Eschatology and Messianism in the *Gabriel Inscription*

Torleif Elgvin  
NLA University College, Oslo | torleif.elgvin@nla.no  
*JJMJS* No. 1 (2014): 5–25

**Introduction**

The *Gabriel Inscription* (or *Vision of Gabriel*) is the only known text from the Dead Sea region written on stone. It was written with black ink on a roughly polished limestone that measures 96 by 37 centimeters. The text is written in Hebrew in two columns, and more or less fragmentary remains of 88 lines are preserved. The somewhat crude script can be dated to the second half of the first century B.C.E. Micromorphologic analysis of the stone and its coating suggests that it indeed is an ancient authentic text. The soil attached to the stone indicates it was found east of the Dead Sea, not far from the Lisan peninsula (Goren 2008). The stone was probably located 15 years ago, and was bought soon after by David Jezelsohn, Zürich, from the Jordanian antiquities dealer Ghassan Rihani, in Irbid, Jordan.

*Hazon Gabriel* (as the text is called in Hebrew) was published in Hebrew in March 2007 (Yardeni and Elizur 2007). Two months later I headed a symposium on this text in Oslo and made a tentative English translation of it, which subsequently was accessible on the internet for a few years. Ada Yardeni’s initial deciphering and full-size drawing of the text provided the starting point for all subsequent interpreters. Subsequently, Elisha Qimron and Alexei Yuditsky suggested a number of new readings in a Hebrew article (Qimron and Yuditsky 2009). A collection of papers on this enigmatic text were published in a volume edited by Matthias Henze in 2011, which included English versions of Yardeni/Elizur 2007 and Qimron/Yuditsky 2009 (Henze 2011).

In a number of publications Israel Knohl has argued that the *Gabriel Inscription* refers to a dying and rising messiah named Ephraim. Already on April 19, 2007, he argued in *Haaretz* that the text said “In three days, live!” (l. 80). Even though he later conceded that this phrase should rather be read “On the third day—the sign” (first suggested by Hendel 2009), he still finds a pre-Christian suffering messiah in this text, perhaps modeled on Simon, one of the

---

leaders of the uprisings following the death of Herod in 4 B.C.E., who was killed by Herod’s troops in Transjordan. The blood of this slain messianic leader would, for his followers, pave the way for the final salvation (as is said in later rabbinic texts on the messiah son of Joseph/Ephraim, who will pave the way for the victorious son of David). Knohl argues that such messianic texts were formative for the shaping of the Jesus tradition, but remains relatively alone along this line of interpretation. The text is shaped as a long prophetic oracle, formed in dialogue between an anonymous Jewish prophet and the angel Gabriel. The mediating angel adopts the role of a human prophet, frequently repeating the formula “thus says the Lord.” Both in orthography and style the text is somewhat vulgar, conveying the impression of an immediate prophetic experience, not a crafted literary text. The text includes liturgical responses (lines 23–24, 72–74). This element may reflect the background of the prophet (Levitic?) or demonstrate a secondary use of this text in a communal liturgical setting.

The text describes a situation of crisis for a Jerusalem surrounded by enemy armies (ll. 13–14, 27, 32–36, 53–57). God promises to come to its aid with angelic armies and chariots, and the archangel Michael is particularly mentioned (ll. 26–28, 32–33, 65–67). A breakthrough is repeatedly promised “on the third day,” as promised in Scripture. Lines 16–22 contain a divine oracle directed to a Davidic messiah, “my servant David . . . my son,” who is promised “a new covenant” (or “a sacred covenant”) and a sign on the third day. Three divine envoys, designated as prophets and shepherds, are sent by God to scrutinize the people of Israel and are subsequently recalled (ll. 69–72, 75–76, 79). The Gabriel Inscription may reflect both prophetic experience and exegetical interaction with a number of biblical traditions, in particular with the prophetic books (Ezek 1; 38–39; Zech 1–8; 14; Dan 8–12; Hag 2:6; Isa 7:10–17; 66:15; Jer 31:31–34).

In the following I will present some textual notes that interact with Yardeni/Elizur and Qimron/Yuditsky, along with a transcription of the legible lines of the text and a structured English translation. Thereafter I will discuss

2 “The Christian myth of a Messiah who dies and is resurrected was shaped by a preexisting Jewish myth. From the ‘Gabriel Revelation’ we learn that the motif of the leader’s resurrection on the third day existed in Judaism prior to the birth of Christianity”: Knohl 2011b, 441.
3 According to David Hamidovic, the repetitions in lines 57–59 show that the inscription is no autograph, but copied from a Vorlage. He suggests that the stone could have been used as a liturgical object (2009, 149, 151–2). However, as it now stands, the text does not present itself as a liturgical document. For Yardeni and Elizur the “scroll style” with two columns suggests that the inscription was copied from a scroll (2011, 12). The incised vertical and horizontal guidelines have parallels in many scrolls from the Judean Desert.
4 Transcription, textual notes, and translation are indebted to Yardeni and Elizur 2007, and Qimron and Yuditsky 2011. Where I depart from these scholars and suggest alternative readings I have consulted Yardeni’s 2007 drawing as well as photographs made by Bruce Zuckerman and his team in 2009, available on Inscriptifact (ISF: www.inscriptifact.com). In the translation italic font indicates tentative/uncertain readings and interpretations.
some main themes in the text, focusing on its prophetic-apocalyptic character, the nature of the divine envoys, the sign on the third day, and the characteristics of the messiah. Finally, I will compare the Gabriel text with a dialogue between God and the Davidic messiah in a talmudic text (b. Sukkah 52a) and with the medieval apocalypse Sefer Zerubbabel.

