

The Daniel Narratives (Dan 1–6): Structure and Meaning

NAAMA GOLAN



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ARIEL UNIVERSITY¹

INTRODUCTION: THE DANIEL NARRATIVES AND THEIR OBJECTIVE

The Daniel narratives (Dan 1–6) are defined as “court tales”: a literary genre that features also in other biblical² and extra-biblical sources,³ and describes the foreign courtier whose wisdom secures him a prominent place in the royal court despite his ethnic differences.

Based on the Daniel narratives’ similarity to other court tales, many scholars have read them as stories whose objective is to describe the relationship between the Jewish courtier and his foreign environment. In his salient 1973 article, Humphreys claims that both Daniel 1–6 and the Book of Esther should be read as court tales

¹ This article is based on my doctoral dissertation, which I wrote in Bar Ilan University, supervised by Prof. Elie Assis: N. Golan, *The Daniel Narratives: A Literary Analysis of Daniel 1–6*, PhD dissertation, Bar Ilan University, (Ramat-Gan, 2017). I would like to thank Prof. Assis for his invaluable assistance over the course of its writing. I am also indebted to Prof. Yair Zakovitch and Prof. Michael Segal from the Hebrew University for their review and helpful comments on this article. The biblical verses quoted throughout this paper are taken from the NRSV translation unless otherwise indicated. In many cases there is a discrepancy between the verse numbers in the Aramaic source and those in the English translation. The numbers appearing in the paper follow the Aramaic version of the MT.

² Biblical court narratives include the Joseph narrative and the Book of Esther. On the connection between the three stories (Joseph, Esther, and Daniel), see L.A. Rosenthal, “Die Josephsgeschichte mit den Büchern Esther und Daniel Verglichen,” *ZAW* 15 (1985), 278–84 (279–80).

³ Extra-biblical literature belonging to this genre includes, for example, the story of Zerubbabel in the apocryphal Book of Esdras and the story of Ahikar. As Wills has shown, court tales appear in other cultures as well and are found in Persian literature and in the writings of Herodotus. See L.M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (HDR 26; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 193–204.

describing the courtier's success in the foreign king's court.⁴ The objective of the Daniel narratives, he asserts, was to encourage the diasporic Jews to integrate into their foreign surroundings while still adhering to Jewish law and staying loyal to their God.⁵ Daniel and his friends are indeed characterized as figures who, on one hand, successfully integrate into the royal court, while, on the other hand, remain faithful to their own religion, refusing to accept any form of pagan worship. Moreover, these Jews succeed because of, rather than despite, this faithfulness. Many scholars follow in Humphreys' footsteps, analyzing the narratives against the backdrop of the multicultural ideology of the Persian Empire; for example, as Montgomery writes in his commentary on the Book of Daniel:

We see the Jews of the Golah, no longer hanging their harps on the willows, but bravely taking their place in the world and proving themselves the equals and superiors of their Pagan associates.⁶

Collins adds that the political position expressed in Daniel is one of loyalty and optimism toward foreign rule, claiming that generosity and compassion on the empire's part is typical of diasporic literature, particularly that of the Second Temple period.⁷

Recently, however, different readings of the Daniel narratives have begun to emerge, suggesting that they do not reflect the Jews' successful integration into their environment, but rather criticize the government. For example, Smith-Christopher, a postcolonial critic, claims that the attitude toward foreign rule reflected in the Book of Daniel—even in its first six chapters—is far from harmonious and positive.⁸ Valeta similarly points out the rebellious undertones of the text and even proposes reading the Daniel narratives as a satire in which the foreign kings are characterized as capricious, unstable rulers, easily manipulated, humiliated, and given to irrational bursts of temper. This reading perceives these narratives as a polemic mocking foreign rule.⁹

While there is obvious tension between the approaches that see the Daniel narratives as stories of integration and those who see them as stories of antagonism toward the foreign empire, these readings nonetheless share a common premise: that the Jewish courtier's

⁴ W.L. Humphreys, "Life Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973), 221–223 (222–23).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J.A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ICC 25; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 101.

⁷ J.J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia 16; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 51.

⁸ D.L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 184.

⁹ D.M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1–6* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

relationship with the foreign court lies at the heart of these narratives.

Alternatively, the focus of the Daniel narratives may be seen as the tension between earthly and divine rule. This direction is followed by Davis,¹⁰ by Fewell in her literary study of “circle of sovereignty” in the Book of Daniel,¹¹ by Newsom in her study of the Book of Daniel,¹² and by others.¹³

In this article, I wish to demonstrate how a reexamination of the Daniel narratives from this perspective, which focuses on the tension between earthly and divine rule, may shed new light on the definition and aim of Daniel 1–6. Additionally, I will suggest a new structure for the stories in these chapters, which may afford insight into the meanings of the tales and the process of their formation.

DELINÉATING THE NARRATIVE SECTION

One of the greatest conundrums of the Book of Daniel is the inconsistency in the matching between the two languages the book is written in (Hebrew and Aramaic) and the two genres that it includes. When genres are concerned, we may differentiate between two units: Chapters 1–6 and Chapters 7–12. The first unit, belonging to the narrative genre, includes six court tales delivered in the third person, recounting the rise to fame of Daniel and his friends in the court of the foreign king. The second unit is categorized as apocalyptic literature; it is composed as a first-person account by Daniel, who speaks of the visions revealed to him. When the two languages are concerned, the division is different: Chapters 1–2:4a are written in Hebrew, while Chapters 2:4b–7 are in Aramaic. Several scholars have discussed the question of the original language of the book, proposing various suggestions.¹⁴ Some assert that the Aramaic of Daniel 2–7 indicates that these chapters were an independent unit that had been in circulation before the Hebrew chapters were added to it. Hence, Chapter 7 should be perceived as a part of the narrative

¹⁰ P.R. Davies, *Daniel* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 91.

¹¹ D.N. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1–6* (BLS 20; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).

¹² C.A. Newsom and B.W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

¹³ A. Rofé, *Introduction to Historical Literature in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2001), 106 (Heb.).

¹⁴ Some have suggested that the book was written originally in two languages, just as we know it today; others claim that the whole book was composed in Hebrew originally, while an Aramaic version was available at the same time. According to the latter suggestion, parts of the Hebrew version had gone missing over time and, in order to fill the lacuna, the author borrowed from the Aramaic version. Others proposed just the opposite: the original book was in Aramaic and parts of it were translated into Hebrew at a later stage. For a history of research, see Collins, *Daniel*, 12–13.

unit.¹⁵ This claim receives literary support from the chapters' chiastic structure.

THE STRUCTURE OF DANIEL 2–7

As several scholars have shown,¹⁶ Chapters 2–7 are arranged in a chiastic structure that links Chapter 4 to 5, Chapter 3 to 6, and Chapter 2 to 7:

A: Chapter 2: The four kingdoms that rule over Israel

B: Chapter 3: The divine salvation of God's believers
(from the fiery furnace)

C: Chapter 4: God subjugates the Babylonian king
(Nebuchadnezzar)

¹⁵ The vision chapters (7–12) contain many hints to Antiochus's decrees and are therefore dated to this time. Since there are no allusions to these decrees in the narrative chapters (1–6), they are dated to an earlier period. Since Chapter 7 does contain hints to the time of Antiochus, those scholars that attribute this chapter to the narrative unit believe that these hints are not an integral part of the work, but rather a second layer added at a later stage. See G. Hölscher, "Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel," *TSK* 92 (1919), 113–38; M. Noth, "Das Geschichtsverständnis der alttestamentlichen Apokalyptik," *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen* 21 (1953), 4–25.

