

**CONSTRUCTING A DECEITFUL DEITY – THE
DISEMPOWERMENT OF BEL
– BEL AND THE DRAGON, VERSES 1-22 (OG/Th)**

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ABSTRACT

In this article aspects of narrative critique, body, space and ancient cosmologies are combined into a spatial-body framework. This spatial-body framework is then used to analyse the first narrative episode of “Bel and the Dragon” which is described as “The disempowerment of Bel.” Simultaneously, this smaller narrative episode is read in reciprocal relationship with the larger narrative of the Greek Daniel. Such an analysis indicates a shift in the author’s personal cosmology. First, a new worldview is created within which all alien gods are false. Second, the Babylonian god Bel is recreated as a deceitful deity. Third, the identity of the Jewish deity is recreated as an omnipresent all-powerful god. By means of the narrative the editor/author creates a new reality and worldview within which the Jews in the diaspora can still be faithful to their God without being afraid of competing earthly powers or other so-called deities.

INTRODUCTION

In the Septuagint (LXX), the book of *Daniel*¹ is extended with three additional stories and two more chapters. The narrative of *Bel and the dragon*² is one of these additional stories and forms the fourteenth chapter of the *Greek Daniel*.³ In itself, *Bel and the dragon* consists of three episodes. In the first episode Daniel demonstrates to the king that the Babylonian god Bel (Βελ) is not a living deity by uncovering the deceit of Bel’s priests (vv. 1-22). In the second episode Daniel kills a sacred δράκων

¹ *Daniel* in italics refers to the book of Daniel. Daniel in normal script indicates the character named Daniel.

² *Bel and the dragon* in italics refers to the narrative as it is found in the LXX. The words Bel and dragon in normal script indicate a specific deity or a sacred animal respectively.

³ *Greek Daniel* in italics refers to the LXX and Theodotion versions of *Daniel*. *Hebrew Daniel* will be used in reference to *Daniel* as it is found in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament/Tanach)

(dragon/serpent) worshiped by the Babylonians (vv. 23-27). In the last episode Daniel is yet again thrown into a lion's den, but is miraculously saved by the Jewish deity (vv. 28-42).

This paper is the second article in a series written on *Bel and the dragon*.⁴ The objective of the first article⁵ was to identify research lacunae in previous studies on *Daniel 14*. The first article argued that due to new developments in certain areas of the study of literature and language, fresh insights may be presented in order to enhance the understanding of this apocryphal narrative. The third and fourth articles will focus on the second and third episode respectively. The scope of this article is the first episode of *Daniel 14*, i.e., verses 1-22 (OG/Th). The aim of this article is to apply the recommendations made in the first article to the first 22 verses of *Bel and the dragon* (OG/Th). This episode of *Bel and the dragon* is described in this article as *The disempowerment of Bel*.⁶

PAST RESEARCH AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Past research is here summarised as follows:

- The polemic use of the narrative against idolatry (Jones 2003:24-26; deSilva 2002:239). Nickelsburg (2005:24-26) summarised the narrative with the theme

⁴ This series of articles is done as part of a Masters dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Pierre Jordaan of the School of Ancient Language and Text Study, North-West University Potchefstroom-Campus.

⁵ "Constructing realities – *Bel and the dragon* – Identifying some research lacunae", in *Old Testament Essays*, 2014 (forthcoming).

⁶ Both the Old Greek (LXX/OG) and Theodotian (Th) versions are used in this article. Where necessary, differences between the two versions are shown and elaborated on. The article does not focus on ideological reasons as to why the versions differ. Rather, the article uses both versions to explain *Bel and the dragon's* relationship to the *Greek Daniel*. The article further uses both versions to give a more elaborate explanation of *Bel and the dragon's* meaning within the macro structure of the larger *Greek Daniel* narrative. In some sense a more elaborate version is constructed relying on both the Old Greek and the Theodotian versions. Although the versions may differ, they remain one and the same story (*fabula*) just as there are many versions of *Red riding hood*. In this light, this article prefers to focus on *Bel and the dragon* as a narrative and not the differences between its text versions.

“Who is the living God?” Developments in the field of the study of language and texts (for example, an author’s use of space in a narrative) make it possible to examine this theme more thoroughly and elaborately than before.

