dead. For this article only the heavens above as living space of the gods is important. Cognitively, the heavens can be described as god-space. The physical world was seen as the dwelling place of humans and could therefore cognitively be described as human-space (Figure 1).

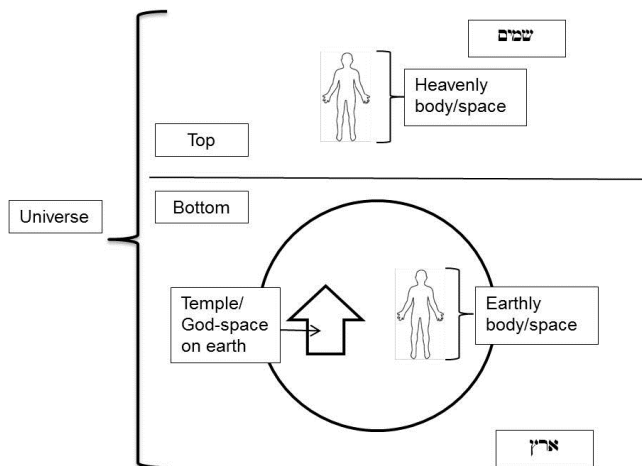


Figure 1

In terms of cognitive linguistics, heavenly-space or god-space can be described as an

embodied vessel within which the gods live, in the same way that human-space can be described as an embodied vessel within which humans live. Interaction between heavenly god-space and earthly human-space was possible through what people on a religious level experienced as holy or sacred spaces (Figure 1). These sacred spaces can manifest from something as simple as a river to a complex entity such as a building, an altar or statue and even the persona of the king (Walton 2006:212, 278; Murphy 2002:35-49). Within the cultural worldview of the ancient Near Eastern people, sacred spaces were experienced as extensions of the gods' heavenly god-space. Sacred spaces indicated that specific locations (human-spaces) were under the protection and authority of specific deities (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. Usually, specific deities' authority was confined to the national boundaries of the people who worshiped them (Walton 2006:97-102). Traces of this ancient religious worldview are also reflected in the texts of the Hebrew Bible. A short summary follows.

- According to textual criticism,<sup>1</sup> the text of Deuteronomy 32:8-9 can also read that the peoples of the earth were each given their own territory according to the number of the gods (Murphy 2002:159).
- According to 1 Kings 20:23 the Arameans assumed that the God of Israel's authority is confined to the mountains and not the plains.
- The nation of Israel was the sacred property of their God (Ex 19:5-6; Dt 14:2).
- Mount Zion was accepted as the holy throne of the God of Israel, while Jerusalem was His sacred city (Ps 48).
- The Temple in Jerusalem represented the heavenly dwelling place of YHWH (cf. Ps 29; Walton 2006:113-135; Albertz 2003:55, 133, 152-157; Murphy 2002:68).
- Together, Zion and Jerusalem were religiously experienced as the *axis mundi* between heaven and earth (Humphreys 1990:61, 64-67).
- The Davidic king was accepted as an earthly extension of YHWH's heavenly god-space (De Bruyn 2012:456-470). He is YHWH's firstborn son (Pss 2; 89:28), who sits at His right hand (Ps 110) and is described as an אֱלֹהִים (Ps 45:8).

From all this we can derive that in texts cities, mountains and temples can be viewed as more than mere geographical landmarks. Based on the worldview of the ancient Near East, cities, mountains, temples and even specific people named within ancient

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<sup>1</sup> See alternative text readings in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

texts can be viewed as sacred spaces or vessels.

Furthermore, when nations waged war, each nation called on their gods to protect them. If a nation lost a battle it was believed that this nation's gods were not strong enough to protect their 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 subject to the authority of the gods and nation who were victorious. Traces of this belief are reflected in Psalm 137 and Isaiah 36.

In Psalm 137 the Israelites are challenged to sing about Zion as the stronghold of their God, although they were not physically near Zion. Many Israelites refused to sing their songs of worship in a land of foreign gods for they feared the possibility that their God did not have the power to operate in foreign territory (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:515-516).