Text
Col. I

[7]  שאלת דּוּב
[9]  דּוּב
[10]  שאלת דּוּב
[12]  בֶּן-שֵׁמְאָּלָה וְאָמָהָּו הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[13]  כָּמָר אָם הָאָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָה הָהּ בִּלְחוֹם
[15]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא
[16]  וַחֲסֶדֶם עֶבֶר דָּרֶךְ מִלְפֶּפֶר הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[17]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת אָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָהָו אָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[18]  וְאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת שָׁלוֹם עָבָּדָא יְהוָה זֶרֶם בִּלְחוֹם
[19]  וְאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת שָׁלוֹם עָבָּדָא יְהוָה זֶרֶם בִּלְחוֹם
[20]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא
[21]  וַחֲסֶדֶם עֶבֶר דָּרֶךְ מִלְפֶּפֶר הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[22]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת אָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָהָו אָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[23]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת שָׁלוֹם עָבָּדָא יְהוָה זֶרֶם בִּלְחוֹם
[24]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא
[25]  וַחֲסֶדֶם עֶבֶר דָּרֶךְ מִלְפֶּפֶר הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[26]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת אָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָהָו אָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[27]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא
[28]  וַחֲסֶדֶם עֶבֶר דָּרֶךְ מִלְפֶּפֶר הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[29]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת אָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָהָו אָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[30]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת שָׁלוֹם עָבָּדָא יְהוָה זֶרֶם בִּלְחוֹם
[31]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא
[32]  וַחֲסֶדֶם עֶבֶר דָּרֶךְ מִלְפֶּפֶר הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[33]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת אָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָהָו אָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[34]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא
[35]  וַחֲסֶדֶם עֶבֶר דָּרֶךְ מִלְפֶּפֶר הָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[36]  וְהָאָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת אָלָחֵי שֵׁמְאָלָהָו אָלָחֵי צְבָאוֹת
[37]  וַחֲשֹׁת שָׁלֵשׁ עַל-אֲרֻבָּא תְוָבָּא וְתְוָבָּא

Elgvin, Gabriel Inscription 7
Thus saith the Lord, after the word spake I to Jerusalem to build, and to comfort her; afraid and broken-hearted, I said unto you, 'Fear not.'

Jerusalem shall yet be inhabited, she shall be established upon her own foundation; again shall the house of Jacob takeroot upon herJudge.
Textual Notes

L. 12. The beginning of this line is read by Yardeni/Elizur as לַכְּכֶם תִּעְמֹדוּ. Qimron/Yuditsky observe that there are two words before “house of Israel” and renders בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל טוֹכִּי or קֹנַנְיָה. According to ISF 11423 the first word ends ר- or י-. The left leg and horizontal upper part of the first stroke of the tav is clear. Based on Yardeni’s full-sized drawing of the text (Yardeni/Elizur 2007) one could read this first word as קֹנַנְיָה or קֹנַנְיָה. On her drawing one sees the right edge and lower corner of a square letter, possibly mem, and before this two or three strokes which may be interpreted as the left leg and top of khet, enabling the reading קֹנַנְיָה. The next word perhaps opens with bet, kap, or ‘ayin (cf. ISF 11423). The two opening words of line 12 would contain a verbal clause referring to God’s action for Israel. שִׁים וּפְגָּפָה may be the easiest material reading of the word before “house of Israel.” However, above the first two letters of this word a supralinear lamed can be discerned. Thus I tentatively suggest to read קֹנַנְיָה שִׁים וּפְגָּפָה—“I will have pity on you, house of Israel,” (רחם וּפָגָא). L. 12. גדלותירושלם may be interpreted not as “the greatness of Jerusalem” (as is commonly done), but as “great deeds (to be) done for Jerusalem,” referring to God’s deeds in the past or the close future, cf. 1 Chr 17:19–21. Acts of God are in focus in this text more than the glory of Zion.

Ll. 16–17.עבדידודבקשמןלפניא empres[ב]נ[יו,]האותאנימבקשמןלפְניך. The last word of line 16 can materially be read אפרים (“Ephraim”) or אֲמָרִים (“words”), as the second letter of this word equally can be read as pe or mem. Qimron/Yuditsky argue for the reading אֲמָרִים. “Give me words [in re]sponse,” referring to this expression in Prov 22:21.

Since his first publication in 2007, the reading “Ephraim” has been essential for Knohl’s interpretation. Based on the physical evidence he argues that the first word of line 17 cannot be empres[ב]נ[יו,] but is a word ending with final mem (2011a, 42, note 11). With Yardeni/Elizur he restores empres[ב]נ[יו,] and interprets the crucial words: “My servant David, ask of Ephraim [that he] place the sign; (this) I ask of you.” Such a reading represents a stretched interpretation of these two lines. In this text it would be artificial to bring in a dialogue between two messiahs, one of David’s seed and one of Ephraim’s. All through the text the speakers of the dialogue are the anonymous prophet and Gabriel. And it is God or the angel who brings forward the sign (l. 80), not a human agent (cf. Kim 2011, 167). The close context supports the interpretation of Qimron/Yuditsky: In

5 Thus Yardeni/Elizur 2011, 13. “[O]ne can perhaps restore the name Ephraim[?]” (ibid.: 19). Hendel (2009, 8) and Qimron/Yuditsky read empres.
lines 10–11 the prophet asks the angel for a word from the Lord, and lines 17–21 provide the response to this request. David’s request is phrased as a synthetic parallelism: “Give me words [in re]sponse, the sign I ask from you.” In ISF 11425 the last letters of the first word of line 17 are clearly ב. The third-to-last letter looks more like a pe, but bet is possible, so one should read יַבּי. So far יַבּי is the best suggested restoration, which points to אמרים and not אפרים at the end of line 16.