- The examination of the intertextual relationship between *Bel and the dragon* and Isaiah 44-46 and Jeremiah 51 (Nickelsburg 2005:24-26; deSilva 2002:240).
- Comparing the differences in the narrative between the OG (Old Greek) and Th (Theodotion) as well as the history of these two text versions (van der Bergh 2009:310-323; Jones 2003:139-140; Di Lella 2001:586-607; Collins 1993:237-256).
- Humour and irony as a theme in the narrative (Nickelsburg 2005:24-26; Gruen 1998:137, 167-187; Smith-Christopher 1996:17-152).
- The relationship between the court tales of *Daniel 1-6* and *Bel and the dragon* (Collins 1993:405-419).
- The theme of food in the sense of “eating” and “not eating” as a motive in the narrative (Bergmann 2004:262-283).
- Much research was done on the place and date of origin of *Bel and the dragon* and its different text versions (Nickelsburg 2005:24-26; Charles 2004:656; deSilva 2002:240; Gruen 1998:168-170). There are two versions of *Bel and the dragon*, viz. the LXX, which is usually considered as the older version (100 B.C.E.) therefore often called the OG (Old Greek); and the Th (Theodotion) text which is not only considered to be the more recent version (second century C.E.), but also more elaborate.
- The similarities and dissimilarities between OG and Th as well as *Hebrew Daniel* and its Greek versions (Jones 2003:139-140). Although this research has brought insight into the origins of the story scholars tend to lose track of the narrative as a whole and its function.
- The original language of *Bel and the dragon* (Charles 2004:655).
- The tolerance of the king towards Daniel and his God (Collins 1992:335-345).
- The character of Daniel as a weapon of attack and defence through the ages (Jordaan 2008:45-53). If this theme is combined with a spatial framework, it is

possible to indicate that the editor/author⁷ utilises Daniel not only as a weapon, but as a vessel of the God of Israel.

One of the lacunae in the commentaries on *Bel and the dragon* is their tendency to follow the well-travelled path. It is neither scholars' lack of the Greek language nor their ability to read the text that creates research problems. Rather it is the fact that very few scholars, if any, try to incorporate new insights from new developments in language and text studies. Furthermore, scholars tend to focus on the complete narrative of *Bel and the dragon* and not its individual episodes.

In current text and language studies, new themes such as body, space and narrative structures have emerged. This is partly due to the works of cognitive linguists such as Evens, Bergen, Zinken, Lakoff, Croft and Cruse as well as narrative critics such as Foucault.⁸ Few scholars have done research on space and body in Daniel. Nel (2014) and Venter (2006:993-1004; 2004:607-624) wrote on space in Daniel 1 and 9, but not on space in *Bel and the dragon*. Van den Bergh (2009:310-232) on the other hand considered the differences in location in the story of *Bel and the dragon*. Although these scholars did valuable work, none of them considered the possibility of combining space with the creative properties of language. Thus, the possibility that the author/editor utilised space as a mechanism to *create realities* was not considered. Also, new developments in language and textual studies, specifically the study of space and the creative properties of language, make it possible to read the use of food as a spatial marker whereby different god-spaces can be identified.

This article is unique in several ways, viz.:

- Aspects of narrative critique will be combined with the creative properties of language. No commentary, as far as could be established, has previously considered this possibility.
- Space and body are regarded as markers utilised by the editor/author to create

⁷ Due to the complex origin of *Bel and the dragon*, and the possibility of different narrators, authors and editors working on the text, the term editor/author is used to indicate the person, persons or school responsible for the creation of the Greek *Daniel*.

⁸ The details of these scholars' work are given as the article progresses.

specific realities.

- The narrative itself is read as a mechanism to create a new identity of the Living God and Jewish believers within the reality of the diaspora.
- *The disempowerment of Bel* (episode 1 [verses 1-22]) is treated within a reciprocal relationship with not only *Bel and the dragon*, but also with the rest of *Daniel*. The function of the episode within the larger *Daniel* narrative is thus also considered.
- The episode is read against the apocalyptic genre for which *Daniel* is known.
- Narratives are regarded as structural units demarcated by spatial markers.
- *The disempowerment of Bel* is treated as a short episode within a narrative about a clash of deities.

THEORY AND METHOD

In analysing *The disempowerment of Bel*, different aspects from narrative critique, genre, body and space are uniquely combined into a body-space framework.⁹

Creating realities through apocalyptic narratives

The disempowerment of Bel is first and foremost a narrative episode within a larger narrative called *Bel and the dragon*. Arguing from the vantage point of *Redaktionsgeschichte*, both *The disempowerment of Bel* and *Bel and the dragon* were strategically utilised to create the *Greek Book of Daniel* (Becker 2005:8-9, 77). Thus, the editor/author creates the larger *Daniel*-narrative by strategically placing the different chapters of *Daniel*¹⁰ in a specific order. Each chapter of *Daniel* and consequently each episode of *Bel and the dragon* have a reciprocal relationship.

