

## A LITERARY-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF DANIEL 2: TWO POWERS IN OPPOSITION<sup>1</sup>

M. Nel<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This article investigates some aspects of Daniel 2 and attempts to demonstrate the value of the literary-historical approach to biblical texts. The literary-historical approach consists of three elements: a structural, a historical and a narrative analysis of the text. Firstly, the structural investigation uses Propp's model for a functional analysis of the text, followed by a semiotic analysis to identify the functions and qualifications in the text. A description of the functions and qualifications is essential in order to identify the text's pertinent transformations as well as its underlying semiotic squares. The latter enables the researcher to formulate the theological values or persuasions which the writer wished to convey to her readers. Secondly, synchronic and diachronic insights are integrated in an analysis of the text. Lastly, the results of the study are concluded in a narrative synthesis, in terms of the narrator, setting, characters, plot and style.

In Daniel 2 the Babylonian king, shortly after being enthroned, dreams about his political insecurity. The narrator emphasises that it is God who appoints and dethrones kings. He reveals the future (Dan. 2:29, 47). He rules over the world (Dan. 2:21, 37, 44), and He cares for His people (Dan. 2:48-49). Israel will rule over the world once God destroys all other kingdoms (Dan. 2:44-45). The narrator of Daniel 2 conveys two persuasions to her readers: she emphasises the sovereign rule of God, not only in Jerusalem but also in Babylon, and the responsibility of the faithful.<sup>3</sup>

Most researchers accept that the tale in Daniel 2 is not literally true. It should be read as a literary text. However, the tale has also functioned in various historical contexts and should be read from a historical-critical perspective.

- 1 The paper was read at the XVIIth IOSOT-congress in Basle from 5 to 10 August 2001.
- 2 Dr. M. Nel, Research fellow, Department of Old Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa.
- 3 This article is based on research done for an unpublished Ph.D.-dissertation in Afrikaans, "A theological-hermeneutical investigation of Daniel 1 and 2" (2000) at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, under Prof. D.J. Human. The research for this article was made possible by a post-doctoral fellowship granted by the University of Pretoria for 2001/2002.

The hypothesis of this article is that the tale in Daniel 2 would be better understood if read from a literary as well as historical perspective.

## 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE TALE

Throughout the ages researchers have accepted that the book of Daniel originated in the sixth century, and that its tales were about real historical figures. In some religious communities the tales (Dan. 1-6) were interpreted as historical narratives and the visions (Dan. 7-12) as prophecies.

In time researchers realised that the book had its origin in the crisis elicited by Antiochus IV Epiphanes' policy of compulsory hellenisation of the Jews in Judea. This crisis led to the Maccabean revolt, and to the political and religious independence of the Jewish nation. The observation that the book contains many historical inaccuracies is the most important clue for the fact that the book originated in the second century. These inaccuracies are explained once it is realised that the writer wrote about the events of her own period, the second century.

The book of Daniel as a second-century creation raises important theological questions. Does the book have intrinsic theological meaning if it is not literally true? The modern view of history is characterised by positivism that subordinates the authority of Scriptures to the factual and historical reliability and soundness of biblical texts. This study suggests that the tales be read and interpreted in terms of the science of literature.

The historical background to the two tales, in Daniel 1:1, 18 and 2:1, does not correspond. The narrative is, however, not intended as a historical description or biography. Historical data is only mentioned in order to relate the tale to world history. This part of world history - Judah's Babylonian exile and Nebuchadnezzar's reign - had distinct political and religious connotations for intended or implied readers.<sup>4</sup>

4 The implied reader is the "first-time reader", the original readers for whom the text was written in the first place (Powell 1990:19), or the "reading communities" (Fowler 1983:5-23). The implied reader is "the imaginary person in whom the intention of the text is to be thought of as always reaching its fulfillment" (Kingsbury 1988:38).

The phrase “the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar” (Dan. 2:1) both orientates and disorientates the reader.<sup>5</sup> At the time when Nebuchadnezzar is supposed to dream, he reigned for only a short while. He has not established his power against the other pretenders to the throne. The dream is to be regarded as a result of his insecurities. On the other hand, the reader understands that Daniel 2 represents a backflash, in terms of Daniel 1.<sup>6</sup> The narrator expects her readers to presuppose that Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem in his first year of reign. In the second year, the aggressor already experiences problems. He has to work hard to retain the recently conquered power.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. GENRE

Daniel 2 seems to be a narrative about a dream. The interpretation of the dream corresponds with the information given in the visions (Dan. 7-12). The narrative of Daniel 2, however, is in the form of a tale, and should be interpreted as one of the tales in the Book of Daniel (1-6). The genre of the tale is a court legend that tells of deliverance. Deliverance is effected by the gift to interpret a dream (Collins 1984:49; Davies 1985:54).<sup>8</sup>