In Isaiah 36 the Assyrian king warns Hezekiah not to trust in YHWH, for He could not protect the city of Samaria. In fact, it is stated that no other god could protect the people against the king of Assyria and his gods.

It is quite possible that the author(s) of Daniel 3 wrote the narrative in answer to the doubts people may have had about the God of Israel's authority in foreign countries. This possibility is subsequently investigated from the vantage point of cognitive linguistics.

## **Clarifying terminology**

For a better distinction between the different deities of Israel and Babylon the article uses the following descriptions: The god of Israel will be described as Elohim. At the same time the Babylonian gods will collectively be described by the name of the Babylonian high-god Marduk, otherwise known as Bel (Abusch 1995:1014-1025).

## **APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY**

### **Summary of Daniel 3**

A broad overview of the narrative follows in preparation for a cognitive analysis of Daniel 3.

#### **Verses 1-7**

These verses serve as an introduction to the narrative. The author sets up the plot of the narrative. Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden statue (מִלְכָּא) in the plain of Dura. It

previously was suggested that Dura indicates the enclosure of the city wall. However, Collins (1993:182) states that Dura should be regarded as a place name that adds local colour to the narrative. Whether Dura refers to a plain or the enclosure of the city wall makes no difference to this article, therefore Dura will be treated as a place name as Collins (1993:182) suggests. All attendants at the inauguration of the golden image are commanded to worship the golden statue. Steinmann (2008:167-168) is of the opinion that this construction of the golden image could be dated to 594-593 B.C.E. During this period Nebuchadnezzar had to subdue many uprisings and rebellions. However, one must be very careful to link the narrative of Daniel 3 to specific historical events. Since the attendants are commanded to worship this statue, one can assume that it was an image of a Babylonian god or goddess (Steinmann 2008:170; Towner 1984:50). The possibility that the statue was an image of a god is supported by the Aramaic text of Daniel 3:12, 14 and 18 (Collins 1993:182). For the sake of argument we can assume that it was a statue of the Babylonian high-god Marduk. Interpreted against the cultural worldview of the ancient Near East, the function of this image probably was to indicate that this specific province of the Babylonian empire was under the authority of Marduk and his king Nebuchadnezzar (Steinmann 2008:168; cf. Walton 2006:212-213 on the image of God). Cognitively the image would have been viewed as an extension of Marduk's god-space (see Figure 1), for it served as an embodiment of the Babylonian high-god. Worshipping this image would thus have been an indication of absolute commitment and obedience to Babylon, the king and the Babylonian gods (Steinmann 2008:168). On a cognitive level worshipping Marduk's image was to accept that the territory of Dura was part of Marduk's god-space. It was also a way for people to show that they accepted Marduk and his king's authority over their lives. It makes perfect sense that Nebuchadnezzar would use the inauguration of the new Marduk statue as an occasion for subdued rebels to publicly show their loyalty and acceptance of Marduk's and Nebuchadnezzar's authority.

The golden statue could also have been an image of the king himself (Collins 1993:182). Since the kings of the ancient Near East were thought of as descendants of the gods (van Groningen 1990:39), the king was almost always depicted as the son of a specific deity, chosen to rule on behalf of the gods (Curtis 2007:54; Usue 2007:83, 87-88). It is thus possible that Nebuchadnezzar himself was the object of worship in the narrative of Daniel 3. However, as a demi-god or son of a god, Nebuchadnezzar still would have been subjected to the high-god Marduk. In terms of cognitive



linguistics and the worldviews of the ancient Near East Nebuchadnezzar was the embodiment of the Babylonian gods. It is within this ancient paradigm that the article argues that Marduk himself is one the main characters in the narrative of Daniel 3. This article thus follows Steinmann (2008:170) and Towner (1984:50) in their assumption that the golden statue was an image of a Babylonian deity, possibly Marduk. This assumption is also based on the Aramaic text.

### **Verses 8-12**

In these verses tension builds up. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are accused of not obeying the king's command to worship Marduk.