With his larger *Daniel*-narrative the editor/author comments on a power struggle within his ancient society. The editor/author sets his comments within the apocalyptic

⁹ In my first article on *Bel and the dragon*, this method was explained in detail. Here only a broad overview is given.

¹⁰ This is true of both *Greek* and *Hebrew Daniel*.

genre (Clifford 2003:3-29; Murphy 2002:126-136; Collins 2000:157; Redditt 1999:13). Apocalypticism reflects a unique worldview and is complex in its nature. Aspects of apocalypticism found in *Daniel* are: the dualistic distinction between a physical world and a spirit world; an eschatological deity war between good and evil; and life after death. As an apocalyptic narrative *Daniel* places the suffering of the Jewish people within the perspective of as a larger clash of deities. The Jews should understand that their suffering is due to a cosmic struggle between their God and false gods. However, in the final days (ἔσχατος, cf. Daniel 10:14 to the end of Daniel 12) evil is vanquished and God will emerge as the victor.

In the words of Foucault (1979:113; 1980:109-133; 1984a:202), the power struggle between good and evil can be described as a struggle between a dominant narrative and a challenging narrative. In ancient times the dominant narrative would have been somewhat as follows: Ancient Near Eastern people believed that each nation had its own gods and that those gods were bound to the boundaries of the people who worshiped them. During war each nation called upon their gods to protect them and to give them victory. It was believed that as nations waged war against each other their gods also waged war. Subsequently it was the nation with the strongest gods that won wars. The loser's gods became subordinate to the victors while their earthly territories became part of the winning deity's powerbase (cf. Walton 2006:97-102; Murphy 2002:159). According to this worldview the God of Israel was defeated by the Babylonian gods at the time of the exile. Consequently, the gentile world saw the God of Israel as a degraded deity without real power. Throughout the diaspora this worldview created a crisis for the Jews. During the Second Temple Period Jews were challenged continuously to rethink their belief system (cf. Ps 137 and Is 40).

It is important to comprehend that all life is a narrative and even more so are cultures and worldviews (Lakoff 2008:21-93). Narratives have power, not only to reflect realities, but also to create realities and to hide opposing "truths". Narratives are structures of the brain and when they are written on paper or voiced, language is used to construct them. Words are the building blocks of narratives and thus have the creative power to create framesets in peoples' minds through the narratives they

structured. For the ancient people, their worldviews were real – that was the way the world functioned. The same is true of worldviews today; beliefs are real for the people who hold them. It is within this paradigm that the editor/author of *Daniel* creates his own narrative to challenge the popular ancient worldview of the Near Eastern people. He does this by creating a new reality about the God of Israel and his identity. In creating this new reality, the editor/author utilises narratives about Daniel to influence the way people think about the God of Israel and the deities of the gentile world. This would help a Jewish reader (and modern Christian readers) to understand the *Daniel* narratives as a clash of worldviews and even a clash of different deities. In this way the *Daniel* narratives are more than just polemic stories against idolatry.

For my approach it is important to comprehend the link between narratives and worldviews and also the creative properties of language and narratives (Figure 1).

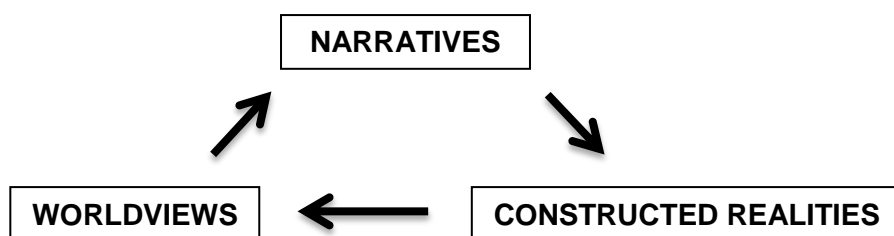


FIGURE 1: The on-going process of creating worldviews, realities and narratives.

In my approach, *The disempowerment of Bel* forms part of a larger editorial unit. This episode-narrative forms part of a larger deity war. *The disempowerment of Bel* is thus treated in a reciprocal relationship with *Daniel* 14, but at the same time as a story within a larger narrative, the *Greek Book of Daniel*.

The utilisation of body

Not only are narratives built/composed around bodies in the form of characters (Foucault 1984b:170-178; 1984c:179-187), but narratives are also formed within the human body in the form of worldviews and opinions (Lakoff 2008:21, 93). Humans use their bodies to interact with the world around them and to experience it. As the world is experienced through the body worldviews/cosmologies and opinions are

formed. Thus, humans employ their bodies to conceptualise (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:555-557). Through bodily experience humans construct different spaces and words which in turn establish frameworks. There is thus a link between the body, words, space and narratives. Furthermore, the body can also function as a space or vessel in itself where specific concepts or experiences can be embodied (De Bruyn 2014:1-6). Lakoff (2008:27) also states that humans understand events in the world in terms of what their bodies can do.

