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# The Shock Factor of Divine Revelation: A Philological Approach to Daniel 8 and 9

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the story and plot of Daniel 8 and 9, and argues that the angel Gabriel assists Daniel in handling the shock factor associated with Divine revelation concerning a seemingly successful antichrist. A comparison of the Septuagint traditions with the Masoretic text this article shows that Daniel 8 and the later part of 9 present visions of an apparently successful blasphemous king and an initially unsuccessful Messiah, rulers against and for God respectively. The perplexities of the prophet about the apparent lack of fulfilment of earlier Divine revelation are part of the literary tension of the text. This article takes a philological approach to Daniel 8 and 9 as a literary unity passed on by a Judeo-Christian tradition and recognizing a unifying role of the Angel Gabriel in Biblical literature.

## *1. Introduction: A Philological Approach*

How relevant is contemporary scholarship to the spiritual traditions, to the people in churches, synagogues and temples that continue to be inspired by the sacred text and integrate it with their lives? In recent years some in the field of Old Testament Studies have argued that scholarship should be secular and operate completely separate from religion. Others have made out a case for a happy marriage, provided there is transparency and a focus on the primary sources. It seems that the metaphysical claims of sacred texts also reach out to those involved in scholarship and ask for a personal evaluation as well as scholarly involvement. In this way Divine revelation can have a shock factor as the different paradigms clash, and 'real' scholarship is defined on the basis of more than methodology.

Sometimes the sacred text itself suggests a shock factor even before the scholars draw their daggers. Daniel 8 and 9 is a fine example of this phenomenon. These chapters submit that the mere contents of Divine revelation, when taken seriously as reliable message from the realms of glory, may cause shock and distress for the first recipients. The story suggests that this is the proper response to its contents, as the main character, the prophet Daniel is very much affected when he faces the revelations presented to him in chapter 8:

"So I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I arose and went about the king's business. But I was dismayed by the vision and did not understand it." (8,27 NRSV)

In the book of Daniel, overcoming this shock factor of Divine revelation requires angelic involvement, a role which is carried out by the angel Gabriel. He is not often mentioned in canonical literature. The only reference in Old Testament Scripture that actually identifies Gabriel as such is the Book of Daniel, and then only in two places which are found in the chapters of this

study (8,16; 9,21).

Scholarly speaking these chapters have been a bit of a shock factor as well. The average commentary shows how Daniel 8 and 9 gave rise to a broad assortment of conclusions and clashing speculations. It all depends on one's preferences in the area of source criticism and assumptions about the "*Sitz im Leben*" (setting) of the alleged original. This may well be legitimate within the context of one's paradigm, but has the practical effect of taking the attention away from the text as a literary unit. Some would also beg the question as to relevance and firm proof in primary and secondary resources.

This question is particularly pregnant when it comes to Daniel 8 and 9.

Some claim reference to or literary origins in the times of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163BC); others prefer Antiochus III the Great (223-187BC); Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204BC) or seek these largely or at least partially in sixth century Babylon.

All of these are fascinating and clever theories, but the very fact that all these different approaches exist and have their educated supporters, indicates room for speculation and lack of firm data in any of the suggested directions.<sup>2</sup>

For the reception of the text in Christianity it doesn't really matter who inspired the wicked actions of the vision in Daniel 8. On a literary level these only serve to foreshadow dramatic events in the future. This is e.g. evident in Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* V.25, see also chapter 30 where Irenaeus links up the anti-Christ with the tribe of Dan and the prophecies of Jeremiah) and Hieronymus (*Commentariorum in Danielelem 8 & 9*, Migne PCC25, 535-553). The same would be true of the end time vision of Daniel 9:26-27. Gerbern S. Oegema argues on the basis of the surviving text of the Roman bishop Hippolytus's commentary on Daniel (4.51-52) that "Hippolytus applies Daniel 9,26-27, which in earlier times had been linked to Antiochus Epiphanes, to the antichrist and makes him—in connection with the Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark 13 par.) and Revelation—the basis of his detailed description of the end of days."<sup>3</sup>

