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**BEHIND THE VISIONS AND DREAM OF DANIEL:
AN APPRECIATION OF ITS LITERARY FEATURES**

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BEHIND THE VISIONS AND DREAMS OF DANIEL: AN APPRECIATION OF ITS LITERARY FEATURES

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Often viewed as a unique book in world's history, the Bible is a work that is much greater than a mere book. Because it contains a collection of no less than sixty-six individual books,¹ it can be more adequately described as *bibliotheca sacra*, a holy library. Among these, the Book of Daniel is one of the better known because its stories are cherished by many readers of Scripture. In addition to thrilling and faith-building stories, the book also contains divine revelations (visions and auditions) whose messages instill hope. It has widely been recognized that the combination of these two literary forms² can provide a solid educational base for the character development of young people so succinctly condensed in the slogan "Dare to be a Daniel!"

A question may be raised on how to use effectively this faith-building and hope-inspiring material from Daniel's book in non-Theology (non-Religion) classes. In answer to this question I propose in this paper the following twofold thesis: (1) It can be demonstrated that Daniel's book is a literary masterpiece,³ and (2) the literary quality of this biblical book may serve as an instrument to communicate Christian principles to young people whose degree programs do not require taking Theology (Religion), but only

¹ This is true of the Protestant editions of the Bible. The Roman Catholic versions (such as The Jerusalem Bible) contain additional books known as "apocryphal" which are found not in the Hebrew canon but in the Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint and also in the Latin Vulgate.

² On the importance and the role of the stories in Daniel's book see the forthcoming work by Zdravko Stefanovic, *Wisdom to the Wise: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007).

³ The expression "literary masterpiece" is related to the literary qualities of Daniel's book in Jacques B. Doukhan, "Seven Perspectives in the Book of Daniel," *Shabbat Shalom* (Spring 2004): 11.

a class or two in world literature. In this way a gap between a secular curriculum and a faith-based educational goal can be bridged.

Approaches to Daniel's Book

A casual survey of published books, commentaries and articles dealing with the Book of Daniel reveals the fact that scholars have taken a variety of approaches to this biblical book. To name only a few approaches one can mention historical, archeological, canonical, theological, philosophical, sociological, text-linguistic, denominationalist, apologetic, etc. Needless to say, in most cases Daniel's book has been approached from modern scholars' points of view influenced by a variety of interests, needs and ideologies. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, once stated that he "found much consolation in reading the book of the prophet Daniel in the Bible" and based on what he had learned especially from chapter 6 made him declare that Daniel was "one of the greatest passive resisters that ever lived."⁴

Another point that could be raised here is that in the past most scholarly studies and popular presentations on Daniel tried to prove or disprove the historical value of certain statements found in the book. The attempt to show that Daniel's text and its claims are trustworthy is a task worthy of scholarly investigation and writing. Yet to limit one's extensive research to this aspect of the book is not the best approach to give justice to the rich and multi-faceted contents of this prophetic book. In other words, to present solid evidence in order to show that the claims from Daniel should be taken as factual and true is a valid academic exercise. Yet, equally valid,

⁴ M. K. Gandhi, *Gandhi's Complete Writings* (Bombay: Indian Government), vol. IX, 541, quoted in Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "The Book of Daniel," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 94.

but often neglected, could be a study that presents Daniel's messages as attractive, beautiful, and applicable in people's lives. "What's in there for me?" is a contemporary question that needs to be addressed in the study of Daniel as much as the question "When and where was the book written?"

While this paper presents a literary approach to Daniel's book, the authority of the inspired text of the Bible is taken seriously. It is, therefore, maintained in this study that the author of Daniel communicated divine messages through rich literary forms. Biblical Hermeneutics is defined today as the science and *art* of interpreting the text of the Bible.⁵ As stated above, I will first present some evidence that shows how Daniel's book is a literary masterpiece.

A Literary Masterpiece

The study of any piece of literature begins with a definition of its genre. **Genre** (French; German *Gattung*) is defined in the English language as "literary form or type."⁶ The presence of captivating stories in Daniel's book, as well as of graphic visions containing details of colorful symbolic images is foremost among its genres. Among the best-known stories are King Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (chap. 2), The Fiery Furnace (chap. 3), The Writing on the Wall (chap. 5), and Daniel in the Lions' Den (chap. 6). Each story is characterized by a plot (or a conflict), characters (or heroes) and a setting (or a context). The message of these stories centers in God (*theocentric*) who has power to save lives and to control the events in world's history.