In *The disempowerment of Bel* there are the bodies of the gentile king, Babylonian priests, Bel, and Daniel. In short, there are heroes and villains, a king and his subjects, protagonists and antagonists, as well as deities and humans. These bodies are used to construct a worldview where Bel is worshiped as a living god. Two opposing narratives or realities are thus formed, one about the gods of the gentile world and the other about the God of Israel. The characters within this story are utilised in such a way that at the end of *The disempowerment of Bel*, a new reality about the God of Israel and what He can (or will not) do is created. As the editor/author's readers began to form a new understanding of their God, they also began to understand something of God's identity.

Utilising space

How editors/authors utilise space to create realities goes beyond the identification of different spaces in terms of places. Rather it is an investigation into the creative properties of words that are associated with specific spaces. My research is an attempt to show how editors/authors create narratives or realities by utilising spaces within their conceptual frameworks.

Space forms one of the basic domains of human thinking (Haspelmath 1997:1). At the same time space is the basic framework within which the body functions. It was stated above that humans experience the world through their bodies. In experiencing the world around them humans construct structural spaces through which they can categorise phenomena such as below, on top, inside, outside, and under (De Bruyn

2014:1-6).¹¹ For example, by means of the experience of climbing a mountain, different spaces can be identified. Words are then created to reflect or identify these spaces as above and below. A homestead is usually experienced and categorised as private space and not everyone is welcome to enter that space. Friends are metaphorically experienced as close and customarily may enter someone's private space. Within their different cultures humans may experience certain spaces as sacred or holy and then use words such as temple, church or synagogue to give meaning to the experience of those specific spaces. Sometimes body and space are combined in what can be described as embodied spaces. These embodied spaces are the way (and sometimes place) in which (where) human experience and consciousness takes spatial and material form in different locations and entities (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:1). For example, within the worldview of humans throughout history, deities and their spatial domains can be embodied in different forms or entities like a temple, an altar, a city and even a person such as a priest or king. In *The disempowerment of Bel* the Babylonians and the king viewed the idol as an embodiment of their god Bel. These sacred embodied spaces can be described as god-spaces.

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

The above explanation of body and space and the reading of *Greek Daniel* (both

¹¹ In experiencing spaces a distinction can be made between primary experienced spaces and secondary experienced spaces. Primary experienced spaces are typically those spaces that can be identified through/by movement. For example: By walking up a mountain, a change in space can be experience which can be identified as from below to above. This experience of space is also on a vertical level. Movement in space can also be on a horizontal level where for instance a car is moving towards or away from a specific point. Secondary experienced spaces are spaces that are formed by cultural or religious frameworks. A temple or church, for example, is defined as holy, not by movement of the body, but through an experience based on paradigms in the mind. It is only through cultural/religious mind-sets that one building can be distinguished from another as holy.

OG and Th) as a larger narrative, have interesting consequences for a reader's understanding the book of *Daniel*. The larger *Daniel* narrative shows that what began as an invasion of the God of Israel's god-space (Dn 1) is turned around into an invasion and destruction of the Babylonian deities' god-space. This larger *Daniel* narrative goes on to end with the killing of the Babylonian gods in *Daniel* 14.

APPLYING THEORY AND METHOD

The disempowerment of Bel: Overview

The plot of *The disempowerment of Bel* revolves around the character Daniel who uncovers the god Bel as a fraud and not a living god. Old Greek (OG, vv. 1-2) introduces the story as part of the prophecy of Ἀμβακοθμ (Habakkuk). The character Daniel is identified as a priest of the tribe of Levi and companion of an anonymous foreign king. This supports the theory that *Bel and the dragon* originally circulated independently from *Hebrew Daniel* (Collins 1993:405-410). Theodotian (Th) tries to strengthen the editorial unity of *Greek Daniel* by not only omitting OG's introduction but also by giving the episode a Persian setting. Th identifies the anonymous king of whom Daniel was a companion as Κύρος ὁ Πέρσης (Cyrus the Persian). Cyrus is named in *Daniel* 6:28 and 10:1. This links *Bel and the dragon* to the narratives of *Daniel* 5 and 6. In other words *Daniel* 14 is linked to the time after the Persians overthrew the Babylonians. However, one must be careful not to read too much into the text, but perhaps this Persian setting of the narrative explains why Daniel is much bolder against idols in *Bel and the dragon* than in the narratives of *Daniel* 1-6. It probably would have been easier to convince a Persian king that a Babylonian god is no god – especially if one considers the worldview of the time (as discussed above). A god who could not protect his people in war was a supposedly weak and degraded deity and was subjected to the gods of the conquering power. Bel, also known as Marduk, was the Babylonian high-god (Abusch 1995:1014-1025). If Bel could not protect the Babylonian Empire against the Persians, he was not really worthy of worship. However, history teaches that Cyrus (as did most Persian kings) revered all