- 5 Compare also Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia's alternative reading, based on Daniel 6:19 and 8:27, but without making an essential difference in meaning: “the tenth year”. Speculation on the dates in chapters 1 and 2 only has significance if a historical basis for the tales is accepted. Josephus thinks “the second year” refers to the second year after Nebuchadnezzar has subjugated Egypt. Rashi and Ibn Ezra are of the opinion that it refers to the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign over the *oikoumene*, the thirty second year of his reign (Young 1949:55). Jerome (Braverman 1978:45-46) says Jews solved the problem of the date in Daniel 2:1 by referring to the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign over the Assyrians, Egyptians and Moabites with “the second year”.
- 6 “Backflash” can be defined as the narrator looking back at something that has happened in another scene told previously.
- 7 Compare Hartman & Di Lella (1978:137) for a discussion of the problem of the date provided by the narrator in the first verse.
- 8 Humphreys (1973:222-223) is of the opinion that the basic theme is to propose a suitable life style for the *Diaspora*.

### 3. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Functional analysis<sup>9</sup>

The tale in Daniel 2 consists of narrative material (in vv. 1-2, 12-19, 46 and 48-49), three dialogues (in vv. 3-11, 24-45 and 47), as well as a song of praise (in vv. 20-23). The first verse gives information about the background, and implies information contained in Daniel 1. The narrator relates the dilemma: the king has a dream and requests his wise men to interpret its contents (vv. 1-3).<sup>10</sup> The wise men cannot do what the king requests them to do, and the king thus punishes them (vv. 4-13). Daniel inquires why the wise men are punished, and proposes to interpret the king's dream. He and his three friends pray for the revelation of the interpretation of the dream, and he praises God after receiving the interpretation in a vision (vv. 14-28). The unravelling of the plot consists of Daniel's revelation of the dream as well as its interpretation (vv. 29-45). The king responds by worshipping Daniel, and acknowledging Daniel's God as the ruler who reveals secrets. The narrative ends with the king rewarding Daniel and his three friends, on Daniel's request (vv. 46-49).

- 9 For a discussion of the theory of functional analysis, compare Richter (1971:210-278); Childs (1977:28-30); Stuhlmacher (1977:61-91); Kraus (1982:510-531); Steck (1983:6); Wanke (in Fohrer *et al* 1983:64-83); Barth & Steck (1989:78-114) and Steck (1995:49-64).
- 10 Fohrer *et al* (1983:110) group Daniel 2 and Genesis 40-41 together as an example of the Old Testament motive of "Bedeutungssyndrom 'Begabung mit der Fähigkeit der Traumdeutung'". This motive forms a "geprägte Thema" because the meaning of the dream is not immediately clear. The statue in the dream also calls for several associations by implied readers. It is a characteristic of dreams in the Old Testament that wise men and other people qualified to interpret dreams are not able to solve the problem of the interpretation.

### 3.2 Proppian analysis<sup>11</sup>

An interpretation of the tale according to Proppian functions reveals that the first verse points to a difficult task described three times (repetition,

- 11 Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson published their classification of the world's folktales in 1910. Thousands of folktales have been classified according to this standard system by analysing and summing up the plot in detail with cross-references to the relevant numbers in Thompson's "Motif-Index of Folk Literature". The Index was revised in 1961, organising more than five thousand tales with a thousand basic plots.

Niditch & Doran (1977:180) used Aarne-Thompson's classification system in analysing biblical tales. They describe the literary form of the tale in Daniel 2, Genesis 41 and Ahikar 5-7 as folktales about wise men, concurring with Aarne-Thompson's tale Type 922, "Clever Acts and Words". According to Aarne & Thompson there are four basic plot events combining motives of action, character, background, *etcetera*. The four elements are:

- a person with lower status is *called before* a person with higher status *to answer* difficult questions or solve a problem demanding particular insight;
- the person of higher status *puts* the problem that no one else can solve;
- the person of lower status *solves* the problem;
- the person of lower status is *rewarded* for solving the problem.

The basic event can have several variations, called nuances. The three texts analysed by Niditch & Doran however share the same pattern and typology. The difference between these three tales and the tales described by Type 922 (in Aarne-Thompson's guide) lies in the nuance of the basic motives of the tale type. Nuances play an important role because they describe the particular ethos behind the use of the specific type.

The tale in Daniel 2 differs from the traditional Type 922 tale in that its theme is the revelation of *divine* will (Niditch & Doran 1977:187). In order to answer this theme the plot in Daniel 2 contains two elements never found in Type 922 tales: two action motives (prayer and the answer to prayer in a vision), and one character motive (a divine helper). These additional motives have no place in traditional wisdom tales of wise men who succeed in solving a difficult problem (Niditch & Doran 1977:190). Motives of requests for help and provision of help by a helper are characteristic of Aarne-Thompson's Types 300-749, where the helper and providing action tend to be of magical, but not divine origin.