What is the relation between “my servant David” and the author of this revelatory text? Kim (2011, 158) sees this “David” as the recipient of the revelation. He argues that the text was addressed to the leader of a militant group in a time of crisis for Jerusalem, a group who had the warrior-king David as hero. Kim does not specify if this “David” was the one who received this revelation, or if another prophet was mediating it. Since the text includes different scenes and visions (ll. 25–26, 31–35, 38, 41, 83), and David is referred to in the third person in line 72 (cf. Collins 2011, 111), a more probable scenario would be the prophet listening to a dialogue between God and the Davidic messiah.

Ll. 18–19. דַּשָּׁה בֶּרֶית. Qimron/Yuditsky notes that the reading is doubtful, and annotates the first word בֶּרֶית. However, on ISF 11424 the first three letters are clearly drawn, although the first letter equally can be read as bet or kap. The final taw is materially more doubtful, but it is difficult to come up with a better reading that fits with the next word, דַּשָּׁה. I concur with Qimron/Yuditsky that the digital photo favors the reading דַּשָּׁה (thus Yardeni/Elizur).


L. 22. Read هل דָּשָּׁה אוּת. You do not stand on firm ground. The “evil plant” of lines 20–22 may well be an anti-type to the Davidic messiah— is a Davidic/messianic designation from the Bible (Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 29:21; Zech 3:8; 6:12; Ps 132:17, cf. Knohl 2011b, 444–45).

Ll. 24–25. In the beginning of line 25 there is space for a short word before הַשָּׁמָּים, and a few traces of ink are preserved. I suggest to read: יָם יָם will shake the powers of heaven and the earth.” Such a quotation or allusion to Hag 2:6 is also found in Heb 12:26.

Ll. 31–32. Based on ISF 11432 read יָם יָם — “The angel asked, ‘The thing you saw, what was it?’ – I answered: ‘A mighty tree.” Our author is influenced by Aramaic, and could use both ש (ll. 36, 67, 71) and as relative pronoun (אָלָם, l. 81). A scribal error or irregular defective spelling of רָאָתָה should not be ruled out (cf. the spelling רָאָתָה for רָאָתָה in line 23), even if

6 The parallels between Ps 2 and the Gabriel Inscription demonstrated below support reading אמרים and not אפרים: in this psalm God instructs the Davidide to ask him for intervention.
occurs in line 71. The first word of line 32 describes the tree seen in this vision.

Ll. 35–36. With Qimron/Yuditsky read and not . Line 36 contains the verb סכנ . A man communicating a sign may have been envisioned standing on the city wall, cf. Amos 7:7.

Ll. 37–38. Read with Qimron/Yuditsky. They interpret it as “the first exile” and “the second exile,” referring to Jer 24:1–10. Alternately, one could interpret as a qal or pi’el infinitive with the meaning “revelation.” Based on isf 11426, one may possibly read תואከר with לֶא—“this is the first revelation . . . and this is the second revelation.” “Revelation” may fit the prophetic character of the text better than a reference to two periods of exile at this point in the text.

L. 41. With Qimron/Yuditsky the penultimate word should be read וּאַהֲרָא. With isf 11427 one may read the end of the line אֶלְּדוּר תֶּהָרָאשׁ—“His glory, and I shall see wonders.” The letter here suggested as samek could equally be read בֵּט or קָפָא.

L. 43. The penultimate word seems to beתיא. With isf 11427 one may read the end of the line אֶלְּדוּר תֶּהָרָאשׁ—“blessed are you where you walk.”

L. 44. After one should read אוּתָא. In the context אוּתָא is preferable. One could perhaps restore a text such as אֵשֶׁר אוּתָא בַּדוּשׁ “Blessed are you where you walk.”

L. 71. Yardeni/Elizur read . The second letter is materially more easily read as ד, but דאַל is possible. The third letter is unclear, but קָפָא and יָד can be discerned.

L. 74. . On isf 11441 three vertical strokes can be seen after the second mem, compatible with דאַל, וָא, and ד. The self-presentation “I am Gabriel” (repeated in lines 80 and 83) has its only parallel in Luke 1:19.

L. 81. . The third, fourth and fifth words of this line were read by Yardeni/Elizur אֵשֶׁר אֶלְּדוּר תֶּהָרָאשׁ תַּוָּעָר “narrow holes(?).” Knohl then connected this line with the slaughter of the zealot leader Simon in rocky crevices in Transjordan in 4 B.C.E. (2011a, 47). Taw may equally be read as קָחֵט, as no extending base line of this letter can be discerned. I tentatively suggest as a
possible reading of this line “the prince of princes, of those who are close to the courts”—referring to the angels approaching God in the courts of the heavenly sanctuary. Qop for ‘alep is only a tentative option, as no descender is visible. But the letters of the line below are worn, and the same could be the case for the descender of a qop.

Ll. 80–82. Yardeni’s 2007 drawing of the text may suggest reading, at the end of line 80, אֶפֶּ וּפְרִי מָלָךְ, and at the end of line 82, מַלָּכִים מֶלֶךְ יַעֲשֵׂה (for the latter, cf. ISF 1143), leading to the following self-presentation of Gabriel: “I am Gabriel, the king of the angels, the prince of princes, of those who are close to the courts.” A similar self-presentation is found in Luke 1:19, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and proclaim to you these good news.” If my reading of line 80 is correct, the titleしまר (l. 81), used more probably for Michael than for God in Dan 8:25 (cf. 8:11), is here applied to Gabriel. Elizur lists later Jewish usage of the term “prince of princes” (Yardeni/Elizur 2011, 20–21): In hekhalot literature it designates Metatron or the angelic Youth alongside the Lord, and Gabriel is positioned as the head of the princes (בראשת הששים). The hekhalot usage would support my reading of lines 80–81. In later piyyutim “prince of princes” is a designation for Michael. A Babylonian incantation text names the two angels who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah as Gabriel and Michael (Hamidovic 2009, 157). The role of two chief angels, Michael as leader of the heavenly host (l. 28) and Gabriel as angelus interpres, is probably inspired by Daniel 8–11.