¹⁶ A. Lenglet, "La structure littéraire de Daniel 2–7," *Bib* 53 (1972), 169–90. Many scholars have embraced this structure; see, for example, Radday, who used Lenglet's chiastic model as a basis and developed it. He argues that, in addition to the chiastic structure of the literary unit comprising Chapters 2–7, we can identify a chiastic structure for the entire book that is based on the two languages it was composed in. The Hebrew part opens the book and concludes it, whereas the Aramaic part comprises its center. Moreover, the Hebrew literary unit (Chs. 8–12) also follows a chiastic pattern: Chapter 8 deals with a vision about the two kingdoms, Persia and Media, while Chapters 10–12 also present a vision about these two kingdoms. The "Prophecy of Seventy Weeks" appears in the center of the book, in Chapter 9. See Y.T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in J.W. Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 50–117; see, also, R. Albertz, *Der Gott des Daniel: Untersuchungen zu Daniel 4–6 in der Septuaginta fassung sowie zu Komposition und Theologie des aramäischen Daniel buches* (SBS 131; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 170–84. Tanner too relies on Lenglet's structure, introducing minor changes to it. He identifies an "overlapping structure" in the composition, meaning that the book can be divided into two parts: Chapters 1–7 and Chapters 7–12. According to Tanner, Chapter 7 is an intentional "hinge chapter" of the book, thus belonging to both its parts. Tanner considered this division as a literary technique that meant to highlight Chapter 7 as the central and most significant chapter in the Book of Daniel. See J.P. Tanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," *BSac* 160 (2003), 269–82; see, also, M. Segal, *Dreams, Riddles and Visions: Textual, Contextual and Intertextual Approaches to the Book of Daniel* (BZAW 455; Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2016), 211–13.

C: Chapter 5: God subjugates the Babylonian king (Belshazzar)

B: Chapter 6: The divine salvation of God's believers (from the lions' den)

A: Chapter 7: The four kingdoms that rule over Israel

Both stories stand at the center of the chiastic structure, describing an arrogant Babylonian king who is punished for his pride. Both kings are informed of the impending demise of their rule—either in a dream or by a mysterious inscription that appears in the midst of a banquet. The connection between the “Dream of the Tree” narrative (3:31–4:34) and the story of “Belshazzar’s Feast” (Ch. 5) is reinforced through Daniel’s reproach to Belshazzar before his interpretation of the mysterious writing on the wall. Half of this speech (5:22–23) is devoted to a description of the deeds of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar’s father. These verses paraphrase Chapter 4 and emphasize the connection between the events that befell the father in this chapter and the fate of his son in Chapter 5.¹⁷

There is a clear similarity between the “Fiery Furnace” narrative (3:1–30) and the narrative of “Daniel in the Lions’ Den” (Ch. 6), from a perspective of both plot and language. Both stories begin with a royal edict: in Chapter 3 the king orders everyone to bow down to a golden image, while in Chapter 6 he forbids all to pray to anything or anyone divine or human for thirty days. In both episodes the king’s officials report that someone has violated his command, and these betrayals are described using very similar language:¹⁸ “and accused them” (3:8); “and accused Daniel” (6:25). The punishment that awaits the wrongdoers is described with the verb root רָמַם (3:20; 6:17): Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are *cast* into the fiery furnace, while Daniel is *cast* into the lions’ den. Neither Daniel nor his friends meet their death there, but are instead granted miraculous salvation by an angel

¹⁷ In Daniel 5 Belshazzar is referred to as Nebuchadnezzar’s son; however, according to Babylonian sources, Belshazzar was Nabonidus’s son. It seems that the figure of Nebuchadnezzar mentioned in Daniel 4 reflects the historical figure of Nabonidus. This claim is supported by the discovery of “The Prayer of Nabonidus” in Cave 4 in Qumran. See: J.T. Milik, “*Prière de Nabonide et autres écrits d’un cycle de Daniel*,” *RB* 63 (1956), 407–15; D.N. Freedman, “The Prayer of Nabonidus,” *BASOR* 145 (1957), 31–32; J. Fitzmyer and D. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts* (BibOr 34; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 2.

¹⁸ At first, the king’s subjects address him with the blessing “O King . . . live forever!” (3:9; 6:7), and then they repeat the edict, which is formulated similarly: “whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown” (3:10–11; 6:13) into the furnace or den. Later on, they mention the people who “pay no heed to you, O king” with emphasis on their Jewish ethnicity, “There are certain Jews”; (3:12); “Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah” (6:14).

of God (3:28; 6:23) and emerge unscathed (3:25; 6:23). Both narratives describe this miraculous salvation from the perspective of the king¹⁹ and both contain the motif of reversal by employing the principle of “measure for measure”. Those who try to harm Daniel or his friends are harmed in that same way:²⁰ The informers who had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cast into the fiery furnace are themselves killed by the intense heat of the furnace, while those who metaphorically “consume [Daniel’s] flesh” are consumed by the lions before they reach the bottom of the den.²¹ As a result, the kings who witness these miraculous rescues turn “to all peoples and nations of every language” (3:29; 6:26) and issue new edicts beginning with the words “I make a decree” (3:29; 6:27), praising the Jewish God who rescued his servant. Both narratives conclude with the Jewish courtiers’ rise to greatness in the king’s court, using the verb root חָלַל, to succeed.

Another parallel exists between Chapters 2 and 7: the scheme of four kingdoms is presented in both.²² While these four symbolize the human empires that will rise and fall in succession, both chapters describe also a fifth empire, the eternal Empire of God. Additionally, there is extensive linguistic similarity between the two chapters: for example, in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the fourth empire is “as strong as iron” (2:40–41), while the fourth animal in Chapter 7 is described similarly, with “iron teeth” and great strength (7:7). With these iron teeth the fourth animal devours and “smashes in pieces,” trampling what remains “with its feet,” which recalls the fourth empire of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that also “crushes and smashes everything”. The mention of the beast’s feet generates another connection with Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, where the fourth empire is compared to the feet of an image made of iron and clay.

This notwithstanding, despite the clear similarities between Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Chapter 2 and the “Vision of the Beasts” in Chapter 7, one cannot overlook significant differences

¹⁹ Both kings (Nebuchadnezzar and Darius) rise in alarm (3:24; 6:20), approach the furnace or den (3:26; 6:21), address the Jewish courtiers by their names, and afterwards refer to them with an almost identical expression: “servants of the Most High God” (3:26) / “servant of the living God” (6:21) and order the survivors to come out and approach them.

²⁰ This motif is typical of court tales and is also present in the Book of Esther, when it is told that Haman is hung on the gallows he prepared for Mordechai (Esth 7:10).

²¹ M. Segal, “From Joseph to Daniel: The Literary Development of the Narrative in Daniel 2,” *VT* 59 (2009), 129–49 (124 n. 1).

²² Kratz argued that the four kingdoms motif in Chapter 2 was a secondary one and ascribed it to the redaction stage of Chapter 7; see R.G. Kratz, *Translatio imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologisch-theologischen Umfeld* (WMANT 63; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 42–70. Albertz, on the other hand, rejected the idea of an Aramaic collection that did not include the eschatological motifs; see Albertz, *Gott des Daniel*, 176.

between these two chapters. In Chapter 2 a long frame narrative appears alongside the dream and its interpretation; the verses dealing with them (2:31–45) comprise only about a third of the whole story. Chapter 7, on the other hand, is dedicated in its entirety to the description of the vision. While Chapter 2 speaks of Daniel in the third person, in Chapter 7, all but the first verse is a first-person account by Daniel—as is typical of the vision chapters. Additionally, while Daniel interprets someone else's dream in Chapter 2, in Chapter 7 he is the one having the dream and it is the angel who interprets it for him.