### **Verse 13-18**

The three Hebrew men are brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Tension continues to build up in verses 8-12 increases even more. The king challenges their God's ability to rescue them from his hand. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to obey the king.

### **Verse 19-27**

The tension in the narrative reaches its peak. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are condemned to die in a fiery furnace, but they are saved by an angel of their God.

### **Verse 28-30**

The denouement of the story takes place in these last verses. Nebuchadnezzar proclaims the ability of the Israelite god to save his people. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are given honouree positions in the province of Babylon.

## **A clash of images**

Daniel 3 is not just a story about Hebrew men who refuse idolatry and their God who rescues them from a fiery death (cf. Fee & Stuart 2002:204-210 and other scholars mentioned above). On the contrary, analysing Daniel 3 from the vantage point of a spatial-body-frameset indicates that the narrative is a story about the god of Israel who challenges the Babylonian gods. The narrative forms part of a bigger narrative that already starts in Daniel 1 as what can cognitively be described as a clash of deities (de Bruyn 2014).<sup>2</sup> Utilising spatial markers, the author of Daniel 3 shows his readers that the God of Israel indeed has the ability to operate inside the spatial authority (domain) of foreign gods. What started in Daniel 1 as an invasion of Elohim's god-space in that his city Jerusalem and his temple were invaded, is turned around to become an invasion of Marduk's own territory (de Bruyn 2014). Daniel 3 takes the attack on

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<sup>2</sup> Publication in print.

Marduk's god-space to the next level. The narrative is not so much a question of Elohim's ability to protect his people from death, but rather, which deity has authority over the plain of Dura. Due to Elohim's rescue of the three men, the fiery furnace cognitively becomes a beacon (image) to indicate that the plain of Dura does not belong to the authority domain of Marduk, but to the god-space of the god of Israel. This cognitive interpretation is based on the following arguments: Within the parameters of the ancient Near Eastern worldviews, the god-space of Marduk is indicated in Daniel 3 by the following:

- the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar;
- the golden image;
- the plain of Dura;
- the province of Babylon;
- the hands of Nebuchadnezzar; and
- the fiery furnace.

Although the plain of Dura starts out as part of the god-space of Marduk, it soon becomes what can cognitively be described as contested space (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:1-37). The narrative starts with no indication that the god of Israel, who is described in this narrative as Elohim, has any spatial embodiments. Within the cognitive worldview of the ancient Near Eastern people, this would have been expected since the narrative is set deep within Marduk's territory. No foreign gods were supposed to have power within the Babylonian high-god's god-space. Even more so, the construction of the golden image had to proclaim Marduk's authority. No foreign gods were supposed to have spatial markers that can proclaim their power in the same vicinity as Marduk. Only one pantheon of gods and only one high-god can have authority over a specific territory. As the narrative of Daniel 3 unfolds, events take an interesting twist.

As if out of nowhere, Marduk's authority is challenged. To make things more interesting, the challenge to Marduk's authority comes from a deity who was supposed to be defeated and his territories conquered. The challenger to Marduk's authority turns out to be the God of Israel, whose king, temple treasures and people were brought to Babylon as a symbol of degradation (De Bruyn 2014). Similar to the narrative of Daniel 1 the challenge to Marduk's authority in Daniel 3 does not come from outside his god-space, but from within it. Upon closer examination of the narrative it appears that the God of Israel does have a spatial embodiment after all.

Elohim's spatial marker only becomes visible and stands out when almost every attendee bowed down to the image of Marduk. Elohim's initial spatial marker becomes visible in the embodiment of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the same three men who together with their friend *Daniel*<sup>3</sup> abstained from eating the king's food in the narrative of Daniel 1. By standing up and not kneeling down in worship, the three men become an embodiment of their god. The author strategically sets up these three men to become an image for their god and thus they become a platform from which the god of Israel can confront Marduk and his king. This confrontation can indeed be cognitively described as a clash of images. Now both Marduk and the god of Israel have images set up in the plain of Dura. In this way the plain of Dura now becomes a contesting space.