⁵ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 5.

⁶ R. N. Soulen and R. K. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 66.

The best remembered visions from the book are The Four Beasts and a Son of Man (chap. 7), A Ram and A Goat (chap. 8), and The Rise of Michael (chap. 12). While the message of the visions also centers in God, the visions also focus on the Messiah, who, throughout earth's history and especially in the time of the end, provides deliverance for a faithful remnant of God's people. When talking about the chapters in Daniel that contain visions, it is worth noticing that "audition genre" has not been given its due attention in the studies of the book. Although they are attested in every visionary chapter in the book, the most important auditions are found in chapters 8, 11 and 12.

Both stories and visions in Daniel are given in narrative as well as in poetic form. Narrative is the most common genre in the Bible and due to its strong presence in Daniel, the book has been called "a gallery of memorable narrative moments."⁷ Biblical narrators not only tell stories but interpret them as well. In the case of Daniel's book, the narrator selects certain events while others he ignores.⁸ He also uses a lot of repetition. The presence of poetry in Daniel's book is easily discerned in contemporary versions of the Bible because in them poetic passages are indented. In the visions of Daniel 7, for example, poetry is used in the report about the events that take place in heaven (vs. 9-10, 13-14) in contrast with prose used to describe the events that happen here on earth. A combination of prose and poetry is a well-

⁷ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 191.

⁸ William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 7. Shea says: "The history brought to view in Daniel is a special kind of history—a theological history in which selected events are given while others are ignored." Daniel 1:2 that says "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [King Nebuchadnezzar's] hand" is one of the best examples to show how the biblical narrator presents an interpreted type of history. Commenting on chapter 7, C. Mervyn Maxwell in *God Cares* vol. 1 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1981), 123 concludes that Daniel's vision "purposely presents a one-sided picture of Rome."

attested phenomenon in biblical prophetic passages, and some scholars call it anthology.

In the first half of the book, there are several hymns of praise to God. The first such hymn was composed by Daniel:

*Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.
He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.
He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.
He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.
I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
You have given me wisdom and power,
You have made known to me what we asked of you,
You have made known to us the dream of the king (2:20-23).*

The hymns that follow come from the mouths of two pagan kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Darius the Mede (but not Belshazzar). It could be stated that the hymns of praise composed by these two kings echo Daniel's own hymn. In King Nebuchadnezzar's case we see a ruler who used to issue cruel and vindictive orders now changed into a poet composing a song about the Most High God:

*Signs, how grandiose!
Wonders, how mighty!
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom,
His dominion from generation to generation (4:3).⁹*

⁹ The translation of this passage is taken from Doukhan, "Seven Perspectives," 11.

Ancient Jewish scholars were greatly touched by the king's words from this passage and they commented that the king "has stolen all the songs and praises from David."¹⁰

Another genre in Daniel which deserves more attention is prayer. Its best example is found in chapter 9 where Daniel confesses the sins of his people and then presents a petition to God to intervene on their behalf. It is only in recent times that the topic of prayer in Daniel's book has received more attention by scholars.¹¹ The following list shows the presence of various genres in the book:

1. Story (chaps. 2, 3, 6, etc.)
2. Dream (chaps. 2, 4, etc.)
3. Vision (chaps. 7, 8, 10, etc.)
4. Interpretation of a dream/vision (chaps. 2, 7, 8, 9, etc.)
5. Audition (8:13-14; 11:2-12:4, etc.)
6. Riddle or cryptic writing (5:25-28)
7. Prayer (6:16; 9:4-19)
8. Hymn of praise (2:20-23; 4:1-3, 34-35; 6:26-27)
9. Royal edict (3:29; 6:7-9, 26)
10. Royal proclamation (chap. 4)
11. List (3:2-6; 5:4, 23)
12. Dialogue (4:9, 18-20; 10:12-20; 12:8-13)
13. Oath (12:7)

Plan of Daniel's Book. Generally speaking, the structure of Daniel's book is characterized by balance and symmetry best evidenced through the use of chiasm, especially in the first half of the book. Chapters 2-7,

¹⁰ B. Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 92b.