In addition, including Chapter 7 in the first unit of the Book of Daniel along with the rest of the narratives (Dan 2–7) disrupts the chronological frame of the book, as both its parts describe a sequence of three kingdoms: Babylon (1–5; 7:1, 8:1), Media (6:1; 9:1), and Persia (6:29; 10:1).²³ If we accept the claim that Chapter 7 constitutes part of the first half of the book, we face difficulty explaining the logic behind the chronological sequence of the chapters. For example, if Belshazzar dies in Chapter 5, why does he suddenly “rise again” in Chapter 7? On the other hand, if we accept that Chapter 7 opens the second part of the book, the logic is clear: after the narrative section (Chs. 1–6) ends, a new sequence of prophetic visions begins (Chs. 7–12).

It seems, therefore, that the chiastic structure of Chapters 2–7 does not necessarily indicate they were written by the same author. Instead, the similarities between the chapters may be attributed to different editing stages of the text.²⁴ Apparently, the “Vision of the Beasts” in Chapter 7 is, in fact, an updated version of the “Dream of the Statue” about the four kingdoms, appearing in Chapter 2.²⁵ Chapters 2–6 initially comprised individual, independent stories.²⁶ There was later a preliminary collection of texts that included

²³ It should be noted that this chronological framework, which divides the book into two parts and repeats the sequence of empires in each of them, was not embraced by the Greek redactor of the OG. Papyrus 967 of the OG version of Daniel presents the chapters of the book in a different order, where the narratives and vision chapters are interspersed: 1–4: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; 7–8: Belshazzar of Babylon; 5: the end of Belshazzar's reign; 6, 9: Darius of Media; 10–12: the first year of Cyrus of Persia. Some claim that this order is the original one, arguing that the connections between Chapters 4 and 7, and between 5, 6, and 9 of the OG are closer than those of the MT; however, Amara has proven that the chapter order in Papyrus 967 is not the work of the translator, but rather that the book was rearranged after its translation into Greek. See D. Amara, *The Old Greek Version of the Book of Daniel*, Ph.D. dissertation (Beer Sheba, 2006), 278–86.

²⁴ Collins, *Daniel*, 34.

²⁵ Y. Zakovich, *The Pattern of the Numerical Sequence Three-Four in the Bible*, Ph.D. dissertation (Jerusalem, 1977), 163.

²⁶ Collins, *Daniel*, 34.

Chapters 3:31–6:26.²⁷ In the Hellenistic period the Aramaic narratives were collated along with the introductory chapter (Ch. 1).²⁸ It was only at a later stage, in the days of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, that Chapter 7 was appended to the composition.²⁹ The argument that the Daniel narratives (Chs. 1–6) were an independent unit during the Hellenistic period may be supported by pointing to the unit's structure.

THE DANIEL NARRATIVES GENRE AND THE DEFINITION OF DANIEL 1

Before I present a structure that includes Chapters 1–6 in the Book of Daniel, a discussion of the status of Chapter 1 is in order. Daniel 1 is the only story among the Daniel narratives that is written in Hebrew. This chapter was added to the rest of the stories at a later stage³⁰ as an introductory chapter that binds them all.³¹ As part of its introductory role, Daniel 1 presents the readers with some biographic information concerning the characters who later appear in the stories,³² the location of the events that take place, and their

²⁷ J.D. Michaelis, *Deutsche Übersetzung des Alten Testament 10 Theil* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1781), 22; K. Koch, *Das Buch Daniel* (EdF 144; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 75; E. Haag, *Die Errettung Daniels aus der Löwengrube: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der biblischen Danieltradition* (SBS 110; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 12.

²⁸ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 89. Koch has asserted that, to begin with, Chapter 1 was written in Hebrew as an introductory story to the Aramaic narratives (Koch, *Daniel*, 16–18). Collins, on the other hand, believes that it was written originally in Aramaic and translated into Hebrew by the editor. To support his claim, Collins shows that half of the Aramaisms in the Hebrew section of Daniel appear in Chapter 1 (see Collins, *Daniel*, 23–24).

²⁹ The Hebrew chapters (Chs. 8–12) were added in the last stage, between 167 and 164 BCE, and it was also then that Chapter 1 was translated into Hebrew. Finally, before the inauguration of the Second Temple, a gloss was also added containing two verses: Dan 12:11–12 (see Collins, *Daniel*, 38).

³⁰ The matter of observing the dietary laws of *kashrut* and refraining from foreign foods even in life-threatening circumstances is not mentioned in biblical books dealing with Jewish life in the diaspora, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Esther. This subject is, on the other hand, typical of the time of the decrees and is reflected in some biblical Apocrypha books describing this period. See, for example, 1 Maccabees 2:62–63; 2 Maccabees 6:18–20.

³¹ As Rofé holds, this is the emergence of a hero, which also answers the question of how Daniel and his friends ended up in the court of the king of Babylon. According to Rofé, stories describing the emergence of a hero are usually the last course in the construction of a myth about the hero, and this is the case with Daniel as well. See Rofé, *Introduction*, 103.

³² The story presents Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, by both their Hebrew names and their Babylonian ones. Additionally, verse 1 mentions King Nebuchadnezzar and in verse 21, which concludes the story, Cyrus is recalled. These two kings delineate the entire

timeframe.³³ Furthermore, Chapter 1 includes foreshadowing hints that are resolved as the stories unfold.³⁴ Alongside its role as an introductory chapter, however, Daniel 1 also serves as its own story.³⁵ Though there are differences between it and the other Daniel narratives, one must also consider the similarities it shares with Chapters 3 and 6. In my opinion, a redefinition of the Daniel narratives may shed new light on the definition and status of Chapter 1.

Humphreys suggests to divide the Daniel narratives into two subgenres: “court conflicts” and “court contests.”³⁶ He considers Chapters 3 and 6 as “court conflicts” given the tension between the Jewish courtier and his environment, which nearly results in the death of the protagonists before the reversal of the plot. The protagonists are saved and rise to fame, while those who ask to harm them are punished. Humphreys defines Chapters 2, 4, and 5 as “court contests.” These narratives present Daniel’s victory in a contest against the other wise men of Babylon. While the latter fail to solve Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2; 3:31–4:34) and the meaning of the mysterious writing on the wall (Ch. 5), Daniel succeeds in doing so. Chapter 1, Humphreys maintains, falls into neither of the two categories, and should be defined as an introduction that contains elements of both contest and conflict.³⁷

Dividing Chapters 2, 4, and 5 and Chapters 3 and 6 into two subgenres is indeed convincing, and many scholars accept this division.³⁸ I would, however, like to propose different definitions that reflect another perspective of the Daniel narratives. Once again, Humphreys’ definitions are based on the similarity between the Daniel narratives and other court tales, with an emphasis on the Jewish courtier’s relationship with his foreign environment. Yet, as various scholars have demonstrated, the focus of these narratives is, in fact, upon the relationship between earthly and divine rule.³⁹

timespan described in the Daniel narratives in Chapters 1–6 (a period that includes the rules of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus).