Translation

7 to the sons of Israel[9] word from the Lor[d] 10 you asked for a word from 11 the Lord, you asked me. – Thus says the Lord of Hosts: 12 I will have pity on you, house of Israel, I will shout about great deeds to be done for Jerusalem. 13 Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: See, all peoples 14 will make war against Jerusalem, and deport from it 15 [o]ne, two, three, four of the prophets and the elders 16 [and] the pious men.

My servant David, ask me: 17 “Give me words [in re]sponse, the sign I ask from you!” Thus says 18 the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: My son, in my hands I have 19 a new covenant for Israel, on the third day you will know it. Thus says 20 the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel: Evil will be broken before 21 righteousness. Ask me, and I will tell you what this 22 evil plant is. You do not stand on firm ground, but the angel 23 is your support, do not fear!

– Blessed be the glory of the Lord from 24 his dwelling! – In a little

Although elsewhere in the text is spelled with ‘alep, the phraseملك מלך should be interpreted as “king of the angels,” rather than “king of kings”—a phrase appearing in Ezek 26:7; Ezr 7:12; Dan 2:37 (on human kings); 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16 (on Christ). If my tentative readingملك at the end of line 82 is correct (“those who love the king”), could here refer to Gabriel or more likely to God.
while I will shake the powers of heaven and the earth.

– See the glory of the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel! The God of the chariots will listen to the cry of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and bring consolation for the sake of the angel Michael, and for the sake of those who have loved and asked him.

Thus says the Lord God of Hosts, the God of [Israel]: One, two, three, four, five, six. And the angel asked: “The thing you saw, what was it?” – I answered: “A mighty tree.” – “Yes, Jerusalem shall be as in former days.” – And I saw a second one [who was] guarding you, Jerusalem, and three, yes, three who perform mighty deeds. . . three . . . [to them. See: a man standing and . . . [on the wall] and he . . . who will give a sign for Jerusalem. [And] I stand over . . . and he said: This is the first revelation, and this is the second revelation, [and] these are the poor ones. And I saw . . .

I will take pity on Jerusalem, says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel. Yes, thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, from . . . says the Lord: I will pour out over Jerusalem the spirit of the awesome ones. He will give . . . Blessed are you where you walk . . .

These are the three holy ones from days of old, from the beginning of Jerusalem, say: “We trust in you, not in flesh and blood.” This is their chariot, that of the great ones of heaven. There are many who love the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel . . .

Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel . . . Prophets I did send to my people, three of them. But I said when I looked on its ways that were not . . . , I talked to them calling them back to the place for the sake of David, the servant of the Lord.

– [See, you created] the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. You show mercy toward thousands from generation to generation.

Three shepherds came to Israel to search for pious ones, to see if there were among them, if there were among them holy ones and pure ones.

“Who are you?” – “I am Gabriel, the angel sent by the Lord . . . and you shall rescue them. A prophet and a shepherd shall rescue you.” – “[Then I] ask you for three shepherds, for three prophets.”

On the third day: the sign! I am Gabriel, king of the angels, the prince of princes, of those who are close to the courts. The sign is for him. See, they ask you. See those who love the king! On the third day, the small one that I took, I Gabriel. The Lord of Hosts, the God of . . . Then you will stand
firm for all[ ... for e[v]er

**Angelic Prophecy and Divine Envoys**

In the late Second Temple period we find prophets who foretell the future or actualize God’s will for their audience. Some of them share an apocalyptic worldview and produce apocalypses or apocalyptically inspired texts. While modern interpreters might discern between the phenomenon of prophecy and apocalyptic seers, such a distinction was hardly made in “prophetic-charismatic” or apocalyptic milieus in the centuries around the turn of the era.8

The *Gabriel Inscripton* opens a window into the actual sayings of a prophet and/or apocalyptic seer more than a century after the shaping of the books of *1 Enoch* and a century before this phenomenon would unfold also in the Jesus movement, as evidenced in the New Testament texts, *Didache*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The relation between the heavenly realms and angels on one side and the fate of earthly Jerusalem on the other seems to locate this text with apocalyptic “relatives” such as the Revelation of John and the *War Scroll*.

In *Hazon Gabriel* the mediating angel adopts the role and terminology of a human prophet, frequently repeating the formula “thus says the Lord.” This is different from the interpreting angels we encounter in Dan 10–12, *Jubilees* or *1 Enoch*, but similar to Zech 1–3. This feature may reflect the theology and angelology of our author, who perhaps needed a mediator less awesome than God himself.

In lines 70–72, 75–76, and 79 we encounter three divine envoys, designated as prophets and shepherds, sent by God and then recalled to heaven. In Zech 11 the image of three shepherds designates human rulers with poor conduct. Elizur lists a number of rabbinic references to “three prophets,” identified as biblical prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, Qohelet, Elijah, Micah, Moses, Zephaniah, and Hulda (Yardeni/Elizur 2011, 18–19).

According to lines 75–76, the shepherds are sent to scrutinize the people of Israel to see if there are faithful ones among them. Rather than pointing to human rulers or prophets, such an assignment brings to mind angelic envoys with similar tasks, cf. Gen 18–19; Ezek 9; Zech 1:10–11; Rev 7:1–4.9 The three shepherds should be interpreted as angelic shepherds commissioned by

---

8 The apocalyptic Book of Revelation presents itself as a “prophetic book,” Rev 22:18, and the *Yahad* text 4QFlorilegium refers to biblical Daniel as “Daniel the prophet.” On Josephus’ understanding of prophecy (primarily foretelling the future), see Gray 1993, in particular pp. 6–34, 164–67. For Paul, prophecy is empowered speaking “in the spirit,” conveying “upbuilding, encouragement and consolation,” i.e. actualizing scriptures or the will of God for the community (1 Cor 14:3).