¹¹ On the presence and function of prayers in Daniel's book, see Paul B. Petersen, "The Theology and the Function of Prayers in the Book of Daniel" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1988).

originally written in Aramaic (chaps. 1, 8-12 are in Hebrew) are clearly arranged in a chiastic manner:¹²

- A. Vision of world kingdoms (chap. 2)
- B. The faithful tested (chap. 3)
- C. Judgment on a king (chap. 4)
- C'. Judgment on a king (chap. 5)
- B'. The faithful tested (chap. 6)
- A'. Vision of world kingdoms (chap. 7)

Chapters 2 and 7 focus on the kingdoms of this world and they both end with an announcement of God's eternal reign. Chapters 3 and 6 present stories of persecution of God's servants who are victims of their jealous opponents. Their God intervenes and saves them in miraculous ways. Chapters 4 and 5 that are found in the heart of the Aramaic section of the book disclose the message of the Aramaic portion of the book intended for all the people who inhabited the earth. That message was that no person on earth, including an emperor, can remain neutral in his or her attitude toward the God of heaven. In other words, when God confronts a human being, he or she has to decide to take a stand either for or against him. The two examples from the lives of the two Babylonian kings who encountered God illustrate this principle well. One king responded positively to God's call to repentance and his life was preserved, and his power was restored to him. The other king remained unrepentant and paid the highest price for it. Neutrality, according to the teaching from Daniel's book, is simply *not* an

¹² Based on A. Lenglet, "La structure litteraire de Daniel 2-7," *Biblica* 53(1972):169-90; W. H. Shea, "Further Literary Structures in Daniel 2-7: An Analysis of Daniel 4," *AUSS* 23/2 (1985):193-202; cf. *AUSS* 23/3 (1985):277-95.

option when it comes to making decisions about God and one's eternal destiny.

Artistic imagery. Another important literary feature in Daniel is rich artistic imagery characterized by the use of metaphor and simile. The imagery is presented on at least three distinct levels: (1) Terrestrial: Following King Nebuchadnezzar's command the provincial administrators assembled in the Plain of Dura and all bowed down and worshipped the image of gold, all except three Hebrew men. The text from 3:8-12 says that this act of insubordination did not go unnoticed by the members of the master race in Babylon:

At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon-Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego-who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.

The act of denouncing the Hebrews is presented in a much more graphic language in Aramaic. The original text literally says that the Chaldeans "ate their pieces." The concept here is that the talebearer eats his victim's flesh, a sort of verbal cannibalism. A modern equivalent would be to say that the astrologers "chew out" the Hebrews. In the story of Daniel's rescue from the lions the same expression is translated as "falsely accused" (Dan. 6:24).

The second in the series of four ferocious beasts in Daniel 7 is described in the following way:

And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'

The impression made by this picture is that another creature has been eaten and some of the bones are still in the mouth of this “insatiable monster.” The same chapter presents a small horn with a big mouth (v. 8) that will oppress the Saints of the Most High God (v. 25). The long persecution is expressed here through a familiar picture of garments worn out by people. (2) Extra-terrestrial: The story of Belshazzar’s banquet is found in chapter 5. In response to the king’s blasphemous behavior

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way (5:5-6).

Belshazzar’s vision of a detached hand writing on the wall before him “remains one of the most haunting images in literature.”¹³ Generally speaking, a disembodied palm of the hand would represent a defeated enemy. The effect of this eerie scene might be similar if “the head of a decapitated victim began to speak.”¹⁴ One can contrast this scene with Psalm 119:73a where the psalmist sings praise to God’s powerful hands saying: ***“Your hands made me and formed me.”*** What is fascinating in Daniel’s book is that a similar (possibly the same) hand touched the prophet and

¹³ John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 246.

¹⁴ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 738.

restored life-sustaining strength to him no less than three times during his vision of the person “dressed in linen” in chapter 10.

The description of Belshazzar’s fear is detailed and graphic and it comes in contrast to the description of his pride and arrogance from the preceding verses. “The noble silhouette of the king crumbles to a heap of bones rubbing against each other in fear.”¹⁵ (3) Celestial: One of the richest imageries in the book is the text that describes God’s throne in heaven found in 7:9-10:

*As I looked, thrones were set in place,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.
A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.
Thousands ypon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
The court was seated,
and the books were opened.*

While whiteness symbolizes purity, fire is a standard metaphor used in the Bible for divine presence and judgment (Psalm 78:14, 21; Hebrews 12:29).

In Daniel 12:3 God’s messenger tells Daniel what will happen once Israel’s patron angel Michael arises:

*Those who are wise will shine
like the brightness of the heavens,
and those who lead many to righteousness,
like the stars for ever and ever.*

¹⁵ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 79.