Niditch & Doran (1977:193) conclude that the traditional wisdom tale has been substantially reformed and altered in Daniel 2, although it is not totally lost. In terms of the structure of motives, Daniel 2 follows the traditional order, but also includes motives and elements that are foreign to the traditional pattern. The additional elements cause the traditional theme of wisdom and resul-

which Propp calls trebling).<sup>12</sup> Milne (1988:211-215) describes this difficult task as a Proppian function.<sup>13</sup> The solution to the problem is the focus of the rest of the tale. The wise men try three times to execute the difficult task. By using trebling twice in the first verses the narrator skilfully emphasises the ability of the person who will ultimately be able to solve the problem. The unravelling consists of Daniel's prayer and the secrets revealed in answer to the prayer. The function of verses 13-19 and 24-25 is to link the two functions - the difficult task and the solution.<sup>14</sup> The solution is described in verses 29-45. In Proppian terms the king's honouring of Daniel is "the acknowledgment and honouring of the hero".<sup>15</sup> That the king also acknowledges Daniel's God is essential to the tale, and the narrator uses this element for important rhetorical functions.<sup>16</sup>

tant success to fade into the background, whereas the interpretation of dream symbols becomes the acceptable norm for divine revelation.

Daniel 2 is similar to Type 922 as far as its basic structure is concerned but differs considerably as far as the motives are concerned. This discrepancy indicates the problems with classification systems based on themes or motives. The Aarne-Thompson classification system leaves room for themes and variations on themes in folktales. Every permutation and combination of motives is given a specific catalogue number. In the end the catalogue system has a large number of tale types, with every tale type representing only a small group of tales. Another problem is that motives and themes overlap categories or types. It is not always possible to determine where one variant ends and the next one starts.

- 12 Watson (1984:275) states that threefold repetition is a phenomenon found time and again in folktales:

... trebling may occur among individual details of an attributive nature ... as well as among individual functions, pairs of functions ... groups of functions, and entire moves (Propp 1968:74).

- 13 This function, 25(M), "a difficult task is given", is usually found in folktales in the context of a dream and its interpretation.
- 14 Functions 25(M), "a difficult task is given", and 26(N), "solving a difficult task".
- 15 Function 14(F), "help for the hero".
- 16 Verses 46-47 describe the king's honouring of Daniel. In Proppian terms this is function 27(Q), "acknowledgement and honouring of the hero". Verse 48 forms function 31(W), "reward for the hero". The last verse has no function in terms of the tale.

The narrator uses repetition to describe the wise men (also in Dan. 4 and 5). The terms used for the six groups of wise men are very vague. Her purpose with the lists is not to define exact groups but rather to emphasise the inclusiveness of all wise men.

In the tale Daniel acts as “hero” while the king, in setting the difficult task, acts in Proppian terms as “the father of the princess” and in Greimas’ (1983:232-235) terms as “sender” or “despatcher”, the one who initiates the action of the plot. The wise men are “the false heroes” and God is “the helper” when he acts on behalf of the hero. The narrator refers to God at strategic points in the narrative (vv. 23, 28 and 37). God is the initiator of the motives of the characters.<sup>17</sup>

The tale’s ending which refers to the three friends (v 49, as well as the reference in v 17) paves the way for the rest of the tales.<sup>18</sup>

Proppian analysis is useful in determining the surface structure of tales as well as helping the researcher to determine what is of primary essence in the tale.

### 3.3 Semiotic analysis

A semiotic analysis of Daniel shows two values or persuasions that the narrator wishes to convey to her readers. The dream refers to a kingdom whose influence and power differs from subsequent kingdoms. In the end the kingdom of God breaks through, destroys all human powers and exists indefinitely. This kingdom refers to God’s immediate reign on earth or (more probably) the rule of his people. The value of God’s sovereignty is emphasised. The same theme determines Daniel’s and Nebuchadnezzar’s songs (respectively vv. 20-23 and 47). The second theme functions adjacently to the main theme, and consists of God’s placing Daniel in a position of great responsibility in answer to his prayer (vv. 18 and 48).<sup>19</sup>

17 Arioch’s role can also be described as “despatcher”, bringing the proclamation to the hero, and the hero into the presence of the king. Hartman & DiLella (1978:139) and Porteous (1979:43-44) note the discrepancy between the two times when Arioch is introduced in the tale.

18 With the exception of Daniel 1:11-16, most researchers regard all passages regarding the three friends (1:6; 1:7; 2:17; 2:49) as secondary appendages (Milne 1988:290).

19 The pertinent transformations may be summarised as follows:

Binary opposition determines the course of the tale.<sup>20</sup> The primary problem opposes the solution of the problem, the request of the king opposes the wise men's incapacity to do what is requested, Daniel contrasts the wise men's inability directly with his God's ability to reveal secrets, and the dream opposes earthly kingdom's failure with the victory of God's reign.