9 Cf. the “shepherds” of the *Animal Apocalypse* (1 En 89–90). These shepherds should be understood as angels of wrath interfering in the history of Israel, cf. the role of the “angels of Mastema” in 4Qapocrjer C and *Jubilees* (4Q387 2 iii 4; 4Q390 1 11; 2 i 7; *Jub.* 48:2.12; 49:2).
God to test the ways of men, and may be identical with the three holy ones of line 65.10 A reference to three biblical prophets would not easily fit the setting of the Gabriel text, which points either to a historic situation of crisis in the first century B.C.E. or to an eschatological war.

These divine envoys may be compared with the two witnesses of Rev 11, who testify to the truth before they are killed by the beast, and after three and a half days resurrected and taken to heaven. David Flusser and Cana Werman have argued persuasively that Rev 11–13 reinterprets the Oracle of Hystaspes, an anti-Roman Jewish apocalyptic text from the first century.11 In the Oracle (known through Lactantius, a third-century Christian writer), there is one prophet who is sent by God to preach and bring the people to repentance. He is subsequently killed by the antichrist, and then called back to heaven on the third day. The Gabriel text may reflect an earlier version of traditions later incorporated into the Oracle and Rev 11–13. Apoc. Elijah 4 reflects the same tradition, with three witnesses who preach against the antichrist. All three, the virgin Tabitha, Elijah, and Enoch, are killed and resurrected. The Apocalypse of Elijah contains both Jewish and Christian layers. The evidence of the Gabriel Inscription suggests that the core of Apoc. Elijah 4 is Jewish in origin (pace Wermut 1983, 724–25, 746–49).

A Crisis Oracle?
The Gabriel text repeatedly promises a sign of redemption on the third day (lines 17–19, 54, 80). “The third day” could mean the third day after the actual time of revelation to this prophet (in the case of a real military threat to Zion), or refer to the third day after the beginning of the future siege of Jerusalem. If the first option was originally intended, these “three days” would be reinterpreted by later transmitters or interpreters who would have to interact with the delay of the eschatological breakthrough (some kind of Parusieverzögerung).

In either case the Gabriel Inscription shows that an eschatological hope

---

10 In the Bible “holy ones” refers to angels (Collins 1993, 313–17; Collins 2011, 105). In literature from Qumran and later periods this designation may be extended to human servants of God, as in line 76.

11 Flusser’s (1988) hypothesis was accepted by Aune in his commentary on Revelation (1998, 588–93, 726–8, 771). According to Werman (2009), the motif of the woman giving birth to the messiah (Rev 11) was also present in the Oracle; in a Christian text like Revelation it is strange that the messianic baby is taken to heaven after his birth, if this was not already an element in John’s source. Schäfer has recently discussed the Jewish traditions about a mother giving birth to the messiah, who is taken to heaven as a baby (y. Berakhot 2,4/12–14; Lam. Rabba 1,16 § 51; cf. also Sefer Zerubbabel), and concluded that they represent anti-Christian polemic: Schäfer 2010, 1–31; Schäfer 2012, 264–71. Schäfer does not mention Werman’s article. If Werman indeed is right (and I tend to agree with her), the later texts may represent anti-Christian polemic added to a tradition originating in the Second Temple period.
could be connected with a breakthrough on “the third day” already before Jesus. Our text thus parallels the foresayings referring to the third day in the gospels (Matt 12:40; Luke 24:46; John 2:19; cf. 1 Cor 15:4). The hope for redemption with dawn or on the third day would find support in scriptures such as Hos 6:3; Ps 46:5; Exod 8:19; 19:11, 15; and Gen 22:4 (on the third day Abraham sees the place of offering and symbolically receives “his son back from the dead,” cf. Heb 11:17–19). As in Luke 24:46 and 1 Cor 15:4, the breakthrough on the third day is promised in the scriptures: “on the third day it will be, as [the prophet] said” (l. 54), which could refer to Hos 6:3 as proof text.

Is there a specific historic situation of crisis behind this revelatory text, as argued by Israel Knohl and Daewoong Kim (Kim 2011)? Knohl has suggested the upheavals after the death of Herod. Other options would be Pompey’s invasion of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E., the Parthian incursions into Judea in 40–39 B.C.E., or the civil war between Herod and the Hasmoneans in 39–37 B.C.E. that culminated in the siege and conquest of Jerusalem.12

But the author of the Gabriel text could engage in prophetic dialogue with biblical texts on wars about Jerusalem and the end-time fate of Zion (such as 2 Kg 19; Ezek 38–39; Zech 14; Ps 46; cf. Rev 20:9) without an acute situation of military crisis, similar to the setting of the Revelation of John. Our author is simultaneously prophet and exegete, as Christopher Fletcher-Louis has argued about John of Patmos.13 Similar to the men of the Yahad and John of Patmos, our prophet sees himself as part of revelation history, he is given “new information” on the end-time war soon to come.

The eschatological scenario presented in this text—with angels, chariots, a Davidic messiah, and his anti-type “the evil branch”—would make sense as revelation about the end-time battle given to a group characterized by eschatological fervor. A “crisis oracle” given to the leaders of a Jerusalem under siege seems less probable. As a third alternative, this detailed revelation on the end-time could have been prompted by the author’s experience of a military crisis in Judea. Such a recipient group as suggested here is easily perceived in the upheavals of Judea in the first century B.C.E.

With the setting I suggest it is easy to understand why the text was “recycled,” received liturgical responsae, and was inscribed in stone, a stone

---

12 David Hamidovic (2012) departs from mainstream interpretation. He dates the script after 50 C.E., suggests Titus’ siege of Jerusalem as its historic setting, and Vespasian as an anti-type for the Davidic messiah—for which cf. the evil branch of lines 20–22.