the gods of the nations he conquered (cf. also Is 40-45 and Neh 1). Furthermore, verse 4 of both Th and OG indicates that the king did indeed worship the idol of Bel. Although plausible, a Persian setting cannot be the only explanation for a bolder Daniel who laughs at kings and kills gentile priests.

The description of Daniel as a ἱερεὺς (priest) in OG (v 2) does not contradict *Daniel* 1. In *Daniel* 1 the character Daniel is only introduced as a young man from the kingdom of Judah who was taken into captivity to Babylon. Ezra 2 indicates that there were priests who were taken into exile making it possible that Daniel could indeed have been from a priestly family.

The God of Israel is also introduced in this first episode. Yet, OG and Th each do so in a unique way. OG introduces Him as the Lord God (κύριος θεός, OG v 5) while Th defines Him as the Living God (τὸν ζῶντα θεόν, Th v 5). Collins (1993:405) attributes this anomaly¹² to a misreading of the Hebrew *Vorlage* (possibly misreading יה “living” as the Tetragrammaton) by the editor/author or translator of OG. As I indicated above, *The disempowerment of Bel* forms part of a larger narrative which I describe as a clash of deities. In my first article I wrote:

The struggle between deities materialises with the underlying question: “Who is the living God?” As the smaller narrative progresses through its three episodes, the question: “who is the living God?” becomes a mechanism to progressively create the identity of the God of Israel. Life and death thus become concepts to construct a narrative as well as identity and reality.

Although this motive of life and death (living and not-living gods) exists in both OG and Th, it is much clearer in Th due to Th’s description of Israel’s God as a Living God.

The episode can be outlined as follows:

Verse 1-2: Introduction. The character Daniel is introduced as companion of a foreign king.

¹² The difference in how the God of Israel is introduced in the different versions of OG and Th.

Verse 3-7: Tension is created between the king and Daniel. Daniel admits that he does not revere the Babylonian god, Bel, as he is not a real living deity.

Verse 8-14: Tension builds up further. A test is set up to examine the divinity of Bel.

Verse 15-18: Tension reaches breaking point when the next morning they discover that all the food on Bel's altar/table is gone.

Verse 19-22: In the denouement of the episode the deceit of Bel's priests is uncovered. The priests are killed and the idol of Bel destroyed.

The disempowerment of Bel: The smaller episode

The disempowerment of Bel is not just a polemic story against idolatry. It is a commentary on the divinity of not only Bel, but also the divinity of the God of Israel. It is a story written to create an alternative reality within the gentile worldview of the diaspora. The editor/author wants to influence the way people think about the God of Israel. In creating this new reality the editor/author also helps to reform Jewish dogmas. To create a new reality the editor/author utilises spatial and bodily aspects from the ancient worldviews of the ancient Near Eastern people in his story. Against the background of this ancient worldview the editor/author narrates his story as a clash of deities.

Setting up opposing spaces

Within the parameters of the ancient Near Eastern worldview, Bel's god-space is indicated by:

- εἶδωλον (an idol, OG/Th v 3),
- Βηλ ἱερεῖς (Bel's priests, OG v 9; Th v 8),
- ἱερόν (a temple, OG v 8);
- τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Βηλ (the house of Bel, Th v 10).

βρῶμα (food) is also used as an embodied marker of power, divinity and life. In *Bel and the dragon* food in the sense of "who nourishes who" is very important for it embodies the elements of life and death. Bergmann (2004:262-283) already showed how the motive of food is used to establish a hierarchy between different characters in

Bel and the dragon. If this is combined with a spatial-body framework it also becomes possible to show which deity is a living god by having power over life and death. As with *Daniel 1*, food can thus be used as a spatial marker. In this episode, food is first used to help mark the god-space of Bel. However, as the episode develops, the food becomes a marker by which Bel's god-space can be defined as a place of deceit and fraud.