## 4. SOME EXEGETICAL ISSUES

### 4.1 Aramaic use

From Daniel 2:4b to Daniel 7:28 the language changes to Aramaic. No convincing argument has been advanced for this change in language. The words are not found in the oldest documents, although the language also changes in those documents.<sup>21</sup>

Problem – v. 1	<i>versus</i>	Solving the problem – vv. 48-49
Request of king – vv. 2-3, 5-6, 8-9	<i>versus</i>	Inability of wise men – vv. 4, 7, 10-11
Problem for Daniel – vv. 13-16	<i>versus</i>	Solving the problem – vv. 17-45
The plot can be depicted as:		
Inability of the wise men	<i>versus</i>	Might and power of God
20 The plot seen in terms of binary oppositions:		
Problem		Solving the problem
Failure of earthly kingdoms	<i>versus</i>	Victory of divine kingdom
Inability of wise men	<i>versus</i>	Might of God
Problem for Daniel	<i>versus</i>	Solving the problem
Request of king	<i>versus</i>	Inability of wise men

- 21 Researchers have advanced many arguments for the change in language:
- The traditional argument is that Aramaic is used for those parts of the tales which are written for the attention of the heathen nations, especially the prophecies given in the second and seventh chapters. Hebrew is used for the sake of the Jewish reader, who has special interest in the prophecies given in the last chapters (8-12). An international language is used to convey the book's prophetic message. This explanation only makes sense if it is accepted that the book has prophetic value.
  - A similar argument is that those parts in the book which would interest non-Jewish readers are written in Aramaic, while the rest is written exclusively for Jewish eyes.



The narrator uses the Babylonian names of the three friends (in v. 17), but uses Hebrew names (v. 49) at the end of the unravelling of the plot. The Hebrew reader understands that the narrator is subtly showing that fidelity and faithfulness are rewarded. The Jews are depicted as loyal subjects in the Babylonian court, while maintaining a distinctive Jewish lifestyle (cp. Dan. 6:11, when Daniel continues praying to his God even though Darius prohibits prayer to any god). God saves the wise men from Nebuchadnezzar's judgement for the sake of the faithful Jews. The Jews show their loyalty in praying to their God in the crisis, and in honouring him as the revealer of secrets (Dan. 2:19-23).

- Another argument is that the tales of encouragement are written in a *lingua franca* so that all Jews can understand it, while the esoteric visions are written for a learned and sophisticated group of Jews.
- Koch (1980:49) is of the opinion that a part of the book was written in Aramaic because the writer intended it to be written so. The writer did not take the trouble to inform her readers why she wrote a part in another language (Eissfeldt 1974:516).
- The writer wrote during the Maccabean revolt, and she wanted to rouse the sympathies of her readers by telling part of her tales in the hated language of the oppressor.
- The tales functioned apart from the visions long before these were written. The compiler of the book used the tales in the language in which they were handed down. She did not take the trouble to translate the tales, but wrote an explanatory introduction to the tales (Dan. 1) as well as the visions. The introduction contains the essence of what she wanted to convey to her readers. This view presupposes that the compiler used the unedited tales, while the final product shows that she used unique elements of style throughout the book (cf 5.3).
- Hilton's (1995:110) theory is that the two tales represent a secret reflection on Antiochus' policy of hellenisation. The writer had the same intention both when she used two languages and when she used the personal names of Daniel and his friends in Hebrew and Babylonian. The writer was describing the confusion caused by Antiochus' policy of compulsory hellenisation.
- Eissfeldt (1974:517) recalls the Hammurabi Code (Code 9), consisting of the ABA structure, in the form poem-law-poem. The Book of Job also uses this code: prose-poem-prose. Similarly, the Book of Daniel should be understood as Hebrew-Aramaic-Hebrew.

In my opinion, the most reasonable answer is that the change of language was a mistake of an early scribe responsible for handing down the book to the next generation.

The reference to God as “God of the heavens” (vv. 18, 19, 37 and 44) contradicts the astral worship by the surrounding nations. JHWH is the creator of heaven and earth. He rules over sun, moon and stars, as Babylonian objects of worship. The gods are the deification of nature. But JHWH stands above everything created. He is the God of nature. It is typical of the Book of Daniel that no proper name for God is used. All names used are derived from personal relationships with him.

#### 4.2 Daniel’s song of praise

Daniel’s song of praise (vv. 20-23) consists of seven elements. Sevenfold use has symbolic meaning, depicting the completeness of God.<sup>22</sup> The poem’s contents confirm the two primary motives of the larger literary unit: divine wisdom and divine power. God reveals secrets that no man can know. He reveals himself directly to individuals (against the wise men’s claims that no god can do it – v. 11).

When Daniel reveals and interprets the king’s dream, he says by way of introduction that the king had been thinking about “the last days” before retiring to bed (v. 29). The phrase can be translated with “the backside days” (Verhoef 1994:227; Jenni 1997a:84). This may refer to the future (as is the case in most translations; cf Hammer 1976:28). The notion does not have eschatological or prophetic content. Daniel is not referring to the end of time and the chain of events that will precede it, but rather to the situation of the implied reader. His purpose is to show God’s intervention in history in apocalyptic terms (Anderson 1984:19). The narrator describes God’s interference by describing history as prediction in order to assure the reader that God is able to determine the future.<sup>23</sup>

- 22 It is not possible to determine whether the sevenfold description of God’s glory was chosen on purpose. Should that be the case (I think this is highly probable), it refers to the apocalyptic use of “seven” to describe fullness or completeness. See Van Wyk (1983:183) and Venter (1993:1009-1014) for an analysis of the poetical text of verses 20-23.
- 23 This is also emphasised by the word order found in verse 28, “for king Nebuchadnezzar”. The usual word order in Aramaic would be “for Nebuchadnezzar the king”. With her strange word order the narrator wishes to emphasise that it is the God of heavens who is revealing the secret to the king.