³³ In Chapter 1 it is mentioned that the Daniel narratives take place in Babylon to which Nebuchadnezzar had expelled the people of Judaea (1:1–2). In terms of timeframe, the Daniel narratives begin with the start of the exile: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim” (1:1) and end in the days of Cyrus, whose declaration marked the final days of the Jewish diaspora.

³⁴ Thus, for example, the mention of the Temple vessels in verse 2, which has no narrative function in Chapter 1, is intended to foreshadow their appearance in the story of “Belshazzar’s Feast” in Chapter 5. See Newsome, *Daniel*, 38. In the same vein, we can also explain the comment on Daniel’s wisdom: “Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams” (1:17). This note brings up Daniel’s unique wisdom for interpreting dreams, foreshadowing what will be reflected later in Chapters 2, 4, and 5.

³⁵ Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 34.

³⁶ Humphreys, *Diaspora*, 211–23.

³⁷ Ibid., 219–20.

³⁸ See, for example, Collins, *Daniel*, 45–47.

³⁹ See Fewell, *Circles of Sovereignty*, 10, 48–49; Newsom, *Daniel*, 33–35,

I suggest dividing the Daniel narratives into two different sub-genres: stories of identity conflict (Chs. 3, 6) and of submission of the ruler (Chs. 2, 4, 5). Narratives of identity conflict place Daniel and his friends at the center, describing how the Jewish courtiers are forced into choosing between their loyalty to God and their loyalty to the earthly king;⁴⁰ their decision to remain loyal to God constitutes the narrative's center of gravity.⁴¹

Shifting the focal point of these narratives from the conflict between the Jewish hero and his foreign environment to the internal conflict the Jewish courtier faces regarding his loyalty to God versus his loyalty to the king affects the status of Daniel 1. According to Humphreys' definition of Daniel 3 and 6 as "court conflicts," the motif of physical conflict between the Jewish hero and those who wish him harm stands in the center of the story. Not only is this motif not central to Daniel 1, it does not even appear in it; these scholars thus argue that it does not belong to the narrative genre of Chapters 3 and 6.⁴² On the other hand, defining these two chapters as stories of identity conflict, whose main purpose is describing the tension afflicting the diasporic Jews between loyalty to the foreign king and loyalty to God, leads to including Daniel 1 in the same category as Chapters 3 and 6, for a similar identity conflict appears in this chapter also, as demonstrated below.

IDENTITY CONFLICT (DAN 1, 3, 6)

In these three stories (Dan 1, 3, 6) the Jewish courtier faces a conflict between loyalty to the earthly king and loyalty to the king of the heavens. His predicament is that dual loyalty is not an option, and he is thus forced to choose one side over the other. Obeying the king necessarily means disobeying God's laws. In all three stories the Jewish courtier elects to remain loyal to God, even when this decision puts him in harm's way. In Daniel 1 the identity conflict that Daniel is faced with is whether to obey the king's edict to eat the royal fare, פתְּבָג הַמֶּלֶךְ, and drink the king's wine or to reject this decree in order

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⁴⁰ In this subgenre of identity conflict narratives we may include also other court tales such as the Book of Esther, describing Esther's resolution to stay loyal to her people rather than to the foreign king. Several scholars perceive Esther's decisive point—staking her life on presenting herself to King Xerxes—as the climax of the book. The Book of Tobit may also fit into this category, as Tobit is presented as one who chooses loyalty to his people and religion over loyalty to the foreign king, when he risks his life in order to bring to burial one of his own people whose body was deposited in the marketplace. See Tobit 2:2–7. In a future study I intend to examine this in depth.

⁴¹ An analysis of the structure of these narratives shows that at the center of each of them stands the hero's identity conflict and his decision. See this in depth in N. Golan, *The Daniel Narratives: A Literary Analysis of Daniel 1–6*, Ph.D. dissertation (Ramat-Gan, 2017), 26–29, 195–98, 245–47.

⁴² Humphreys, *Diaypora*, 219; Collins, *Daniel*, 129–30.

to remain faithful to his God's laws.⁴³ Daniel's resolution in favor of faithfulness to God is expressed in the following words: "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself" (Dan 1:8).⁴⁴ In the "Fiery Furnace" narrative (Dan 3), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego face a similar conflict. Their loyalty to the king requires them to worship the statue of gold, while their loyalty to God forbids them to do so. The three youths decide to stay loyal to God. In a dialogue they carry out with King Nebuchadnezzar they state clearly that they are willing to risk their lives so long as they do not bow to the gold statue (Dan 3:18). In the "Lions' Den" narrative (Dan 6) Daniel must decide whether he maintains his daily practice of praying to God or complies with the king's decree forbidding it. In this conflict, too, Daniel chooses to remain faithful to God. Though he is aware of the danger this entails, he continues to pray to God three times a day, facing Jerusalem, with the windows of his home flung open (Dan 6:11).

Divine intervention (either direct or via an angel) is mentioned in all three stories. In addition, these stories all hint to the reader at a connection between the hero's decision to prefer his loyalty to God and the divine intervention that leads to his deliverance or success. In other words, the divine intervention in these stories appears as a reward for he who adheres to God. All three stories show that the Jews succeed *because* of their loyalty to God and not *despite* it.⁴⁵

In Dan 1:8 we are told that Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the royal rations of food. Immediately following, verse 9 recounts that God intervened in the story and caused the chief officer to show Daniel favor and mercy. The juxtaposition of these verses hints to the reader that there is a connection between them, and the divine intervention should be seen as a kind of reward for Daniel's decision to be loyal to God rather than to the king.⁴⁶

⁴³ Some scholars have argued that the refusal of Daniel and his friends to eat the king's fare was not religiously but rather morally and politically motivated. See, for example, Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 40; however, more plausible is the more common suggestion that Daniel's refusal stemmed from religious motivation related to biblical law. See, for example, Charles, *Daniel*, 19; Montgomery, *Daniel*, 130.

⁴⁴ Daniel's decision to prefer loyalty to God while violating the king's decree is emphasized by word plays on the verb **תָּמַד**, which is repeated in Dan 1 in verses 7 and 8. See B.T. Arnold, "Word Play and Characterization in Daniel 1," in S.B. Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2000), 231–48.

⁴⁵ Humphreys, *Diaspora*, 222–23.

⁴⁶ We should, however, note that divine intervention does not result in an immediate solution, as the palace master says to Daniel (1:10) that he fears the king and therefore denies his request. This refusal raises a theological difficulty: how is it that though God intervenes, causing the palace master to show Daniel favor and mercy, he still does not grant him his

In Daniel 3, the connection between Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's decision not to bow down to the statue and their miraculous rescue from the fiery furnace is reflected in the words of King Nebuchadnezzar. When the king sees the three stepping out of the furnace unharmed, he praises their God and ascribes their rescue from the fire to the trust they put in him. Since the description of saving the youths is put in the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar at the end of the story rather than being presented by the narrator in the middle of the story,⁴⁷ a juxtaposition is formed between this description in verse 27 and the praise of Nebuchadnezzar in verse 28. It is through this juxtaposition that the narrator creates several wordplays that emphasize the “measure for measure” between the loyalty to God and the miraculous deliverance: The youths were fortunate to walk out of the furnace unharmed and, moreover, we are told that “neither were their coats⁴⁸ changed” (Dan 3:27; **וְסַרְבֵּלְיָהוּן לֹא שָׁנָן**) because they “changed the king’s word” (Dan 3:28; **וְמֶלֶת מֶלֶךְ שָׁנָן**). “The fire had no power” upon their *bodies* (Dan 3:27; **בְּנֶשֶׁמֶת הָרָא נָרוֹא**), because they had “yielded up their *bodies*” (Dan 3:28; **יְהִבוּ גְּשִׁמְיוֹן**), that is, they were willing to give up their lives [to God].