The context of the book makes it clear that Daniel's life exemplified two important characteristics of the redeemed people of God. First, he was extraordinarily wise to the extent that he was made chief over the wise men in Babylon. Second, he used his wisdom to lead many to God's righteous way of living.

The examples mentioned above are only a few samples that show the presence of rich imagery in the book on three levels: terrestrial, extra-terrestrial and celestial.

Parallelism. Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic) literary style is most commonly characterized by the presence of parallelism. A good example to show how dominant parallelism is in biblical poetry can be found in the following two verses:

*Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death;
those he wanted to spare, he spared;
those he wanted to promote, he promoted;
and those he wanted to humble, he humbled (5:19b).¹⁶*

*Those who are wise will shine
like the brightness of the heavens,
and those who lead many to righteousness,
like the stars for ever and ever (12:3).*

Synonymous parallelism is also nicely illustrated in 2:21b where Daniel says about God:

“He gives wisdom to the wise

¹⁶ Unless otherwise indicated all biblical quotations in this paper are taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.

and knowledge to the discerning.”

In a similar way in 6:26c Darius praised God by saying that

*“his kingdom will not be destroyed
his dominion will never end.”*

Antithetic parallelism is found in 9:7 where Daniel prays to God:

*“Lord you are righteous,
but this day we are covered with shame.”*

The inverted parallelism or chiasm¹⁷ can be seen in Daniel’s report about the king’s dream in chapter 2. The composite statue was made of elements that are first given in descending order in verses 32-33: Gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. After the rock had struck the statue, all of these elements were destroyed but are listed in ascending order in verse 35: Iron, clay, bronze, silver and gold.

Literary figures. In addition to parallelism a number of literary figures are found throughout Daniel’s book. The first of these is a play on words or pun already found in the opening chapter. Daniel 1:7 says that the chief official *determined*¹⁸ (Hebrew *wayyāśem*) new (i. e. Babylonian) names for the four young men which were to replace their Hebrew names. In verse 8 the same Hebrew word is used to express how Daniel *determined* not to defile himself with the rich food and drink that were served at the king’s table. In fact both verses begin with the identical verbal form preceded by a consecutive *waw* “and”.

¹⁷ Soulen, *Handbook*, 32-33.

¹⁸ In most of modern English translations including the NIV this wordplay is lost.

Another example of wordplay is found in chapter 9 where Daniel is praying and fasting regarding the end of the period of seventy years of exile in Babylon. Yet, when Gabriel arrives in response to the prayer he delivers God's revelation which concerns "seventy weeks" of years (cf. 10:2 "**three weeks [of days]**"). The most elaborate set of wordplays is found in 5:25-28 where the divine judgment pronounced on Belshazzar is presented through "the rhythm of four." This means that each of the four words that formed the cryptic writing on the wall (*Mene* "numbered"; *Mene* "numbered"; *Tekel* "weighed"; *Peres* "divided") is explained in the original Hebrew through four-word statements.

Closely related to wordplay are paronomasia and hendiadys.¹⁹

Paronomasia is one of the most frequently used literary figures in Semitic languages and it is characterized by the recurrence of the same word stem in close proximity.²⁰ Thus, for example, it says in 1:4 that one characteristic of the choice captives was that they were "**well informed**" (NIV) and the original Hebrew says *yōd' 'ē da'at* ("knowing knowledge"). Another among many other examples is found in 2:1 where it says that the kings "dreamed dreams," which is to say the king had dreams. Hendiadys, on the other hand is when two different words are combined to express a single concept.²¹ Thus, in Daniel 2:14 Daniel addresses Arioch, the royal executioner, with "**wisdom and tact.**" These two words could be rendered as "tactful wisdom." In 7:25 the hostile king who is represented by the symbol of a little horn tries "**to change the set times and the laws**" (NIV). A better rendering of the

¹⁹ As far as our present evidence goes, alliteration and assonance are not attested in Daniel's book.

²⁰ For a different definition of paronomasia see W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 258.

²¹ "Two words are used, but one is meant." This simple definition of hendiadys is found in E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968), 657.

original Aramaic statement would be to say “the set times which are regulated by the law.”