### 4.3 Dream

The question arises: why would the king decide not to reveal his dream to his wise men? Either he had forgotten his dream or he wanted to test his wise men in an issue of great importance. Or his demand that they reveal the contents as well as the interpretation of his dream might be examples of his unreasonableness and sadistic revelling in the wise men's misfortune and his unpredictable character. Fewell (1991:25-26) is of the opinion that Nebuchadnezzar's demand that the wise men reveal his dream is deliberately arbitrary. The narrator wishes to emphasise the irrational and unreasonable demands of heathen kings, in order to portray something of the sadistic and unpredictable character of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>24</sup> In narrative terms the narrator uses the royal demand to effectively contrast the inability of the wise men with the almightiness of God. The king's cruel judgement is typical of the arbitrary judicial decisions and cruelty of the kings of that period. In Daniel 2 this information highlights the danger to which Jews in exile were exposed. The king's demand is unreasonable and impossible, but God determines the future and is in the position to reveal it to his children.

### 4.4. Giant statue

The statue in the dream is an allegorical figure of the world's kingdoms, depicted as a giant man.<sup>25</sup> This depiction is often found in world literature. The reader also associates the description of the statue with Daniel 3's statue of gold.

Daniel's calling the king "the head of gold" (vv. 32; 37) is a wise strategic move.<sup>26</sup> In the rest of the revelation Daniel tells of the fall of the kingdom of gold.

24 Compare Ibn Hisham's description in his *Leben Muhammads* of the dream of Rabia, son of Nasr and king of Yemen, who demanded the same from his wise men after his vision (Charles 1929:28).

25 In the words of Exell (s.a.:66) when he describes the statue:

it is a compound thing  
                   it is a big thing  
                           it is an imperial thing  
                               it is a human thing  
                                   it is a tottering thing.

26 One of the titles of the Babylonian king is *šar šarani*, "king of the kings" (Duff s.a.:29).

The kingdoms of the world are united in one statue. Theologically all kingdoms are treated in the same manner, even though each kingdom is autonomous and separate in temporal terms. The kingdoms are seen as part of a greater whole, telling of mankind's hubris and arrogance.

The narrator speaks only of the kingdoms surrounding Mesopotamia because this serves her point of view. Egypt was a mighty and influential kingdom during this period, but it falls outside the implied readers' world of experience.

The valuable and precious statue contrasts directly with the unimpressive, dull, and valueless stone. The difference between the stone and the statue is that no man's hand has touched the stone.

The four kingdoms represented by the different metals are Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece (the Roman view identifies the four kingdoms as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome).<sup>27</sup> The Median kingdom ceased to exist as an independent entity eleven years before the fall of Babylon. However, historical facts are not important to the writer, except to serve her tale. Jewish religion and ethics are the writer's points of reference in evaluating and using historical facts.

There is a definite link between the dream of Daniel 2 and the vision of Daniel 7. In both cases human kingdoms exist only for a limited period, one kingdom following another. Human kingdoms become increasingly animal-like and valueless. In both cases the sovereignty of God controls the pattern of history.

The narrator focuses the attention on the feet of the statue, alluding to the Greek kingdom, existing in Palestine as the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms.<sup>28</sup> The Syrian king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, is threatening Jewish

27 The discussion of the Roman and Greek views has been recorded in detail. Compare Koch (1980:XI-XVI) for relevant literature, and Zenger (1998:461-462) for a short summary.

28 Caragounis (1993:389) counts the number of words used in the description of the different kingdoms, to show where the emphasis lies:

	<i>Dream in Daniel 2</i>		<i>Vision in Daniel 7</i>	
	Description	Interpretation	Description	Interpretation
1st kingdom	6	31	23	-
2nd kingdom	6	6	21	-
3rd kingdom	3	9	20	-
4th kingdom	10	83	78	118

national and religious life with his hellenistic program. The resultant suffering for Jews raised the question: what is God doing to protect his people? The answer to this question forms the focal point of the tale.

God conquers all human kingdoms with the establishment of his “eternal” kingdom. “Eternal” is used to depict a very long or indeterminate period, or the most remote time (Helberg 1994:31; Hammer 1976:28; Jenni 1997b:852-862).<sup>29</sup> Daniel 2 does not contain any reference to a messiah, or any prophecies concerning the end of time (Reeves 1999:20). The narrator encourages the readers of her day - the victims of Antiochus’ vicious prosecution of Jews who tried to remain loyal to their religion and culture - with the comfort that God is determining what is going to happen. The essence of her encouragement is found in the words attributed to Nebuchadnezzar (v. 47).