13 “What John encounters in his visionary experience is made sense of through the framework of understanding already present in his cognition. The interpretation of Ezek 1 . . . involved seeing again what Ezekiel had seen. It may well have involved the resort to cross-referencing, but this contributed to a dynamic imaginative activity in which the details of Ezekiel’s vision were understood by a complex interweaving of vision and textual networking”: Fletcher-Louis 2006, 45, 48; cf. Fletcher-Louis 2008.
perhaps intended to be raised as a memorial stelae. The well preserved state of the inscription could suggest that the stelae was found still standing upright in a cave east of the Dead Sea, a region under Jewish rule in the first century B.C.E. Following biblical tradition, the desert could be conceived as a place of divine revelation and eschatological preparation.

The Davidic Messiah

What does the Vision of Gabriel teach us about the Davidic messiah? He is connected with a war scenario with enemies surrounding Jerusalem (cf. Pss 2; 110), has angelic hosts coming to his help, is addressed by God in the context of a dialogue, and is promised a sign—a breakthrough on the third day that is connected to “a new covenant” (or “holy covenant”). He is called by the biblical term קוֹבֵּד דָּיוֹד — “my servant David” (2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:13, 32, 34, 36, 38; 14:8; 19:34; 20:6; Isa 37:35; Jer 33:21, 26; 1 Chr 17:4, 7; Ps 89:3, 20; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24).

The angelic envoys are recalled to heaven “for the sake of David, the servant of the Lord” (ll. 71–72). This could be a reference to the historic king of Israel. But the parallel with “my servant David” (l.16) rather suggests that the text also here refers to the eschatological Son of David, who has an important role in eschatological history.

If I am right in two assumptions—1) the text refers to a futuric end-time battle, not a present situation of war; and 2) the prophet listens to a dialogue between God and the Davidic messiah (the easiest reading of ll. 16–22)—I see two possible settings for such a dialogue:
a) the prophet listens to what God will say to the Davidide in this future war situation;
b) a heavenly dialogue between God and the messiah could suggest that the messiah is situated in heaven until he is sent to fulfill his task on earth. Such a scenario could explain why the three heavenly envoys are recalled for his sake.

The idea of a messiah in heaven recurs in later talmudic texts such as b. Sanh. 98a (where he sits waiting at the gates of Rome until he is called for). But already some Second Temple texts may testify to this idea. The Son of Man in Dan 7:13–14 may be understood as a heavenly figure with functions similar to a Davidic messiah, perhaps in conjunction with a Davidide on earth (see Elgvin 2015). In the first century B.C.E., the Enochic Similitudes see the Son of Man as a messiah in heaven, and the latest addition to the Similitudes in chapter 71 reveals that Enoch himself is this enthroned Son of Man (i.e. an earthly sage

---

14 Knohl suggests that the lower part of the stone was left empty because it was intended to be set down in solid earth, and this part is indeed darker brown than the rest (2011b, 443).
15 Moshe Idel notes that in some rabbinic texts the messiah transcends earthly dimensions. He can be preexistent and belong to the heavenly realms where we find the merkavah, the heavenly temple, and the souls of the righteous (1998, 42–47).
transformed to heavenly messiah, not a messiah residing in heaven before being sent to earth). Further, 4Q521 (4QMessianic Apocalypse) 1 i 1–2 (“Heaven and earth will obey his messiah”) may reflect an early interpretation of the Son of Man as a cosmic messiah residing in heaven (Elgvin 2015). Cf. further Werman’s suggestion that in the first century C.E. the Oracle of Hystaspes described a messianic child taken to heaven after his birth to be sent to earth in the end-time (see note 11).

Towards the end of the text we find the following dialogue between Gabriel and the prophet:

77 “Who are you?” – “I am Gabriel, the angel sent [by the Lord . . . and] you shall rescue them. A prophet and a shepherd shall rescue you.” – [“Then I] ask you for three shepherds, for three prophets.” 80 On the third day: the sign! I am Gabriel, king of the angels, 81 the prince of princes, of those who are close to the courts . . . 82 The sign is for him. See, they[ a]sk you.

The “you” addressed in line 78 and given the task of rescuing the people is either the prophet himself or the Davidic messiah, who could have been introduced in the end of line 77. The promise that “the sign is for him” (l. 82) probably refers to the messiah, so that lines 16–23 and 80–83 refer to the same sign promised on the third day.

The promise that “Jerusalem shall be as in former days” (l. 32), and the expectation of a Davidic messiah whose only hope to save Jerusalem is angelic intervention, show that the author was no supporter of the military might of Herod or the Roman/Hasmonean alliance that preceded him, and hint that the present leadership is illegitimate.

God’s Dialogue with the Son of David in b. Sukkah 52a

A text in b. Sukkah 52a contains close parallels to some crucial lines in the Gabriel Inscription. Both texts represent a rereading of the dialogue between the Lord and the Davidic king in Ps 2:7–8. The conflict between enemy peoples and the elect Davidide in Zion, God’s dialogue with the son of David and intervention for his anointed—these elements in Ps 2 were read both by this talmudic text and Hazon Gabriel as prophetic information about the end-time battle.

Lines 16–19 in the Gabriel Inscription should probably be read as follows (cf. Qimron and Yuditsky 2011, 31–34).
My servant David, ask me: 17 “Give me words [in re]sponse, the sign I ask from you!” Thus says 18 the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: “My son, in my hands I have 19 a new covenant for Israel, on the third day you will know it. Thus says 20 the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel: Evil will be broken before 21 righteousness. Ask me, and I will tell you what this 22 evil plant is. You do not stand on firm ground, but the angel 23 is your support, do not fear!”

Both Israel Knohl and John Collins have in their discussion on Hazon Gabriel referred to a text in b. Sukkah 52a that deals with messiah son of David and messiah son of Joseph/Ephraim, without noting the close terminological parallels between this text and the Gabriel inscription (Knohl 2011a, 49; Collins 2011, 109). 16 A closer study of text from the Bavli will sharpen our understanding of the Gabriel Inscription. The talmudic text runs as follows:

Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the messiah son of David (May he reveal himself speedily in our days), “Ask of me anything, and I will give it to you,” as it is said, I will tell of the decree of the Lord. The Lord said to me, you are my son, today have I begotten you. Ask of me and I will give the nations for your inheritance (Ps 2:7–8). But when he will see that the messiah son of Joseph is slain, he will say to Him, “Lord of the Universe, I ask You for nothing but life’. ‘As to life,’ He would answer him, “Your father David has already prophesied this concerning you,” as it is said, He asked life of You, You gave it to him, even length of days for ever and ever (Ps 21:5).