The “Lions’ Den” narrative (Dan 6), too, connects Daniel’s decision to prefer his loyalty to God with his deliverance from the lions’ den. This connection is expressed in Daniel’s words to King Darius. The king rises early in the morning and fearfully goes to the lions’ den, where he cries out to Daniel in lament, asking him if his God had saved him from the den. In response Daniel answers: “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.” (Dan 6:23) In his words, Daniel associates his deliverance with his loyalty to God. Alongside his loyalty to God, he mentions also his loyalty to his king. This dual loyalty is emphasized by a double wordplay, which explains Daniel’s rescue as a reward both for his loyalty to God and for his loyalty to the king.

request? In the OG **שַׁר הַסְּרִיסִים** (the chief officer) and the **מֶלֶךְ** (guard) are presented as one and the same—a man named Abiezri (**Αβιεσδρι**). The merging of characters resolves this difficulty, since, according to the OG, it is thanks to divine intervention that Daniel’s request not to defile himself by consuming the royal fare is granted. Though at first Abiezri expresses his fear of the king, after Daniel and his friends suggest a ten-day trial, he agrees and accepts their request.

⁴⁷ This is in contrast to the OG, where the narrator recounts the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by God’s angel who drove away the flames, turning the furnace into a dew-bringing wind, so that the fire does not harm the youths. The description of their deliverance in the MT, brought from Nebuchadnezzar’s point of view, heightens the tension toward the rescue and intensifies its description, as the reader has no reason to suspect that Nebuchadnezzar’s account is an exaggeration or unobjective.

⁴⁸ The meaning of the word **סַרְבֵּלְיָהוּן** remains vague. On this matter, see Charles, *Daniel*, 71; Montgomery, *Daniel*, 130; Collins, *Daniel*, 188–89.

	Reason	Result
Loyalty to God	“Because I was <i>found</i> (<i>הָשַׁתְכַּחַת</i>) innocent before him” (Dan 6:23)	“And no kind of harm was <i>found</i> (<i>הָשַׁתְכַּחַת</i>) on him” (Dan 6:24)
Loyalty to king	“And also before you, O king, I have done no <i>harm</i> (<i>חִבּוֹלָה</i>)” (Dan 6:23)	“So that they would not <i>harm</i> me (<i>חִבּוֹלָגִי</i>)” (Dan 6:23) ⁴⁹

According to the first wordplay, Daniel’s rescue from the lions’ den is related to his loyalty to God. It was because God *found* Daniel innocent in his sight before him that he lifted him from the lions’ den with no wound *found* on him. The second wordplay, on the other hand, underlines Daniel’s deliverance as a result of his loyalty to the king: since Daniel did no harm to his king and did not *harm* him, God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions and they did not *harm* Daniel.⁵⁰

SUBMISSION OF THE RULER TO THE DEITY (DAN 2, 4, 5)

Narratives of identity conflict are interspersed with narratives of submission of the ruler to the deity in Dan 2, 4, and 5. Humphreys’ definition of these three chapters as “court contests” emphasizes the tension between Daniel’s wisdom and the incompetence of the Babylonian king’s wise men.⁵¹ Many scholars accept this definition.⁵² However, as others have commented, the main weakness of this definition is found in Dan 4.⁵³ The motif of contest is weak and marginal

⁴⁹ In order to demonstrate the Aramaic wordplay of the MT, the English translation of these verses does not follow a single conventional translation.

⁵⁰ Newsome, *Daniel*, 200.

⁵¹ Humphreys, *Diaspora*, 222–23.

⁵² See, for example, Wills, *The Jew in the Court*, 112; S. Niditch and R. Doran, “The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach,” *JBL* 96 (1977), 179–193 (192).

⁵³ For this reason, these scholars do not define Daniel 4 as a court contest. See, for example, L.F. Hartman and A.A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB 23; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), 174; P.J. Milne, *Vladimir Propp and The Study of Structure in the Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (BLS 13; Decatur Ga: Almond Press, 1988), 232–39; J.E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas Texas: Word Books, 1989), 82.

in this chapter and is certainly not the narrative's focus.⁵⁴ Additionally, in the OG there is no element of contest at all,⁵⁵ which implies that there is place to assume that this motif was added to the MT version of Daniel 4 of at a later time, based on its presence in Daniel 2.⁵⁶

Defining Daniel 2 and 5 as “court contests” is not convincing either, given that the tension between Daniel and the other wise men of Babylon does not seem to be the central focus of either narrative. Rather, as many have duly noted, in these stories it is the foreign king that is the central character, rather than the Jewish courtier.⁵⁷ If so, while narratives of identity conflict describe the Jewish courtier, who is loyal to divine rule rather than to human rule, narratives of submission of the ruler describe the arrogant rulers that favor their own earthly rule over divine rule and are punished by God as a result; in Daniel 5 the ruler even meets his death. The narrative structure I will now propose emphasizes this contrast.

⁵⁴ In the rest of the “court contests,” when the king seeks an interpretation for his dream, he mentions the reward for the solver of his dream or the punishment that awaits those who do not solve it. In contrast, in Daniel 4, when Nebuchadnezzar gathers his wise men, he mentions no reward nor punishment (4:4). In other “court contests” there is a character whose role is to tell the king he knows of someone who can interpret his dream after others have failed (see Gen 41:9–13; Dan 2:25; Dan 5:10–13), but no such character appears in Daniel 4. Additionally, the successful interpretation is usually followed by the solver’s promotion and reward (as in Gen 41:41–45; Dan 2:48–49; Dan 5:29). In contrast, in Daniel 4 no such reward is mentioned.

⁵⁵ Daniel 4:3–6 does not feature in the OG. The MT version of 4:15 describes Daniel’s ability to solve the dream where others have failed, but there is no such comparison in the OG; it is only relayed how Nebuchadnezzar wakes in the morning, calls Daniel, his chief wise man, and tells him the dream, which Daniel then solves.

⁵⁶ Segal, *Dreams*, 102–104. This is in contrast with other scholars who believe that the MT version of Dan 4:3–6 is the “Vorlage” and these verses were omitted from the MT at a later stage: R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 81–82; M. Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins and Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4* (JSJSup 61; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 26–27; Montgomery, *Daniel*, 247.

⁵⁷ Newsom, *Daniel*, 33–35, 159; Fewell, *Circles of Sovereignty*, 10.

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE DANIEL NARRATIVES (DAN 1-6):
A NEW PROPOSAL**

Preference of Divine Rule over Earthly Rule Narratives of “identity conflict” (Dan 1, 3, 6): Daniel and his friends are the narrative’s focus.	Preference of Earthly Rule over Divine Rule Narratives of “submission of the ruler” (Dan 2, 4, 5): the foreign king is the narrative’s focus.
Introduction: “In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah” (1:1).	Introduction: “In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign” (2:1).
Chapter 1 Daniel and his friends remain loyal to God’s word, refuse to eat the king’s fare, and rise to greatness as a result. ↓	
	Chapter 2 The impending demise of his rule is revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. ↓
Chapter 3 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego choose divine rule over earthly rule and refuse to bow to the golden image (and rise to greatness as a result). ↓	
	Chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar’s pride in his own earthly rule leads to his punishment; later on he recognizes God’s rule and is restored to the throne. Chapter 5 Belshazzar’s pride ↓ his own earthly rule and his worship of gods of gold and silver leads to his punishment and death. ↓
Chapter 6 Daniel remains loyal to God rather than to the king, continues praying three times a day and rises to greatness as a result. ↓	
Conclusion: “So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (6:29).	Conclusion: “That very night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed” (5:30).