That the king worshipped Daniel by bowing to the ground before him and offering sacrifices to him has been problematical for Jews throughout the ages. No man may accept the honour that belongs to God alone. I think the writer is showing her sense of humour in the description (v. 46). The Jew has frequently found himself in the position where he is regarded as inferior, but here the great king of the world bows before the Jew, and honours the Jew’s God as the only one who reveals the secret of the king’s dreams. The enemy of the Jew is bowing before him.

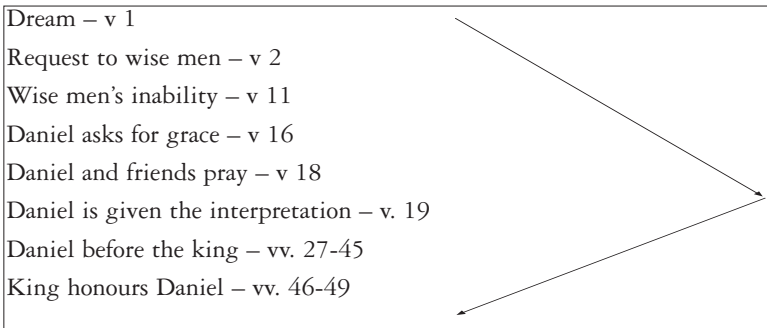
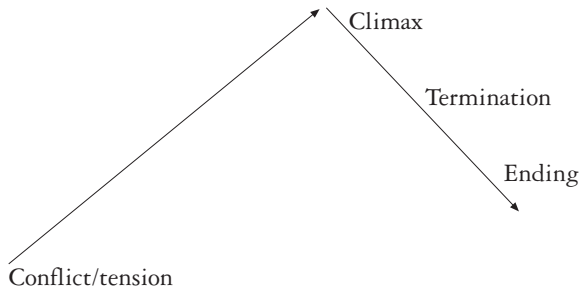
The Jew who was so often in the position of the inferior liked to indulge in the fantasy of having the tables turned on occasion (Porteous 1979:51).

29 The phrase “eternity” occurs fourteen times in the Old Testament (Hammer 1976:28). Only in Jeremiah 2:2 and Isaiah 23:20 is “eternity” used to refer to a new age of God’s reign, according to Hammer. That this is also the sense of Daniel 2:28 is supported by the Septuagint. The Old Greek Translation also translates it with “in the last days”. This leads Archer (1958:30) to propose that “afterwards” should be put before “in the last days”.

## 5. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Plot and characters

The traditional plot consists of the line of tension that climaxes before returning to a state of relaxation.<sup>30</sup>



The order in which the tale is presented is both causal and temporal. After the king has dreamt, he calls his wise men. Daniel comes before the king because the wise men are unable to interpret the dream. This is followed by the revelation to Daniel, and Daniel’s interpretation of the dream for the king. The king honours Daniel. Each incident follows on the previous one both causally and temporally. Development of the plot is restricted because Daniel 2 contains a short story.

30 The plot may develop in various ways. A turn of events may lead the developing line of the story in another direction. The plot of Daniel follows the traditional line.

Only two characters are involved at each stage of the story. The narrator restricts her use of characters so that the reader's attention can be focused on a few points. The parties participating in the action are the king and wise men, the commander of the king's guard and Daniel. The plot is exclusively in dialogue form.

There are no satellite events either. All happenings are vitally important. Core events determine directly the development of the plot. Every event happening in Daniel 2 is causally important for what follows.

The tale is told analeptically, but the narrator intends the dream's interpretation to be understood proleptically. The narrator uses history to make proleptical statements about the future. The only part of the interpretation that is really proleptical is the last part of the dream, which refers to the establishment of a divine kingdom. The narrator uses *prolepses* as a rhetoric tool to give substance to the value of the persuasion she uses to underline the interpretation of the dream, that God's rule is sovereign.

The interpretation of the dream defines causality in the political sphere. One kingdom follows a previous one because God wills it.

The plot in Daniel 2 functions on two levels. On the one hand, the king demands that his wise men tell him the contents and interpretation of his dream, and condemns them to death for their incapability. The narrator intentionally delays the plot to heighten tension with the treble repetition of the wise men's incapability as well as Daniel's conversation with Arioch. Then Daniel calls his friends, prays for the interpretation and receives it. The narrator does not tell the reader what the interpretation is, or even whether it is correct. First Daniel sings his song of praise, which is echoed in the king's words (cp. vv. 21-22 with 30 and 47). The second part of the plot consists of the dream and its interpretation, which forms a distinct tale within the greater tale.<sup>31</sup>

31 The interpretation is gradual and progressive:

Divine kingdom – vv. 44-45
Divided kingdom – vv. 41-43
Strong kingdom – v 40
Large kingdom – v 39a
Unimportant kingdom – v 39a
Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom – vv. 37-38

Daniel asks the king to delay his demand for the interpretation of his dream (in v. 16), but verses 25-26 relate how he has to be introduced to the king by Arioch. Redaction-historically this contradiction betrays a seam in the tale. Structurally it is interpreted as an element of style, repetition, used by the narrator to delay the story in order to heighten tension.