Whether Antiochus Epiphanes or someone else inspired the author, or not (this part of Daniel has a Hebrew manuscript tradition, not Aramaic), doesn't really matter from a literary point of view either. The scope of the text lies beyond that time anyway (cf. 8,17.26). This is recognized by traditional and critical scholars alike.<sup>4</sup> Also, amongst its early first century readership, Daniel 8 instilled a futuristic expectancy. It certainly did for Jesus (Matt 24,15; Mark 13,14), who took the reference to "the abomination that makes desolate" (9,27) as an event that still was to take place (see 2.3.2).<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Jesus puts this in such a way that he appealed to his hearer's knowledge about these chapters. He apparently took it for granted that his first century public considered this part of the book of Daniel as a prophecy of future events that had not been fulfilled as yet. Clearly, Jewish and Christian tradition didn't see the need to associate the text with a specific *ex eventu* in the past, but believed Daniel 8 and 9 to have a specific bearing on the future. The urge to explain the contents of Daniel on the basis of past events has its roots in the neo-platonic philosophy of Porphyry.<sup>6</sup>

From the Septuagint tradition it is evident that Daniel must have had a consolidated format around the second century before Christ. From the canonical Gospels it is clear that this certainly must have been the case by the time of the first century AD (cf. Matt 24,15; Mark 13,14). It has since been passed on in two main textual traditions (Septuagint & Masoretic text), both in Judaism and Christianity.

With a philological focus on the established text, this article argues that

the shock effect of Divine revelation in the apocalyptic narrative of Daniel 8 and 9 is overcome with angelic assistance. It suggests that the text relates to and interacts with its readers on a philological level. Daniel appeals to religious readers who face situations that are hard to reconcile with the reign and the plans of a loving God. Particularly when sinners seem successful and 'baddies' rule the world, the situation begs the question about God's control or even his existence. Why does he allow it? Will it stay that way always? What is going to happen next?

On this literary level, the prophet Daniel faces these existential questions and readers may sympathize as the main character of the text is genuinely perplexed by God's plans. In his distress Daniel receives pastoral assistance from the angel Gabriel. His presence expresses Divine interest, and also a wish that Daniel should understand the vision (8,16). Although Gabriel does his interpreting, this initially adds to the shock-factor (8,27). It is only the revelation he provides subsequently that contains the promise that the evil king will be judged. Although the Masoretic text suggests that this is foreshadowed by 8,25 ("He shall be broken and not by human hands") this article will argue that this is not the case, but only happens in 9,27 ("the decreed end is poured out on the desolator").

We will follow the order of the contents of Daniel 8 and 9 and first explore Gabriel's mainly interpretative role in chapter 8 and shift the focus on his revelatory role afterwards. It will become clear that in both roles Gabriel serves as a "shock absorber" for Divine revelation. While lack of information can add to insecurity the angel makes sure that Daniel interprets the vision in the right way, although this was not happy news and may have added to the prophet's distress (8,27). Throughout God's special interest in Daniel is confirmed (8,16; 9,20-23). Finally the angel adds new revelation, showing that God will be faithful to his promises and overcome the evil one (9,24-27). In this way the angel helps Daniel to come to terms with the shock-factor of Divine revelation.

## 2. *The Shock Factor of Divine Revelation*

### 2.1 *Gabriel's parallel involvement in Daniel and Luke*

Perhaps in the wake of the popularity of Christmas, angels are generally associated with singing God's praises and the realms of glory. A perhaps lesser known activity is their role in revealing God's will to people on earth (e.g. the Law on Mount Sinai, cf. Acts 7,35-53).