The alternating structure of the Daniel narratives dovetails stories of identity conflict with stories of submission of the ruler, emphasizing the contrast between characters who choose to remain loyal to divine rule and those who favor earthly rule. Additionally, this structure allows us to discern the inner development of narratives of identity conflict (Chs. 1, 3, 6) alongside that of the three stories of submission of the ruler (Chs. 2, 4, 5).⁵⁸ Moreover, this structure reveals a complex portrait of the varying relationship between the Jewish courtier and the foreign king.

NARRATIVE INTRODUCTIONS: CHRONOLOGICAL HEADINGS

Only two narratives in the MT version of Daniel open with a chronological heading that sets the story in historical context.⁵⁹ Each heading introduces a narrative subgenre: The title at the beginning of Chapter 1 introduces the thread of identity conflict narratives, while that at the beginning of Chapter 2 introduces the thread of submission of the ruler narratives. While the first title dates the story in relation to the king of Judah, the second title features the king of Babylon alone—a contrast that is consistent with the content of each thread: identity conflict narratives focus on the Jewish hero, so that their introduction in relation to the Judean king is appropriate. In contrast, narratives of submission of the ruler focus on Babylonian kings, and the narrative introduction relates solely to the Babylonian king and not to the king of Judah.

THE INNER DEVELOPMENT OF EACH SUBGENRE

Narratives of Identity Conflict (Chs. 1, 3, 6)

Over the course of the identity conflict narratives, there is a marked development in Daniel and his friends' devotion to God and the

⁵⁸ On the connection between consecutive narratives, see Golan, *Daniel*, 286–88.

⁵⁹ This is unlike the OG, where there are chronological openings at the beginning of Chapters 3 and 4. Both introductions date the narrative to the same year: ἔτους ὀκτωκαιδεκάτου, “the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign”. Amara proposes that the choice of the eighteenth year as the year Nebuchadnezzar made an image in the Valley of Dura and was punished with exile is related to the fact that Jeremiah 52:29 cites his eighteenth year as the year in which he exiled many people from Jerusalem. The OG version of 4:22 contains an addition unparalleled in the MT or the Theodotion version, that Nebuchadnezzar sinned by destroying the temple. This addition seems like an attempt to explain that Nebuchadnezzar’s expulsion from human society to live among the animals was a punishment for the destruction of the temple. Amara therefore holds that the dating of Chapters 3 and 4 is designed to link these three events: in the same year Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, returned to his own land, set up the image, and was severely punished. See Amara, OG, 291–92; see, also, Segal, *Dreams*, 115–18.

extent of their defiance of the foreign king. In Chapter 1 their violation of the king's order does not pose an actual threat to their lives. The question of risking death does come up when the palace master says that his own life will be in danger if anything happens to the courtiers: "You would endanger my head with the king" (1:10); but it is not their own lives that are explicitly at risk. Moreover, in Chapter 1 Daniel and his friends do not openly defy the king's orders: they refuse to eat the royal fare as commanded (1:16), but they do this behind the king's back, and he is never informed of their defiance.⁶⁰

In Chapter 3 we can identify a marked increase in the degree of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's defiance of the earthly king, as well as in the extent of their utter, boundless loyalty to God. The three youths explicitly state to Nebuchadnezzar that they have no intention of obeying him and bowing to his image. Moreover, the three emphasize that their refusal is not based on their assumption that God will save them: whether or not God will save them, they have no intention of bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar's image (3:17–18). This fierce devotion to God is presented in contrast to the loyalty of Nebuchadnezzar's servants, the satraps: while the latter serve their king from fear of being cast into the fiery furnace (3:6), God's servants serve him out of unconditional loyalty.⁶¹

Another noticeable increase emerges in Chapter 6: Daniel is prepared to endanger his life for the sake of praying to his God. He does not even attempt to hide this, but insists on praying publicly, where he can be seen through the open windows (6:11), even though this makes it easy for his antagonists, the satraps, to witness and inform the king (6:12–13).⁶² There is also clearly a growing defiance of the king, which does not consist merely of Daniel's violation of the king's edict, but includes mutiny from within the court itself, as implied in Chapter 6. The satraps compel Darius into signing an edict that effectively goes against his own interests, leading him into the trap they set, which results in a reversal of roles: instead of the king's

⁶⁰ In Chapter 1 there is a disparity between the king's perspective and the reader's. In this way the reader is aware of what the king is not aware of: ironically, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are the only ones who did not obey the king, refusing to eat the king's fare without his knowledge, yet the king chooses them. From the narrator's perspective, Daniel and his friends were chosen as a result of divine intervention and not because of the king's decision. The information gap between the king and the reader generates mockery and irony toward the king, who perceives himself as omniscient, while, in fact, even the reader knows more than he does.

⁶¹ This contrast emerges from the dialogue between the three courtiers and Nebuchadnezzar (3:14–18); see Golan, *Daniel*, 116.

⁶² Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's defiance was also public, but they were forced into such a situation by the king who made them choose between their loyalty to their God and their loyalty to him. In contrast, Daniel could have hidden the fact that he continued to pray to his God, thus not endangering his life, but he chose to pray in public view.

servants being subject to him, the king becomes subject to his servants.⁶³ He is compelled by an edict that he himself signs and reluctantly casts Daniel into the lions' den, against his own interests. That the king's hands are tied is evident from Darius's blessing to Daniel before he is forced to cast him to the lions: "May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!" (6:17).

The description of the satraps' objection to the king enhances the mockery of King Darius, since it is no longer the external opposition of the Judean exiles, but rather an internal one. Also, this is no longer an objection of three people, but rather that of 120 satraps and administrators.

***Narratives of Submission of the Ruler to the Deity
(Chs. 2, 4, 5)***

There is also inner development over the course of stories of submission of the ruler to the deity (Chs. 2, 4, 5). In Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of the fall of his empire, the first of four human empires that will rise and fall in succession. In his dream he sees a statue; its head is made of fine gold, its shoulders and arms of silver, its torso and loins of bronze, and its legs of clay and iron, and it does not endure. Natural stone, which symbolizes God's rule, shatters this statue and crushes it to shards. In its place rises a mighty mountain that fills all the earth. Nebuchadnezzar's powerful kingdom is symbolized by the head of gold—the most important organ, and the most precious of all metals. When Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar of his dream, he addresses the king with the respectful title "King of Kings" (2:37) and describes his kingdom as a mighty empire that controls the entire world—wherever there are humans, beasts, and birds (2:38). This notwithstanding, Daniel emphasizes that it is God who has granted Nebuchadnezzar this power, and it is God who will take it away from him in the future.