The narrator highlights certain values or persuasions. These persuasions explain why she is telling her story. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is the central focus in the tale. The essence of the dream is that all human kingdoms will cease to exist when God establishes his sovereign rule and divine kingdom on earth. Verse 47b contains the king's reaction to Daniel's interpretation, and it emphasises the sovereign rule and might of God. Daniel's song of praise (vv. 29b-23c) is also about sovereignty. The sovereign God has given Daniel the wisdom to interpret the dream. This wisdom - not the royal reward promised to him - places Daniel in a powerful position, a position of responsibility (cp. vv. 20b and 23a). This is the second value which the narrator emphasises. In Daniel 1 power is given to Daniel in response to his resoluteness, while in the second tale power is given to him in answer to his prayers (cp. v. 18 with v. 48).

## 5.2 Point of view

The narrator is omniscient, but not neutral. Her sympathy is clearly with Daniel and not the wise men nor the king. The narrator tells the tale from her point of view. This is obvious from a comparison of verses 10, 11 and 28 with verse 47. She does not, however, use her point of view all the time, and thus makes the telling of the tale more dramatic.

When Daniel stands before the king a second time (v. 27), he does not use the formulaic greeting. He has just sung his song of praise to his God (vv. 20-23), and knows that the interpretation of the dream implies that the king cannot be greeted with the wish for a long life (cp. Dan. 2:4).

The narrator also uses Daniel to tell the tale (in vv. 17-23 and 29-45). She regulates the tale and determines the point of view of the various characters. By her lengthy use of Daniel, the narrator betrays that Daniel's point of view determines the *denouement* of the plot.

God's point of view is the conceptual point of view in Daniel 2. He is not painted as a character but the other characters ascribe actions and effects to him. The description of his influence and decisions determines the nar-



rative.<sup>32</sup> The conceptual point of view also determines the perceptual point of view or the perspective from which the events in the tale are represented. The narrator wishes to assure her readers that God is in control in his sovereign rule. The remainder of the narrative is subordinated to this theological point of view. Even the point of view of interests is determined by the theological point of view. The narrator is telling the story to promote the interests of Daniel because he stands in the service of God.

Daniel acts as double for God. That is why his behaviour is as predictable as God's. God is morally perfect. In this way Daniel becomes the only biblical character, with the exception of Jesus, who is depicted as morally perfect and righteous.

The irony in the tale lies in the king's insistence to hear the interpretation of the dream and his rewarding of the interpreter, while the interpretation describes his fall. The dream honours Daniel's God and not Nebuchadnezzar. Although the king is glad for the interpretation, the dream focuses on God and his sovereign rule. The irony emphasises the narrator's use of two points of view: the king's and God's.

The narrator never leaves the tale. The narrative expires temporally in logical order.

### 5.3 Characteristic style

A writer is recognised by her style. The writer of Daniel 2 distinguishes herself by using repetition of words and phrases, numbers and lists, and irony and contrast.

- 32 The most important descriptions of God's influence and might are found in Daniel's song in verses 20-23:

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for thou hast given me wisdom and strength, and hast now made known to me what we asked of thee, for thou hast made known to us the king's matter. (Revised Standard Version.)

Nebuchadnezzar's song in verse 47 is also a good illustration:

Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.

Compare also verses 18-19, 28, 37-38, and 44-45.

### 5.4 Theological statement

The narrator of Daniel 2 makes the theological statement that God is working behind the scenes of world history, determining the way of nations. He decides what will happen in favour of his people. What happens to the believer is part of God's sovereign rule. Even though the statue of *Zeus Ouranos* stands defiling the courtyard of the temple and Jews might think that their God has been dethroned, believers may from the point of view of belief see God on the throne of the universe.

## 6. SYNTHESIS

A literary-historical analysis of Daniel 2 contributes towards understanding the meaning of the tale. The tales in the Book of Daniel should not be read literally as history before their meaning is understood. The relevance of the Daniel tales lies in an honest research of the text as a product of the second century B.C., originating from the Antiochian prosecution of Jews and leading to the Maccabean revolt. Working with the second century text, the researcher understands that Daniel 2 encourages those suffering from Antiochus' sadistic demands of hellenisation. But modern man and woman, finding him- or herself in a totally different but similar situation, may also find that God still comforts people in the chaos of the human world.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ANDERSON R A

1984. *Signs and wonders. A commentary on the book of Daniel.* (International theological commentary.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

### ARCHER G L

1958. *Jerome's commentary on Daniel.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

### BARTH H & STECK O H

1989. *Exegese des Alten Testaments. Leitfaden der Methodik: Ein Arbeitsbuch für Proseminare, Seminare und Vorlesungen.* Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

### BRAVERMAN J

1978. *Jerome's commentary on Daniel: a study of comparative Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible.* (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly - Monograph series 7.) Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America.

## CARAGOUNIS C C

1993. History and supra-history: Daniel and the four empires. In Van der Woude, A. S. (ed.) *The book of Daniel in the light of new findings*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 387-398.