16 This talmudic text is discussed in Himmelfarb 2011. Knohl discusses the parallel between the Gabriel Inscription and Sefer Zerubbabel (see my discussion below), but does not note the same terminology in b. Sukkah 52a, which he also refers to: “To the best of my knowledge the only (other) place in ancient Jewish literature where terms of this sort (‘ask me, and I will tell you’) appears is in the Apocalypse of Zerubabel” (Knohl 2011b, 440–41).
This talmudic discussion opens with a reference to Zech 12:12, *And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart.* Rav (= R. Abba, Babylon, d. 247 C.E.) asks for the cause of this mourning, and explains that Rabbi Dosa (Galilee, late second century) and the Rabbis differ on the issue. For Rabbi Dosa, Zechariah prophesied on the slaying of the messiah son of Joseph in the end-time battle.

Joseph Heinemann attributes the development of the idea of a fighting messiah from Joseph/Ephraim who is killed by Israel’s enemies, to rabbinic reflection after Bar Kokhba’s catastrophic defeat (Heinemann 1975). And Rabbi Dosa is indeed dated to two generations after this revolt. Three targumic texts contain contrasting traditions on this messianic figure (Fishbane 1998; Reeves 2005: 49–50; Schäfer 2010: 133–5). The “full story” of this messiah as a precursor to the Davidic messiah is preserved in the seventh-century *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the seventh- or eighth-century *Secrets of R. Shimon bar Yohai* (Reeves 2005: 40–66, 76–89), but seems to be presupposed in *Bereshit Rabbah* (fifth century, *Ber. R.* 73.7, 75.5, 99.2), *b. Sukkah* 52a (sixth century), and in some later texts—a targumic tosefet to Zech 12:10, *Midrash Tanhuma*, and *Midrash Tehillim*.

Israel Yuval (2006, 35–38) suggests that the messiah son of Joseph is a Jewish internalization of the figure of Jesus as messiah (also he a son of Joseph, a northerner, and destined to die). Peter Schäfer finds such an internalization in the seventh century Pesikta Rabbati, the only Jewish text with a preexistent and suffering messiah who atones for mankind (2010, 135–178; idem 2012, 264–71). In a recent article Martha Himmelfarb (2013) surveys the various theories about the messiah of Ephraim, and concludes that there is no clear evidence for a messiah descended from Joseph in literature from the Second Temple period. And there are good reasons to see elements of this tradition, which has roots in the tannaitic period, as echoes and responses to Christian tradition.17

In the talmudic text Rav concludes that the Rabbis voted down Rabbi Dosa and decided that the mourning of Zech 12:12 is related to the end-time annihilation of the evil inclination. But Rav admits that Rabbi Dosa had a good cause since his interpretation would accord well with the preceding verse, “They shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son” (Zech 12:10).

The rabbis of the Bavli (third to seventh centuries) knew that Zech 12:10–12 could be read on the piercing of the messiah son of Joseph and the subsequent mourning for him. Not surprisingly they read Ps 2 as a dialogue between God and the messiah son of David. Somewhat more surprising to a modern reader, they found the cause of the dialogue in the slaying of the messiah

---

17 Cana Werman suggests (in personal communication) that the features of the messiah of Ephraim represent a recast of Second Temple traditions of Elijah: According to Rev 11 and *Hystaspes*, Elijah is sent from heaven to earth to preach, be killed, resurrected, and return to heaven. Both this Elijah and messiah of Ephraim are northerners sent on an unsuccessful mission on earth, killed, and taken up to heaven.
son of Joseph in the battle against the enemies of Israel.

– What did the Davidide ask his God for, ... (Ps 2:7)?

– They answer by referring to another royal psalm (Ps 21), easily connected with a Davidic messiah, where they find the same words on David asking and God giving in response (黨ידא, תִּשְׁאֵל). According to the Bavli, the Davidide asks God with the words “I ask You for nothing but life” (i.e. to not die as did the messiah son of Joseph). In response God grants him life everlasting, i.e. victory over the enemies and a portion in the world to come.

The words the Bavli attributes to the Davidic messiah are surprisingly close to God’s instructions to “David” in Hazon Gabriel: שָׁאֵל רֹדֶךָ מִי לִפְנֵי אֲמָרֵי [דָּבָר] הָאֱלֹהִים לְדָבָר “Ask me, and I will tell you.” This terminology in Sefer Zerubbabel is likely indebted to b. Sukkah 52a, since both texts relate to the end-time war and the two messiahs, and Zerubbabel is a Davidide himself.19

Ps 2 deals with enemy peoples conspiring against the Davidide—the same setting that is presupposed in Hazon Gabriel. The promise נַשְׁבָה רַעֵל מִפְּנֵי הָצֶדֶק “evil will be broken before righteousness” (Hazon Gabriel lines 20–21),

18 Werman suggests (in personal communication) that b. Sukkah is more pacificist in style: the Davidide only asks God to stay alive. In contrast, Hazon Gabriel looks forward to a full-fledged battle, although conducted by heavenly powers. The Yahad combined a pacificist ethos with a violent hope for the end-time—with heavenly figures interacting to support the earthly forces in the Milhamah texts: Jostnes 2013.

19 The dialogue between Zerubbabel and Michael in Sefer Zerubbabel can be compared with that between the anonymous prophet and Gabriel in Hazon Gabriel. Both “prophets” have a heavenly encounter with the messiah son of David.
terminologically close to 1Q27 (1QMysteries) 1 i 5–7,20 may be an actualization of Davidic texts such as Ps 2:8–9; 110:5–6; and Isa 11:4–5.