At the beginning of the story, the God of Israel's god-space is embodied in Daniel, who functions as a priestly vessel of the Jewish deity. In *Daniel 1*, Daniel is utilised as a kind of defence mechanism for the presence of the Jewish deity. Here, in this smaller episode, he is more a mechanism of attack through which God acts. Rather than acting as an embodiment of Bel, the king embodies the sceptics, those who have their doubts and misgivings about the God of Israel as well as the worldviews of their time. The king asks questions about "living gods" that can be expected from people questioning one deity's divinity and defending that of another. The king did, however, worship the idol of Bel.

The episode begins with a proclamation of Bel's divinity (OG/Th v 3). There is a Babylonian god Bel who eats a lot. While the king revered Bel, his companion Daniel did not. One day the king asks his companion why he did not revere Bel. Instead of answering the king that Bel was defeated by the Persian gods when the Persians took over from the Babylonians, Daniel proclaims the divinity of the Jewish deity. A deity that was supposed to be defeated by Bel (Marduk) himself when king Nebuchadnezzar invaded his city of Jerusalem and his temple (Dan 1). Daniel only worships the true Living God, the God of Israel. Now, the king asks Daniel an interesting question (Th v 6): καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ βασιλεὺς οὐ δοκεῖ σοι Βηλ εἶναι ζῶν θεός ἢ οὐχ ὄρας ὅσα ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν?¹³ Thus, to be a god, the deity should be nourished by humans and he/she must eat a lot. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative elements are used to identify a deity.

To be a deity –

¹³ And the king said to him: "Do you not think that Bel is a living god? Or do you not see how much he eats and drinks every day?"

- qualitative: *eats* food offered by humans
- quantitative: consume *lots* of food

The irony in this motif is that one would expect a god/goddess to be capable of nourishing him/herself. It is exactly this irony that is used in the third episode of *Bel and the dragon* to create the living divinity of the Jewish deity. For, in contrast to popular belief that deities must eat a lot, there is no indication that the God of Israel needs nourishment. He lives by sustaining himself. At the same time, he nourishes Daniel when he is thrown into the lion's den. Therefore, according to the editor/author, a real living God sustains life, nourishes others rather than being nourished.¹⁴ Already in this first episode food becomes a linguistic mechanism to create a new reality about different deities.

The proof is in the eating/not eating: Confrontation

Daniel answers the king that he must not be deceived for Bel is made out of bronze and clay and does not drink or eat anything (OG/Th v 7). Daniel, as a priestly representative of τὸν ζῶντα θεὸν (the Living God), thus challenges the divinity of Bel. Here the editor/author utilises Daniel as a spatial marker of the Jewish deity. Bel who challenged the God of Israel by invading his god-space in Jerusalem is now challenged by this same Jewish deity he (Bel) supposedly defeated by invading his temple (Dn 1). It was normal practise in ancient times to place food and drink before the idols of the gods. The gods were regarded as present in the idols. They supposedly consume sacrifices by merely looking at them, although sometimes it had to be burned to be transferred to the spiritual realm. The leftovers usually went to the king and temple personnel (Collins 1993:412). In ancient Israel the priests also ate the leftovers of the offerings after most of it had been burned in sacrifice to the Israelite deity (cf. Lv 1-4 and 1 Sm 1:3-5; 2:12-17). When the king confronts the priests of Bel, they maintain that Bel had indeed eaten all the food himself (OG v 9).

¹⁴ This will be discussed much more thoroughly in my third and fourth articles.

The proof is in the eating/not eating: The test

A simple test is now put before Daniel and the priests of Bel. Food will be placed before the statue of Bel; the doors of the temple will be sealed and if the food is gone the next morning Bel would have proven his divinity. Consequently, Daniel will be executed for blasphemy. However, if the food is still there when the temple doors are opened, Bel will have failed to prove his divinity and his priests will be killed. The test is not so much a challenge to Daniel as it is a challenge to Bel. If he is a living god, he must prove himself. In this there is some echo of the challenge Elijah set before the priests of Baal: “If Baal is god, let him prove it by consuming the presented offering” (1 Kings 18). The king himself is depicted as naïve. He must have known that according to custom at least some of the food he himself ate came from the altar of Bel and that Bel therefore did not eat all of the food. The king was supposed to be acquainted with the custom that the priests could eat some of the food offered to Bel. He does not, however, suspect any deceit from the Bel-priests. As priestly vessel of the Jewish deity, Daniel knows that the priests of Bel are deceitful. Despite custom, they ate all of the food and not just some of the food offered to Bel.