## CHARLES R H

1929. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the book of Daniel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

## CHILDS B S

1977. *Old Testament books for pastor and teacher*. Philadelphia: Westminster.

## COLLINS J J

1984. *Daniel. With an introduction to apocalyptic literature*. (The Forms of the Old Testament Literature Volume XX.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

## DAVIES P R

1985. *Daniel*. (Old Testament Guides.) Sheffield: JSOT Press.

## DUFF M

s.a. *Daniel the prophet. The boy with a purpose*. London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott.

## EISSFELDT O

1974. *The Old Testament. An introduction. The history of the formation of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Translated by P.R. Ackroyd.

## EXELL J S

s.a. *The Biblical illustrator. Daniel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

## FEWELL D N

1991. *Circle of sovereignty. Plotting politics in the book of Daniel*. Nashville: Abingdon.

## FOHRER G et al

1983. *Exegese des Alten Testaments. Einführung in die Methodik*. 4. durchgesehene und überarbeitete Auflage. Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer.

## FOWLER R M

1983. Who is "the reader" in Reader-response Criticism? *Semeia* 31:5-23.

## GREIMAS A J

1983. *Structural semantics: An attempt at a method*. Translated by D. McDowell, R. Schleifer & A. Velie. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

## HAMMER R

1976. *The book of Daniel*. (The Cambridge Bible Commentary.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## HARTMAN L F &amp; DiLELLA A A

1978. *The book of Daniel*. Manchester: Anchor.

**HELBERG J L**

1994. *Die boek Daniël. Skrifuitleg vir Bybelstudent en gemeente*. Kaapstad: N.G. Kerk-Uitgewers.

**HILTON M**

1995. Babel reversed - Daniel chapter 5. *JSOT* 66:99-112.

**HUMPHREYS, W L**

1973. A life-style for Diaspora: a study of the tales of Esther and Daniel. *JBL* 92:211-223.

**JENNI E**

1997a. 'br, in Jenni, E. & Westermann, C. (eds.) *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament. Volume 1. 'ab – gnp*. Translated by M E Biddle. Peabody: Massachusetts, 83-88.

1997b. 'olam. In Jenni, E. & Westermann, C. (eds.), *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament. Volume 2. gesed – tsyyon*. Translated by M.E. Biddle. Peabody: Massachusetts, 852-862.

**KINGSBURY J D**

1988. *Matthew as story*. Second edition. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

**KOCH K**

1980. *Das Buch Daniel*. (Erträge der Forschung, Band 144.) Under mitarbeit von Till Niewisch und Jürgen Tubach. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

**KRAUS H-J**

1982. *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*. 3. erweiterte Auflag. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

**MILNE P J**

1988. *Vladimir Propp and the study of structure in Hebrew Biblical narrative*. (Bible and Literature Series.) Sheffield: Almond Press.

**NIDITCH S & DORAN R**

1977. The success story of the wise courtier: A formal approach. *JBL* 96:179-193.

**PORTEOUS N**

1979. *Daniel*. (Old Testament Library.) Second, revised edition. London: S.C.M.

**POWELL M A**

1990. *What is narrative criticism?* (Guides to biblical scholarship. New Testament series.) Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

**PROPP V**

1968. *Morphology of the folktale*. Second revised edition. Ed. L.A. Wagner. Austin & London: University of Texas Press.

**REEVES S**

1999. Die einde van alles? *Insig* 138:16-18.

## RICHTER W

1971. *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft; Entwurf einer alttestamentlichen Literaturtheorie und Methodologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

## STECK O H

1983. *Arbeitsblätter Altes Testaments für Einführungskurse*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag.

1995. *Old Testament exegesis. A guide to the methodology*. (S.B.L. Resources for Biblical study 33.) Translated by J.D. Nogalski. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

## STUHLMACHER P

1977. *Historical criticism and theological interpretation of Scripture. Toward a hermeneutics of consent*. Translated by R.A. Harrisville. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

## VAN WYK W C

1983. The structure of Daniel 2.20-23. In Van Wyk, W.C. (ed.) *The exilic period. Aspects of apocalypticism*. OTWSA 25 (1982) & OTWSA 26 (1983) Old Testament Essays. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 183-187.

## VENTER P M

1993. The function of poetic speech in the narrative of Daniel 2. *HTS* 49(4): 1009-1020.

## VERHOEF P A

1994. Die aanduiding van tyd in die boek Daniel. *In die Skriflig* 28(2):223-233.

## WATSON W G E

1984. *Classical Hebrew poetry. A guide to its techniques*. (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26.) Sheffield: JSOT Press.

## YOUNG E J

1949. *A commentary on Daniel*. (Geneva series of commentaries.) London: The Banner of Truth Trust.

## ZENGER, E et al

1998. *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

## Keywords

Old Testament exegesis

Literary-historical approach

Daniel 2

## Trefwoorde

Ou-Testamentiese eksegese

Literêr-historiese benadering

Daniël 2