Similarly to Chapter 2, Chapter 4 also describes Nebuchadnezzar's humbling submission in his dream. The mighty tree whose top reaches the heaven and can be seen to the ends of the earth (4:8), the tree in whose branches birds nest and in whose shade all the animals take shelter, the tree that provides nourishment for all (4:9) does not endure. An angel comes down from heaven and declares that the tree will be felled, and thus informs Nebuchadnezzar of his expulsion from the throne and his banishment to the animal world (4:11; 20–22). The description of the ruler's submission in Chapter 4, however, is not only fulfilled within the dream itself, as it is in Chapter 2, but it also bursts into the frame story itself. Nebuchadnezzar walks along the roof of his palace and declares: "This is magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty" (4:27). As soon as he utters these words, a voice echoes down from heaven and announces the imminent end

⁶³ Fewell, *Circles of Sovereignty*, 146.

of his reign: “The kingdom has departed from you!” (4:28). Nebuchadnezzar is banished from human society for seven periods of time; he lives among the animals, eats grass like they do, and is even dampened by the dew of the sky. God restores the arrogant king to his throne only after he lifts his eyes up to heaven and acknowledges that God rules the world (4:31).

In Chapter 5 the ruler’s hybris, as well as his humbling and submission, is noticeably more acute. Unlike the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar (Ch. 4), who eventually repents and recognizes God’s power over humanity, Belshazzar does not rectify his ways (Ch. 5). He sins by desecrating the sacred vessels of the temple, drinking wine from them together with his subjects, wives, and concubines (5:4). This sin is explicitly defined as the sin of hybris in Daniel’s speech of reproach to the king: “And you, Belshazzar his son, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this! You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven!” (5:22–23). While Belshazzar should have learned from his father’s sin, he nonetheless continues to be arrogant, and offends even more greatly than his father did. This proud king does not repent, but instead meets his death at the story’s end, teaching the reader what fate awaits those who favor human rule over divine rule.

THE CLOSING VERSES

The conclusions of both the identity conflict stories (Chs. 1, 3, 6) and the submission of the ruler’s stories (Chs. 2, 4, 5) are consistent with their narrative content. The final verse of the latter describes the culmination of this process—the death of the arrogant king who did not repent: “That very night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed” (5:30). In contrast, the concluding verse of the stories of identity conflict describes Daniel’s rise to greatness: “So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (6:29). These verses are a quintessence of the message conveyed by the Daniel narratives: whoever favors heavenly rule over earthly rule is destined for success and greatness. At the same time, he who favors earthly rule over divine rule is destined for punishment: God will humble him, bring him to submission, and might even punish him with death.

THE JEWISH COURTIER AND THE FOREIGN KING

The structure of the Daniel narratives proposed above, differentiating stories of identity conflict (Chs. 1, 3, 6) from those of submission of the ruler (Chs. 2, 4, 5), emphasizes the unique approach of these narratives to the relationship between the Jewish courtier and the foreign king. The episodes of identity conflict exemplify both positive and negative attitudes of the foreign ruler toward the Jewish courtier, whereas the episodes of submission of the ruler depict both positive and negative attitudes of the Jewish courtier toward the foreign king.

“Conflict Identity” Narratives: The King’s Attitude toward the Courtier	“Submission of the Ruler” Narratives: The Courtier’s Attitude toward the King
The “Fiery Furnace” narrative (Ch. 3): The king’s attitude toward the Jewish courtier is <i>negative</i> .	The “Dream of the Tree” (Dan 3:31–4:34): The Jewish courtier’s attitude toward the king is <i>positive</i> .
The “Lions’ Den” narrative (Ch. 6): The king’s attitude toward the Jewish courtier is <i>positive</i> .	“Belshazzar’s Feast” (Ch. 5): The Jewish courtier’s attitude toward the king is <i>negative</i> .

THE FOREIGN KING’S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE JEWISH COURTIER IN NARRATIVES OF “IDENTITY CONFLICT” (CHS. 3, 6)

As I have shown above, there is a striking similarity between Daniel 3 and Daniel 6. In both stories the king’s subjects inform him that Jewish courtiers have violated a royal edict—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will not bow down to the golden image, and Daniel continues to pray to his God despite the king’s prohibition. In both stories this betrayal is described using the expression וְאָכַלוּ קֶרֶץ הָזֶן (3:8; 6:25).⁶⁴ The similarities of language and plot generate the reader’s expectation for a similar reaction from the foreign king, and, indeed, it seems, initially, that King Darius reacts similarly to King Nebuchadnezzar, who is so furious that his face distorts (3:19). Darius, too, reacts negatively and is “very much distressed” (6:15).

On a second reading, however, the reader understands that what distresses the king is not Daniel’s defiance, but rather the absurd circumstances that prevent him from rescuing Daniel. At this point, the reader is exposed to the difference between the two narratives.

⁶⁴ As noted by Newsom, *Daniel*, 198; this expression literally means “they devoured their pieces.”

Nebuchadnezzar's Reaction (Ch. 3)	Darius's Reaction (Ch. 6)
בָּאֶדְזֵן גַּבּוֹכְדָּנֵצָר הַתְּמִלֵּי חַמְּאָה וְצַלְם אֲנָפּוּהִ אֲשֶׁתְנוּ [אֲשֶׁתְנוּ] עַל־שְׂדֵךְ מִישָׁךְ וְעַבְדֵנָנוּ (3:19)	אֶדְזֵן מֶלֶכָא כְּדֵי מַלְתָּא שֶׁמֶע שְׁגִיא בְּאֶשׁ עַלְוָה עַל־דָּנִיאֵל שֵׁם בֶּל לְשִׁזְבוֹתָה (6:15)
“Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted” (3:19).	“When the king heard the charge, he was very much distressed. He was determined to save Daniel” (6:15).

While Chapter 3 describes the Babylonian king’s rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (using the proposition **לָל**; 3:19), Chapter 6 describes King Darius’s determination to *save* Daniel (using the same proposition, **לָעַל**; 6:15). While Chapter 3 portrays the foreign king’s *hostility* toward the Jewish courtiers, Chapter 6 portrays the foreign king’s *affection* for Daniel. The king wishes to *save* Daniel (6:15) and expresses his hopes that Daniel’s God will rescue him (17); he fasts and refuses entertainment (19). The king is so distressed by Daniel’s fate that he cannot sleep (19) and at daybreak he rushes to the lions’ den to see what had become of him (20).

The message imparted to the reader by contrasting these two stories is that one must not rely on the earthly king, because, whether the relations between the foreign king and the Jewish courtier are good and whether they are hostile, the power of the earthly king is limited. Despite the king’s explicit will to save Daniel, he is eventually forced to throw him to the lions’ den, reluctantly. God, conversely, has control over Daniel’s fate and is the one who ultimately sends his angel and delivers him (Dan 6:23).

THE JEWISH COURTIER’S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE FOREIGN KING IN NARRATIVES OF “SUBMISSION OF THE RULER TO THE DEITY” (CHS. 4, 5)

We find a similar phenomenon in the submission of the ruler narratives—this time concerning the Jewish courtier’s attitude toward the foreign ruler. The stories of the “Dream of the Tree” (3:31–4:34) and “Belshazzar’s Feast” (Ch. 5) teach the reader about the downfall that awaits the arrogant king. In both narratives God is characterized as “humbler of the arrogant”; however, there is a significant difference between the Jewish courtier’s attitude toward the foreign king in each story. This contrast is expressed in Daniel’s words toward each of the foreign kings in question:

Daniel 4	Daniel 5
עֲנָה בְּלַטְשָׁאצֵר וְאָמַר [קָרָא] מֶרִי חַלְמָא [לְשָׁנָאִיךְ] לְשָׁנָאָךְ וּפְשָׂרָה [לְעָרִיךְ] לְעָרִיךְ (4:16)	בָּאָדִין עֲנָה דְּגִיאָל וְאָמַר קָדָם מְלֵכָא מְתַנְתַּחַת לְדֹת לְהָוָן וּנְבָנָבִיתָךְ לְאַחֲרֵן הַב (5:17)
Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for <i>your enemies</i> and its meaning for <i>your foes</i> ” (4:16). ⁶⁵	Daniel answered and said before the king: “May your <i>gifts</i> be for yourself, give your <i>rewards</i> to others” (5:17). ⁶⁶