The proof is in the *not eating*: Look out for the ashes

Without the knowledge of the priests of Bel, Daniel strewed ashes on the floor of the temple. From the vantage point of a spatial-body framework, the strewing of the ashes could be described of an invasion of Bel’s god-space. The ashes are used as a mechanism to uncover Bel’s temple as a space of deceit. The next morning when they open the doors of the sacred temple space of Bel, the food is gone. Is it possible that Bel could have averted the invasion of his god-space? In his naivety the king immediately proclaims Bel as a living god. Daniel laughs (καὶ ἐγέλασεν Δανιηλ, OG/Th v 19) and shows the king the footsteps in the ashes that lead to and from a hidden door. Bel could not avert the onslaught on his god-space. It was not Bel who ate the food, but the priests and their families that took all the food. The footsteps in the ashes now become a mechanism to inscribe and recreate Bel’s god-space as unholy and deceitful. By using a practical technique Daniel showed the king that it was the priests of Bel who took away the food. In doing so, Daniel’s actions can be described

as those of a detective.

The proof is in the *not eating*: New identity

The editor/author utilises the footsteps in the ashes to create the reality that Bel did not eat the food. Therefore, in reality, Bel is no “living” god. The irony is that this is now true even within the worldview of the Babylonians and Persians themselves. Bel’s god-space is shown to be a space of deceit and his priests liars. With his story the editor/author recreates the identity of Bel as that of a fraud and a “dead” god. Daniel was therefore right not to worship him. If Bel was thus a “dead” god, people should also start to rethink the identity of the Jewish God who, according to ancient worldviews, was supposed to have been defeated and degraded by Bel (Marduk). However, the same worldviews that once proclaimed Bel to be a “living” god now must admit that Bel is not a “living” god. In this way the editor/author shows that the worldviews of the Babylonians and Persians are no longer valid. In the last episode of *Bel and the dragon* it is shown that in reality there is more to the God of Israel than what popular worldviews would permit people to believe.¹⁵

Bel is no “living” god. His divinity and presence in the human world had to be enacted by his priests, while his worshippers were unaware of the deceit. Bel thus needed humans to be and to function as a living god. As a “dead” god, Bel cannot sustain life. This is emphasised when Bel’s earthly embodiments are destroyed. The king handed Bel’s priests over to Daniel and they are executed. Daniel also demolished Bel’s idol and his temple. Bel could neither save the lives of his priests nor defend himself against the vessel (Daniel) of the Jewish deity.¹⁶ With these actions Bel is indeed disempowered and recreated as not only a deceitful deity, but also a “dead” god.

At the end of the episode the once degraded God of Israel is successful in his challenge to Bel. Bel is killed. What started as an invasion of the Jewish deity’s god-

¹⁵ Not only does the Jewish deity nourish Daniel, but He saves him from death.

¹⁶ The killing of the priests of Bel again echoes the story of Elijah and the priests of Baal. The priests of Baal were also killed after their god was shown to be a fraud (1 Kings 18).

space in *Daniel* 1 is turned around into an invasion of Bel's (Marduk) own god-space. Bit by bit Bel loses his god-space to the God of Israel (Dn 1-5) until his whole empire is taken from him. In the story of *The disempowerment of Bel*, Bel not only loses his divinity, but also his life. The clash between the God of Israel and Bel now has come full circle. The recreation of Bel's identity can be summarised by the following scheme:

Before the test:

Dominant reality

Food is offered → Food is consumed → Bel is a living god

Challenging reality

Food is offered → No food is consumed → Bel is not a living god

The test

If Bel eats → Bel is a god → Daniel dies

If Bel does not eat → Bel is no god → Priests die

After the test

One new reality

Priests eat → Bel is dead → Priests die

Bel has no power → Jewish deity not defeated → Daniel lives

The disempowerment of Bel within the larger narrative of *Greek Daniel*

In my first article I indicated that two major spaces can be identified in the larger narrative of *Greek Daniel*. These spaces are on a vertical level, viz.: *below* and *above* (Figure 2).

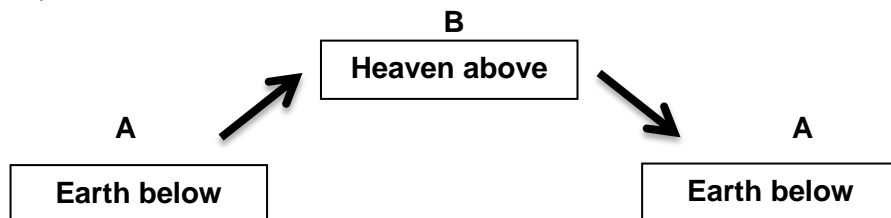


Figure 2: The movement of *space* in the narratives of Daniel.