Gabriel is best known for his association with Christmas, as the angel who announced tidings of comfort and joy to Zacharias and Mary. Even on these occasions, his role was somewhat of an announcer and interpreter of God's will, as we shall see shortly. Gabriel's role in the annunciation story is very much in line with what one reads about him in Daniel. He is sent to assist the prophet when he is confronted with a particularly nasty bit of revelation (Daniel 8).<sup>7</sup>

Revelation in Biblical literature is often accompanied by interpretation. One notices this also in the annunciation story, when Gabriel announces the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. When she asks him how she is going to have a baby without a husband, it is the angel Gabriel's job to do the explaining. Luke 1,34-35:

"Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." Some, however, prefer to deny the obvious and see this as a device that "merely gives the angel an opening to speak about the

character of the child to be born”.<sup>8</sup>

The annunciation story shares with Daniel the element of Divine revelation as a shock factor. In Mary’s case, there is going to be a baby without a husband, casting questions and projecting all sorts of social uncertainty. It is this shock factor that has Mary put the question “How can this be?” and the angel Gabriel providing the answer. Just like in Daniel, he gives extra information and interpretation to help her overcome the shock of the initial revelation. Mullins, even reckons Gabriel’s words about the Holy Spirit among the reassurance forms of the New Testament. Reassurance presupposes interaction and not monologue. In Daniel this reassurance with extra revelation and interpretation are associated with the angel Gabriel as well.

### 2.2 *A frightful vision*

While in Luke the shock factor of revelation concerned a pregnancy without a father, its social implications, and Mary’s important role in God’s plan of redemption, the cause of distress in Daniel is different. God’s vision confronts him with the revelation of the greatest antireligious force of all time.

This evil government will trample on what is dear to all believers, Daniel included.

Gabriel’s initial role is to provide interpretation as the prophet struggles to understand the vision (8,15). It is interesting to note that in Luke Gabriel’s explaining is initiated by a human question (Mary asking how all of this can be possible). In Daniel the interpretive role of the angel results from a command in heaven. The prophet doesn’t have to ask for it. The interpretation is provided, without extra charge.

The story portrays Daniel as an old exile in the third year of King Belshazzar, perhaps more vulnerable to shock for reason of his age. The vision, which is described in Daniel 8,3-14, is said to have overtaken the prophet when he was in the capital Susa by the river Ulai (עֵלְאֵי לְאֵי). Susa received prominence around 521BC when Darius made the city his administrative capital. Some take Ulai in Daniel 8,3 (cf. 8,16) as the “Ulai Gate,” but this is less likely, as the vision (Dan 8,4) opens with a ram appearing beside the river. This suggests a connection with the river rather than a gate called after the river. It must have been a prominent stream, as reliefs of Ashurbanipal’s attack on the city in 640BC have the king claim that he caused the Ulai red with blood. Ulai may well be a reference to the network of rivers around Susa, most of which were connected in one way or other.

While Daniel is by the riverside, this vision of a ram overtakes him. It is an evil appearance. The text shows that this ram charges and conquers the world in all directions. The dominion of the ram doesn’t last, however, as a ferocious male goat appears from the West and breaks the two horns of the ram, thus robbing it of its power. The satanic eyes with the goatee take over the world, but at the height of its power its representative king on earth dies. Still the goat as such continues, using four successors. Out of one of these kingdoms a new and arrogant superpower emerges from the West, expanding to the South, East and even to “the beautiful land.” The text speaks literally about “to the jewel” or “adornment” (וְאֶל־הַצֶּבֶי), which supposes the ellipse of “land” or functions as an endearing metonymy (cf. 2 Sam 1,19; Ps 48,3; Jer 3,19; Ezek 20,6).

According to Daniel, the super-horn of the goat isn’t on a mere earthly conquest. His gory mission has spiritual implications. He wants to bring the heavens in subjection, and is described as attacking supposedly Divine seats of residence by ripping down stars and heavenly bodies or beings (8,10). Its

attitude towards the religious service of Israel is one of arrogance. He robs God, the prince of the heavenly host, of his uninterrupted daily service of sacrifice in the chosen place of his sanctuary, causing apostasy all over the place among those in his allegiance. The relationship between God and his people is interrupted. The vision ends with the terrible announcement that this lack of atonement and of access to God is going to last for two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings. As evening is mentioned first, the text echoes the Hebrew way of time reckoning from Genesis 1,5: "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day." Two thousand three-hundred days of misery was close to a perpetual night.

### 2.3 *God calls Gabriel to interpret*

The connection with God was interrupted, the wicked one prevailed and this might well be only the beginning of the end? When Daniel had seen the vision, he tried to understand it (8,15). For him it wasn't just the normal, bloody, sequence of events in the lives of nations.