Daniel’s remarks to both kings appear at the same point in both narratives: after the king’s own wise men fail to interpret the dream or riddle, he states that he is able to present the solution because God’s spirit is within him. Daniel then makes this opening statement before announcing the solution. There is structural similarity between these statements as both contain parallelisms: In Chapter 4 between “those who hate you” and “your enemies,”⁶⁷ and in Chapter 5 between “your gifts” and “your rewards”. Moreover, both sentences open with a noun (the dream or the gifts) after which Daniel mentions the intended recipient of each: in Chapter 4 he hopes that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about his enemies is fulfilled, while in Chapter 5 he refuses to accept Belshazzar’s gifts and states that they should be given to someone else. The similarity of these statements emphasizes the essential difference between Daniel’s attitude toward the father (Nebuchadnezzar) and his son (Belshazzar). Daniel’s words to Nebuchadnezzar, “May the dream be for those who hate you, and its interpretation for your enemies,” express his concern and empathy to the king,⁶⁸ while his words to Belshazzar, “Let your gifts be for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else,” express his contempt for the king; he desires no favors from Belshazzar. Daniel’s

⁶⁵ Newsom, *Daniel*, 125.

⁶⁶ Newsom, *Daniel*, 160 except for the word “spoke”, which I changed to “said”.

⁶⁷ The word צָרָעָר, “enemy,” is parallel to the word צָרָץ; the letters עַ and צָ are commonly interchanged in Aramaic. On the parallel between צָרָין and מְשֻׁנָּאִין, “enemies” and “hated ones”, see, for example, Ps 99:24.

⁶⁸ The fondness that Daniel displays toward Nebuchadnezzar, destroyer of the temple, has confounded many commentators. Rashi comments on this verse: “Our Rabbis said, ‘My Lord, may the dream be for Your enemies,’ refers to God. He raised his eyes to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, ‘May this dream be fulfilled upon this enemy of Yours.’ But if you say that he said it to Nebuchadnezzar, was not Israel his enemy? Is it possible that he would curse them?” Rashi, based on the midrash, says that Daniel could not have been speaking about Nebuchadnezzar’s enemies, for Israel were his enemies. He therefore ascribes the address of “my lord” to God, meaning that Daniel was actually asking God for this dream to be fulfilled upon God’s enemies—that is on Nebuchadnezzar himself.

different attitudes toward the kings are also expressed in the way he addresses them: while he turns to Nebuchadnezzar using the respectful מֶרְאֵת “my lord,” his address to Belshazzar is abrupt with no deferential titles. Moreover, the narrator’s decision to present Daniel as Belshazzar in his address to Nebuchadnezzar is no coincidence: the special affinity between the king and the courtier is reflected in the fact that Nebuchadnezzar designates Daniel with the name of his own god (1:7; 4:5).

The contrast between Daniel’s attitudes toward the kings reflects the insignificance of his relationship with them to their fates. Despite Daniel’s respect for Nebuchadnezzar, he has no power to change the meaning of his dream or to save him from his humiliating regression to an animal state. The fate of the human ruler is solely in the hands of God; all Daniel can do is advise the king how to postpone his fate for twelve months (4:24), but he cannot change the decree.

The double description of the relation between the dream interpreter and the foreign king aims to demonstrate to the reader the limited power of the former. Despite Daniel’s hope that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about his enemies is realized, he cannot save the king from his dream, divulging his impending expulsion from human society to live among animals for seven periods of time and the inevitable demise of his rule. There is nothing Daniel can do but advise to the king how to postpone this fate by twelve months (Dan 4:24).⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of the similarities between the Daniel narratives and other court tales, many scholars have interpreted the former as stories whose aim was to present the relations between the Jewish courtier and his foreign environment. In this paper I suggested to examine the Daniel narratives from a different point of

⁶⁹ Daniel’s advice to Nebuchadnezzar in 4:24 can be explained in different ways: “Therefore, O king, may my advice be acceptable to you: Redeem your sins by beneficence and your iniquities by generosity to the poor—**הַנִּתְהֹוּ אָרְכָּה לְשִׁלּוֹתָךְ**. The final phrase can be understood in two ways: the word **אָרְכָּה** can refer to postponement of punishment (according to the MT’s vocalization of **אָרְכָּה**), or, if we change the vocalization to **אָרוֹכָה**, it can be related to “healing”. The word **לְשִׁלּוֹתָךְ** can also be understood in two ways: either as serenity, which is the MT’s vocalization, or, read as **לְשִׁלּוֹתָךְ**, it could mean “accidental transgression”, from the word **שִׁלּוֹת**, or **מִשְׁגָּה**, mistake, which is used in Theodotion’s translation. According to the MT, the king’s punishment can only be postponed, while according to the second reading, the king’s accidental transgression can be healed, implying that the punishment may be annulled altogether. I believe the first reading is more logical, given that the king’s serenity is already mentioned at the beginning of the story: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living *serenely* in my house, flourishing in my palace” (4:1). The story opens with Nebuchadnezzar’s serenity before his dream, and now Daniel suggests how the king might postpone his punishment and return to this state of serenity.

view, emphasizing the tension between earthly rule and divine rule. Shifting the limelight from the conflict between the Jew and his environment to the internal identity conflict burdening the Jewish courtier, caught between his loyalty to God and to the king, sheds new light on the Daniel narratives in general and specifically on the status of Chapter 1. Similarly to Daniel 3 and 6, Daniel 1, too, presents an identity conflict of this nature. Daniel and his friends must decide whether they prefer to be faithful to God or to the mortal king. Alongside its role as an introductory chapter, added to the rest of the stories at a later stage, Chapter 1 serves as an independent story whose resemblance to Daniel 3 and 6 cannot be disregarded.

Additionally, in this paper I presented a new structural analysis of the Daniel narratives in Chapters 1–6, which strengthens the argument that following the addition of Chapter 1 to the rest of the narrative chapters they began circulating independently, even before Chapter 7 was supplemented.⁷⁰ This structure further stresses the contrast between he who favors loyalty to God over obedience to a mortal king, and consequently rises to greatness (Dan 1, 3, 6), and he who is proud and chooses human rule over the kingdom of God, and is thus punished and vanquished by God, who either kills him or announces the end of his rule (Dan 2, 4, 5).

The narrative structure that I have presented stresses the notion of the limitedness of human power of both the foreign king and the Jewish courtier. Despite Daniel's hope that the king's dream would be realized against his enemies (4:16), the power of the earthly dream interpreter is finite and he cannot change the destiny of the king, who would be expelled from society to live among animals for seven periods of time (4:28–30). Similarly, Despite Darius's wish to save Daniel from being thrown into the lions' den (6:17, 19–21), his hands were tied, and he was bound by the decree that he had signed himself (6:18). The approach taken by the editor of the Book of Daniel is that God determines what becomes of his servants: he is the one who sends an angel to save Daniel from the lions' den, by virtue of his loyalty to his God (6:23). Similarly, he is the one who restores Nebuchadnezzar to his throne—only after the king looks up to the heavens and acknowledges that “all who live may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals; He gives it to whom He will” (4:14).

⁷⁰ Collins, *Daniel*, 38.