The contest for authority over Dura is resolved in an interesting way. A challenge is set before Elohim and the question is: will the god of Israel be able to save face? Or a better question: will Elohim be able to save his image that in fact has already been set up within Marduk's territory by the events of Daniel 1? Maybe Elohim just got lucky to win the "battle of the banquets" (de Bruyn 2014) as narrated in Daniel 1. How will Elohim fare when he is challenged to protect his people from death? However, again the situation is turned around. What is supposed to be a challenge to Elohim's abilities becomes a challenge to Marduk's own authority.

Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar condemns the three men to die by fire (Dn 3:19-20). He does, however, first try to persuade them to bow down before the image. Nebuchadnezzar argues that no other god will be able to save them from his hands. In other words: no god is more powerful than the king and his gods. Again Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to obey the king. With their second refusal to bow down before the golden statue, the three Hebrew men, on behalf of Elohim, accept Nebuchadnezzar's challenge: "Who is the god that can save you out of my hands?"<sup>4</sup>

Cognitively the hands of Nebuchadnezzar can be described as a spatial vessel. From the context it is clear that as a vessel, the hands of the king are cognitively associated with a space of power. Nebuchadnezzar's hands serve as a spatial marker for Marduk. Since Nebuchadnezzar is Marduk's king and thus the representative of Marduk's god-space, it is logical to also associate the hands of the king as part of

<sup>3</sup> *Daniel* in italics refers to the character, while the biblical book or narrative is indicated by the use of the unitalicised Daniel.

<sup>4</sup> באדון נבוכדנצר התמלי חמא וצלם אנפיהי אשתנו [אשתני קרי] על שדרה מישף ועבד גנו | ענה ואמר למזא לאתונא חד שבעה על די חנה למזיה:

Marduk's god-space. Reading the text from a spatial-body-frameset makes it possible to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's question as: "Who is the god that is stronger than Marduk that he can rescue you from Marduk's power?"

On a cognitive level a connection can be made between the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace. In the narrative of Daniel 3 the fiery furnace functions as a space of punishment. The furnace thus serves as an extension of Nebuchadnezzar's hands. It is the place where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are punished for not acknowledging the power of Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar's question of "Who is the god that can save you from my hands?" can thus cognitively be extended to the furnace, meaning: "Who is the god that can save you from the fire?"

Twisting events around, the author narrates his story in such a way that contrary to any expectation the fiery furnace is transformed from punishment-space to a power-space for the god of Israel. Even though the furnace's heat was increased seven times (Dn 3:19), Elohim withstands Marduk's challenge to save his image (the three Hebrew men) from being incinerated by the fire. Now, not only does the god of Israel have his own image in the plain of Dura, his base of operation is enlarged. The author shows that the furnace is not under the control of Nebuchadnezzar or Marduk, but under Elohim's own control.

The clash of images thus leads to the miraculous saving of the three men in the furnace. This reveals Elohim's power and authority. Nebuchadnezzar and his gods cannot kill the three men, for their god is stronger. Not only does the god of Israel have the power to operate within the spatial domain of Marduk, but he has the power to challenge Marduk and defeat Marduk inside his own supposed authority-space. Again, as in Daniel 1, the narrative shows that the god of Israel can act in Marduk's god-space and no other god can stop him. Cognitively the image of Elohim in the form of the three men could not be brought down. In this way the image of Marduk loses sway over the plain of Dura. Dura starts out as part of Marduk's god-space, but at the end of the narrative the plain forms part of Elohim's god-space. Ultimately it is not just the plain of Dura that belongs to the god-space of Elohim, but the whole province of Babylon (Dn 3:1). In this way Elohim's god-space is enlarged while Marduk's is made smaller. It now becomes clear that the god of Israel is not the desecrated god that the Babylonians deemed him to be.

