

A New Dead Sea Scroll in Stone?

BAR Special News Report



Does a “Dead Sea Scroll in stone” cast new light on early Jewish and Christian views of the messiah? That is the question raised by an intriguing ancient text, a question now being debated in newspapers, web sites and blogs.

The text, called “Gabriel’s Vision” by Ada Yardeni, the Israeli scholar who first published it, is written in ink on stone and dates to about the late first century B.C. and early first century A.D. The text first came to wide attention when our print publication, *Biblical Archaeology Review* published Yardeni’s “[A New Dead Sea Scroll in Stone?](http://www.bib-arch.org/archive.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=34&Issue=1&ArticleID=16&extraID=14)” [http://www.bib-arch.org/archive.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=34&Issue=1&ArticleID=16&extraID=14] in its January/February 2008 issue (Yardeni pointed out that had the text been written on leather, she would have thought of it as another Dead Sea Scroll fragment).

“Gabriel’s Vision” consists of 87 lines, divided into two columns. The text is written in the first person, apparently by someone named Gabriel, and contains numerous Biblical phrases. It is an apocalyptic text and seems to have been written by a supporter of the Davidic dynasty. You can read Yardeni’s **BAR** article by clicking on the link above and you can also see her [transcription of the Hebrew text](http://www.bib-arch.org/news/dssinstone_english.pdf) and her [English translation](http://www.bib-arch.org/news/dssinstone_english.pdf) [http://www.bib-arch.org/news/dssinstone_english.pdf].

But now the story has taken on a new twist. A major *New York Times* article (July 6, 2008) described research by Hebrew University textual scholar Israel Knohl, which claims that “Gabriel’s Vision” provides important new insights into the early Jewish and Christian concepts of the messiah. A more complete article tracking Knohl’s research—by the man himself—will be published in the September/October 2008 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

Knohl looks at the history of Jewish and Christian messianism and explores their similarities and differences. The new stone Dead Sea Scroll opens up a new chapter in the history of this relationship, according to Knohl.

In this pre-Christian Jewish text, he finds references to two different concepts of the messiah—one, the Messiah son of David; and the other, the Messiah son of Joseph (Ephraim). The return of the messiah of David would involve a military victory. Indeed, the Davidic messiah will institute the messianic age with a “day of battle.” He will make his enemies “a footstool.” The Messiah son of David is a triumphal messiah. Ephraim, or the Messiah son of Joseph, is a very different kind of messiah and reflects a new kind of messianism. This kind of messianism involves suffering and death. In the new Dead Sea Scroll in stone, Knohl sees a messiah who suffered, died and rose.

Quoting the Gospels, Knohl finds that Jesus himself rejects the concept of the militant Messiah son of David.

Also in the stone Dead Sea Scroll, an archangel orders someone to arise from the dead in three days. Although the text is difficult, the setting clearly reflects death and bloodshed.

Watch for Knohl’s full article, “The Messiah Son of Joseph: ‘Gabriel’s Revelation and the Birth of a New Messianic Model,” in the September/October 2008 BAR, out in mid-August. It will include the full text of the stone Dead Sea Scroll, plus Professor Knohl’s reconstructions.

Update: Ada Yardeni has informed us that she agrees with Knohl’s reading in [The Messiah Son of Joseph](#).