Another literary figure related to wordplay is merism(us) which is characterized by the use of two or more contrasting (or opposite) elements with the purpose of expressing the concept of totality. In his hymn of praise to God (2:21-23) Daniel states that God sets up and deposes kings, which is to say that the power of earthly monarchs is under God’s sovereign control. Daniel goes on to say that darkness and light are known to God, another way of saying that God knows everything. King Darius, in his hymn of praise, sings about God who “*performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth*” (6:27), which means everywhere in the universe. In his prayer, Daniel confesses that God’s people who live “*both near and far*” (9:7), because they are scattered everywhere, had sinned against him. Merism is also found in the book on a larger scale like in chapter 11 which talks about earthly conflicts between north and south and balancing the report from chapter 8 where the conflicts between east and west are described.

Hyperbole may be defined as “making emphasis by overstatement” and is universally attested in literature.²² It is very commonly used among the Mediterranean people. Jesus told his audience that if the “*right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away*” (Matthew 5:30) and also that “*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 19:24). Among many examples of hyperbole from Daniel’s book is the statement from 1:20 that says how the Hebrew young men’s final grades were ten times better (GPA 40.0) than the grades of all the other wise men in the whole kingdom.

²² Bullinger explained hyperbole as “When more is said than is literally meant,” *Figures of Speech*, 423.

Another example is found in 8:5 that describes the coming of a goat that crossed the whole earth “*without touching the ground*” (a flying goat).

In common parlance, irony is “the statement of one thing with the intention of suggesting something else.”²³ In Daniel irony is mostly used as an intentional literary device. The presence of irony is attested in 2:33-34 where the imposing statue seen by the king in the dream is struck by a stone “*on its feet of iron and clay,*” which was its weakest part. According to 3:8 the same Chaldeans whose lives had been spared by Daniel’s intervention in the previous story (2:24), now come forward and denounce the Jews. In the same chapter, irony is found in verse 19 where the king orders the furnace to be heated seven times hotter, yet everyone knows that punishment is greater when a person is burned with a slow fire. Verse 22 reports the death of the king’s soldiers who were killed because of the intense heat from the furnace and because of the king’s urgent command. As for the Hebrews, the flames of the fire only burned the ropes by which they were tied up (v. 25). Verse 27 adds that “*their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.*”

Numerical progression is found in several places in Daniel’s book. A well known example is the description of the innumerable angelic host that surrounds God’s throne described in the following manner:

***“Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him” (7:10).***

Another example of this literary figure is found in 12:7, 11-12 where three time periods are given: “a time, times and half a time” which totals 1,260

²³ Soulen, *Handbook*, 88.

days, followed by 1,290 days and 1,335 days. Moreover, some examples of broken numerical progression are also found in the text. The best known such case comes from 7:25 where a temporary progress of the little horn before its sudden destruction is conveyed through the expression “time, (two) times, and half a time.”²⁴

Reversals are attested in the book on both smaller and larger scales.²⁵ In 3:15 the proud king is asking the faithful worshippers of God a challenging (rhetorical²⁶) question: “*Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?*” At the end of the story in verse 29 he feels compelled to answer his own question when he says that “*no other god can save in this way.*” The story from chapter 5 tells how Belshazzar and his thousand nobles drank wine and praised the idols of “*gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone*” (v. 4). Later in the story, Daniel rebuked the king because he desecrated God’s holy vessels while giving praise to the idols “*of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone*” (v. 23). By intentionally reversing the order of the first two materials, Daniel wanted to show that as far as Heaven was concerned, Babylon was no longer the ruling empire of the world but Medo-Persia. Gold had already given place to silver. Reversal is also attested in the last chapters of the book. According to 11:33 the wise who instruct many during the persecution by the contemptible ruler fall by the sword, or are burned, or captured or plundered. Yet, because of the rise of Michael, the same wise will be glorified so that they “*will shine like the brightness of the heavens ... for ever and ever*” (12:3).

²⁴ Z. Stefanovic, “The Presence of the THREE AND A FRACTION: A Literary Figure in the Book of Daniel.” *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of W. H. Shea* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archeology, Andrews University, 1997), 199-203.

²⁵ Z. Stefanovic, “Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals,” *AUSS* 30 (1992): 139-150.

²⁶ Thus Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 954.

Inclusio is a literary device that takes place when the opening theme or phrase is returned to at the end.²⁷ His lengthy speech before King Nebuchadnezzar Daniel began (2:28) and ended (2:45) with a reference to his God who knows the future and holds it in his hand. Chapter 4 contains a royal letter addressed to the whole world and enveloped by two hymns of praise. The chapter begins (v. 3) and ends (v. 34) with a statement that affirms God's enduring dominion and kingdom. Similarly, Daniel 12 begins with a report of the rise of Michael, the event which becomes a guarantee that at the end of days Daniel will also rise to receive his allotted inheritance. In both cases the Hebrew verb root 'md is used.