The activities of Daniel 3 were supposed to be in favour and in honour of Marduk and his pantheon. However, the day turns out to be an event where the authority and

power of Elohim is publicly recognised. Ironically, Marduk's king does not stay as faithful to him as one would expect. Nebuchadnezzar recognises Elohim's authority and power publically (Dn 3:28-29). He even makes a law that no one should speak of Elohim disrespectfully. Suddenly it is recognised that there is a god that is more powerful than Marduk. Daniel 3:30 emphasises Elohim's authority over the province of Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as the image of Elohim, are elevated to higher positions in the province. At the same time Marduk loses ground, for even his king proclaims the authority of the god of Israel, not only by public confession and laws, but especially by elevating the image of another deity.

Again, as with his narrative of Daniel 1 (de Bruyn 2014), the author shows his readers that the Elohim's authority and rule is not regulated by earthly structured god-spaces. In narrating his story within a spatial-frameset, the author is demonstrating to his readers that Elohim's rule is supreme, seeing that the god of Israel can operate within the jurisdiction of other gods without them being able to prevent him from doing so. The author thus again addresses all doubts that people may have as to the authority of the god of Israel. The Babylonian gods are exposed: they are not stronger than Elohim. If the god of Israel can operate in the plain of Dura, which is supposed to be under Marduk's authority, he can act anywhere. Therefore the Jews should not be afraid to sing Elohim's praises, even within what seems to them a profane and foreign world according to Psalm 137.

Stated even stronger, if the god of Israel can operate within the profane world outside of his own original territory, the land of Israel, he can also protect his people within that profane world. Daniel 3 shows God's protection of his people by revealing his ability to rescue the Hebrew men from the fire. In 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 is not incapable of being present and operative in Babylon, as some Jews may have thought at that time (cf. Is. 40:27). On the contrary, the god of Israel is omnipresent, seeing that his god-space is universal.

This cognitive analysis of Daniel 3 agrees with the apocalyptic nature of the book of Daniel. According to an apocalyptic worldview there is a distinction between the spiritual and natural world. The challenges and hardships that Elohim's people experience are due to a battle in the spiritual world between the forces of Elohim and the forces of evil. The sufferings of Elohim's people is thus not because of his

inability to protect them, but it is part of a bigger universal picture where the battles between Elohim and his opponents extend to every aspect of the cosmos, including human life (Murphy 2002:126-136).

It is important to remember that the book of Daniel was written to guide the Jews who lived under the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanus. These Jews faced prosecution on a daily basis (Murphy 2002:152; Smith-Christopher 1996:17-153). For these Jews the narrative of Daniel 3 meant that they should not fear the Hellenistic onslaught and the foreign gods. They were given the assurance: even though they may suffer as a nation, Elohim's rule is supreme and he will help and protect his people throughout their suffering. Towner (1984:50) believes that the narrative of Daniel 3 is told against the background of a statue of and an altar for Zeus Olympios which Antiochus IV constructed in the Jewish temple (Tcherikover 1982:161-181; Bickerman 1979:68-69). Since the god of Israel is not bound to man-made spatial structures, the fact that God's temple was defiled by Antiochus IV does not imply that Antiochus IV and his gods conquered the god of Israel (cf. Dn 9:25-26; 10:25-26; Murphy 2002:158-161). Therefore the Jews should keep to their faith just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did.

## **CONCLUSION**

The application of a spatial-body-frameset to the narrative of Daniel 3 shows that the story is part of a bigger narrative that already starts in Daniel 1. Utilising spatial markers, the author of Daniel 3 demonstrates to his readers that Elohim indeed has the ability to operate inside the spatial authority (domain) of foreign gods. The narrative is not so much a question of Elohim's capability to protect his people from death, but rather, which deity has authority over the plain of Dura. Due to Elohim's rescue of the three men, the fiery furnace cognitively became a beacon (image) to indicate that the plain of Dura does not belong to the authority domain of Marduk, but to the god-space of the god of Israel. In this way Daniel 3 is not a story about three faithful men, but rather a story about the god of Israel. In his own manner the author attempts to persuade his readers that Elohim's authority is universal, and not restricted to a particular spatial context.

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