In the 14 chapters of *Greek Daniel* there is a clear movement in space from Earth below to Heaven above and back again to Earth below (cf. Fig. 2 [A→B→A]).¹⁷ In *Daniel* 1-6 the editor/author creates the reality that the God of Israel is not bound to specific earthly locations as the popular cosmologies of the gentile world proclaimed. The Jewish deity's power stretches all over the earth, despite people's beliefs. In *Daniel* 7-12 the larger narrative moves to heavenly space above. From a heavenly view of earth, the editor/author creates the reality that the God of Israel is indeed universal. Everything that happens down on earth, including the suffering of the faithful, is part of a bigger clash between the forces of good and evil. Furthermore, all things that happen in heaven above or on earth below are part of God's strategy. The God of Israel is thus identified as omnipresent, almighty and powerful.

The events of *The disempowerment of Bel* again take place down on earth. By adding the episodes of Chapter 14 the Greek editor/author shows his readers that the newly discovered identity of God has renewed consequences on earth. In *Daniel* 1-6 the author creates the reality that the God of Israel is more powerful than other deities. In *Daniel* 14, after Daniel is shown the heavenly strategy of God (Dn 7-12) the editor/author comes to the conclusion that if God is going to be victorious in the end (ἔσχατος), then there is no place for false gods on earth. There is only one living God, and that is the God of Israel who requires his faithful to eschew all alien cosmologies and worldviews. This is symbolised by Daniel who slays the priests of the false god Bel and demolishes his idol and temple. In *Daniel* 1-6, the character Daniel is utilised as a spatial vessel of the God of Israel to establish a powerbase for God outside of Israel (De Bruyn 2014:1-6). In some sense Daniel is used as a defence mechanism for the presence of God (Jordaan 2008:45-53). The way in which the author/editor utilises Daniel progresses from chapter 1 to 14 until Daniel becomes a weapon of destruction with which the God of Israel exterminates the pseudo-deities. Perhaps this is the reason why Daniel is portrayed as much bolder in his dealings with other deities and worldviews in *Bel and the dragon* than in the previous chapters of *Daniel*. Daniel was

¹⁷ *Hebrew Daniel* only moves from Earth below to Heaven above (A→B).

given a heavenly perspective of events down on earth. It was as if he was taken outside the parameters of earth and watched things unfold from a heavenly vantage point. This gives Daniel an advantage. He now knows things that others do not know. Therefore he can indeed laugh at the naiveté of the king who revered Bel as a living God. Daniel's inside knowledge of the real living God's strategy legitimises his priestly authority as a vessel of the Jewish deity. It also marks Daniel's priesthood as more authoritative than that of the priests of Bel for they are liars and deceivers while Daniel knows the truth. Bel is a false god while the God of Israel is the true God; therefore, Bel can be and must be destroyed.

Consequences for the reader

The new reality that the editor/author creates about the identity of Jewish deity indeed has consequences for his readers. The editor/author utilises Daniel as a mechanism to give "inside" knowledge to the reader. As the larger narrative unfolds, the reader is taken along with Daniel in his discovery of not only God's new identity as universal, but also God's heavenly strategy. At the end of *Daniel* 14 the reader knows what Daniel knows and in this way the editor/author recreates a new cosmology in the minds of his readers.

From the vantage point of apocalypticism every believer should know that within this universal clash of good and evil, both heaven and earth are contested spaces. However, in the end (ἔσχατος), all spatial domains will belong to God, for in reality they already do. According to the editor/author's new cosmology the God of Israel is in total control, and all other gods are not only powerless, but also false. Thus, for the Jews living in the diaspora the right thing to do is to remain faithful to God. Religious syncretism and foreign religious practises should not be tolerated. Because God will be victorious over evil, it is the duty of the faithful to fight evil in their daily lives even if it means showing intolerance to other religions. Whether Babylonian or Persian, or even Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who fancied himself a god, all other religions and their gods must be opposed.

CONCLUSION

The application of a spatial-body framework combined with aspects of narrative critique indicates that the narrative-episode, *The disempowerment of Bel*, is utilised to recreate the identity of not only alien gods such as Bel, but also the Jewish deity. The author starts to recreate a new cosmology within which the Jews in the diaspora can still be faithful to their God without being afraid of earthly powers or other so-called deities. Within this new worldview the boundaries of the Jewish deity's god-space becomes unlimited.

There is however also a shift in tolerance towards other worldviews in *Greek Daniel*. Although it is already shown in the first chapters of *Daniel* that the Jewish deity is more powerful than other deities, Daniel and his friends co-exist with tolerance towards other worldviews. However, in *The disempowerment of Bel*, Daniel kills the priests of Bel and destroys his idol and temple. Since the episode shows that the God of Israel is the only true living God, other worldviews could and should be obliterated.

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