Thus, not only biblical prophets, but also royal psalms in the Psalter (and in particular Ps 2) were formative for the prophetic rereading of biblical texts in the Gabriel Inscription.

Other texts from roughly the same period, such as 1 Macc 3:3–9; 14:4–15 and Ps. Sol. 17, represent messianic readings of royal psalms including Ps 2. Texts of the Yahad present the same picture: The term used in the Rule of the Congregation for God’s sending the Davidic messiah, כזמה הם לגד ה¬ה¬ו¬ך¬י¬ל¬ד “when [God] begets the Messiah among them” (1QSa II 11–12),21 refers to Ps 2:7. And Ps 2 belongs to the reference texts of 4QFlorilegium in its reading of the end-time assault against God’s people and his messiah (4Q174 I 11, 18–19). The Isaiah pesher contains similar tradition on the Davidic messiah (“the prince of the congregation,” “the Shoot of David”) in the end-time wars (4Q161 frgs. 5–6 and 8–10).22 So Hazon Gabriel is concurrent with contemporary exegetical tradition when it conflates an actualizing reading of Ps 2 into a larger apocalyptic or eschatological text. A century later John of Patmos would do the same (cf. Rev 19:11–21).

Messianic texts from the last two centuries B.C.E. can have a quite different flavor. 1 Maccabees (cf. e.g. 3:3–9 and 14:4–15) represents a restorative messianism within the context of Hasmonean state ideology: The priestly rulers Judah and Simon have brought messianic and eschatological promises to a

---

20 The text runs, והשם האות י"ע, בהמות יבשוי עולות ננעלות והרשע מופר יתפוך ננעלות [יח] ותלוי שתפוך זלאתיות יגלה הוהו והוהיוقع מים לארץ [♉]. This shall be to you the sign that it shall come to pass: When the begotten of unrighteousness are delivered up, and wickedness is removed from before righteousness, as darkness is removed from before light and as smoke wholly ceases and is no more, so shall wickedness cease forever, and righteousness shall be revealed as the sun (throughout) the full measure of the world.” Cf. 4QTime of Righteousness (4Q215a) 1 ii 3–4 “for the period of wickedness has been completed and all injustice will ha[ve and en]d” (translations mine). On the text from IQMysteries and a parallel in the Amidah, see Flusser 1994.

21 Qimron’s reading מֵאָס יִשְׂרָאֵל must be discarded (Qimron 2010, 237). Josef Milik has no doubt about מֵאָס יִשְׂרָאֵל, but suggests the scribe misread מֵאָס יִשְׂרָאֵל in his Vorlage (DJD 1, 117). IAA’s recent infrared photo B–284824 confirms Milik’s reading מֵאָס יִשְׂרָאֵל (http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/1Q-28-1 [accessed January 23, 2014]). Yod is awkwardly drawn, but there is no other material option. Stephen Pfann reads the perhaps parallel text preserved in 4Qpap cryptA Sai? which references תֶּהֶר חַלָּה מִמֶּכָּר (DJD 36: 572–3). Texts such as Isa 7:14 (יהו and ג); 9:6–7; and Mic 5:2 may have also influenced the tradition of the begetting and presentation of the messiah.

22 On Ps. Sol. 17 and these sectarian texts, see Collins 2010, 52–78. 1 Maccabees was written around 100 B.C.E., Ps. Sol. 17 around 50 B.C.E. 1QSa is probably a text from the second century (but copied c.75–50 B.C.E., according to a recent dating by Michael Langlois [personal communication]), while 4QFlorilegium and 4Qplsa belong to the first half of the first century B.C.E.
preliminary fulfillment (Elgvin 2013, 55–56). Other texts expect a Davidide in the end-times, but with different connotations. Ps. Sol. 17 expects a Davidic ruler who does not excel in military power as did the Hasmoneans and Romans, but has his strength in God. In 4QpIsa the Shoot of David appears as a military leader in the war against the nations, angelic intervention is not mentioned. The more utopian War Scroll expects decisive angelic action that helps the warriors on earth—priests and pious ones, not trained men of war.

The preserved parts of Hazon Gabriel do not describe precisely how the enemy will be defeated, but angelic powers clearly play a major role (ll. 22–23, 25–28, 52, 65–68, 80–85), even more so than in the War Scroll. The importance of the heavenly hosts in Hazon Gabriel may be reflected in the repeated use of the appellation “YHWH of Hosts,” recurring ten times. Angelic chariots are mentioned twice (ll. 26, 67). The hope of Jerusalem is in God alone, not in human strength: “We trust in you, [not in] flesh and blood!” (ll. 66–67).

Again, does the Gabriel Inscription presuppose a specific historical situation of crisis, as Heinemann (1975) suggested for the idea of a slain messiah of Ephraim? Sefer Zerubbabel reflects the experience of wars between Persia, Byzantium, and the new Muslim empire in 614-638 C.E. (Reeves 2005, 47; Schäfer 2010, 134–5, 174–7). In contrast, the text from the Bavli hardly presupposes such a crisis. Thus, the Bavli adds weight to the possibility that Hazon Gabriel represents prophetic-eschatological exegesis of biblical texts disentangled from any acute situation of military crisis.

If the Vision of Gabriel is an apocalyptic vision of the end-time, what can we know about the intended audience and function of this text? Similar to the setting of the Revelation of John and Yahad texts on the end-time, the aim of such a text would be to strengthen and edify the community of the author, perhaps in a time of trials. The circle(s) of the author would have a strong sense of communion with the heavenly realms, similar to the Yahad and John of Patmos. We are probably dealing with a sectarian group in Judea of the first century B.C.E., different from the Yahad and at a distance from the ruling circles and the temple establishment.

Bibliography

www.jjmjs.org