Themes and motifs. A careful reading of Daniel's book can disclose a number of literary themes and motifs that attest to the unity of the book. The dominant theme that is present throughout the book is God's power, displayed in the ways he deals with the covenant people as well as with the nations of the world.

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and the fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.²⁸

In the word of God only is this set forth. Here it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose.²⁹

²⁷ Nicholas Turner, *Handbook for Biblical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 84. Also, Soulen, *Handbook*, 85-86.

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 499-500.

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1952), 175.

God's way of acting in the lives of a group of people or of individuals is commonly referred to in the Bible as divine judgment. God's judgment results in a destruction of the unrepentant, on the one hand, and in deliverance of the righteous, on the other. While the theme of judgment permeates the whole Book of Daniel, it is especially present in chapter 7, the chapter that is often viewed as a pivotal chapter in Scripture.

In chapter 1, for example, the reader discerns that when the children of Israel went into exile to the land of *Shinar*, they, in fact, backtracked (or reversed) Abram's journey of faith reported in and around Genesis 12. Yet, in that same chapter, we see the faithful remnant rising from (desert) dust to stars at the palace in Babylon. Another scholar describes this motif as "from pit to pinnacle."³⁰ The story from chapter 5 that tells about the fall of Babylon can be described as a movement from stars to dust. Finally, in chapter 12, the wise and the "many" to whom they had witnessed rise from dust to stars once again, this time forever, never to go back to dust again.

In addition to being the most powerful being, God is portrayed in the book as someone who shares power with humans. In this sense, world history as presented in biblical prophecy is a witness to numerous examples of uses and misuses of God-given authority to rule (*šoltān*) by beastlike powers. In practice, this means that at times human laws stand in opposition to God's principles, like in chapters 3 and 6 where two unchangeable laws are in conflict.

The rise of the beasts in Daniel 7 is presented as a replay of the Creation Story from Genesis 1 and it climaxes in the coming of a humanlike

³⁰ S. Talmon, "Daniel," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, edited by R. Alter and F. Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 352.

being³¹ who receives the universal authority to rule. This same theme of “the great controversy” is described in Daniel 8 as a reversal of the continual services in God’s sanctuary. The climax of the revelation in that chapter is a promise that in a distant future the sanctuary will be restored to its rightful state (8:14).

Chapter 9 presents the same truth through yet another theme that could be called “The Story of Two Exiles.”³² From an earthly, temporary exile of seventy years, the prophet is introduced to a much longer (seventy weeks of years) universal captivity to sin that will come to an end because of the Messiah’s death. That event will make God’s covenant prevail in behalf of many (even non-Jewish) people whose sins will be forgiven.

Teaching Literature Classes from Daniel’s Book

In this article I have endeavored to show that the Book of Daniel contains outstanding literary qualities attested in all of its chapters. A task that remains is to present this biblical book as an attractive and useful material for reading, literary analysis and group discussion in the classroom setting. Students look for role models and they can certainly find one in the person of Daniel who was courageous, smart, and kind.

In Daniel’s book God is portrayed as both sovereign and eternal. He is not only a compassionate but also a powerful being who is “mighty to save.” The visions from the book, in particular, portray God as the one who is fully in charge of the events in world’s history. He is able to defeat the oppressor and deliver his suffering people. Young people (and old) today are in need of this kind of message.

³¹ Zdravko Stefanovic “The Use of the Aramaic Word *bār* (“son”) as a Noun of Relation in the Book of Daniel.” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 77-81.

³² Philip R. Davies, *Daniel*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 21.

Although literature classes are often characterized by the use of technical jargon, a Christian teacher will not allow any academic exercise, regardless of how important it may be, to hinder the student from seeing a glimpse of God through every single class lesson. In closing it might be helpful to look at a quote which contains several analogies that illustrate the primary function of Scripture in academic life:

Like a telescope, it [Scripture] summons us to look through, not at, it and see the starry heavens. The most crucial question to ask is, Have you seen the stars? not, What do you think of the lens? Like a loudspeaker, the Bible invites us to hear the Word of God. What is urgent is to receive the Word that was given, not to conclude what to make of the background noise. Like a lamp, the Scriptures make it possible for us to see; like bread, they satisfy our appetite and nourish us. It is very important not to forget, when we are discussing the topic of biblical authority academically, that the Bible is a means to an end, not an end in itself.³³

³³ Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 17.