#### 2.3.1 *A puzzled son of Adam receives help*

The 'horrible histories' in Daniel have a strong spiritual component. If one merely concentrates on the text of the story, setting aside considerations about a pseudo Daniel who wrote in the second century, Daniel's puzzled state becomes even more intriguing. Jewish readers, anyone familiar with the Daniel stories, knew that their setting stories was the exile, a time when Jerusalem lay in ruins and a situation where a destroyed temple offered little opportunity for daily worship and sacrifice. As far as the Daniel of the story is concerned, the regular burnt offering was interrupted already and the sacerdotal connection with God was no longer in place. Why then this talk about a future overthrowing of the sanctuary? It was all very puzzling and disturbing to the prophet.

But help was on the way. Daniel 8,15: "Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, and I heard a human voice by the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, help this man understand the vision." The voice comes from the river. The LXX: *καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀνθρώπου ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ Οὐλαι* ("And I heard a human voice from the middle of the Ulai"). When Gabriel turns up in the flesh, as it were, Daniel responds with fear, just like Zechariah and Mary were afraid when they encountered the same angelic presence some centuries later (cf. Luke 1).

#### 2.3.2 *Gabriel interprets: A vision beyond Antiochus Epiphanes*

The first thing that Gabriel does, is offering Daniel a proper perspective (Dan 8,17): "And he said to him: Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end" ( *וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הַבְּרָא דָם כִּי לְעֵת קֵץ הָיָה חֲזֹן* ). The Septuagint reads: *Διανοήθητι, υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου, ἔτι γὰρ εἰς ὥραν καιροῦ τοῦτο τὸ ὄραμα* ("Understand, o son of man, as this vision concerns a proper time yet to come").

Although Daniel is a frail son of Adam ( *בְּרָא דָם* or as the LXX reads it, "son of man"), he receives this vision for what is considered as the borderland of time as a representative of the human race, which affairs will be at stake. As Gabriel interprets the vision for the prophet, he makes it clear that Daniel should not understand this revelation in terms of the past or present. Instead, the prophet should realize that this is about events in a distant future. This is a vision for the time of the end ( *וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הַבְּרָא דָם* ), or as the Greek has it: "its appointed time (ὥραν καιροῦ) is yet to come."

While some of the later recipients of the book of Daniel may have been reminded of the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, Gabriel's angelic interpretation

insists that the real implications of this vision should be sought beyond that time. Consequently, in this literary sense it is irrelevant whether Daniel 9 has its present literary origin in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163); Antiochus III the Great (223-187); Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204) or in sixth century Babylon.<sup>11</sup>

The sacrilege in the second century before Christ was indeed horrendous in the eyes of religious Jews. If there ever was a great tribulation for believers, then the last years of Antiochus IV Epiphanes were probably it.<sup>12</sup> 1 Maccabees 1,44-50 deals with these days in detail, particularly vs.45-46 where the king gives command to “to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink-offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and festivals” (καὶ κωλύσαι ὀλοκαυτώματα καὶ θυσίαν καὶ σπονδῆν ἐκ τοῦ ἁγιάσματος καὶ βεβηλώσαι σάββατα καὶ ἑορτὰς). Idols and pagan altars were erected everywhere. Swine and other unclean animals sacrificed. On the penalty of death Jews had to forsake circumcision and the ordinances of God’s law. Despite these horrors and apparent fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy, Gabriel’s interpretation foreshadows a great cosmic event of evil that was still to come. If Epiphanes was horror, they had seen nothing yet. The timetable of Gabriel in chapter 9 shows that at least five centuries are to pass before the particular destruction of the holy city, will come to pass. The abomination that makes desolate (9,26), the event that he has in mind, will only take place after that.

This interpretation of Daniel’s vision as a future event is followed and encouraged by early Christian tradition, perhaps not in the last place because Gabriel’s timetable pointed at Jesus as the anointed one who would be killed (9,26). But even without this consideration, it is clear that early Christianity saw the abomination not as an already fulfilled event of Epiphanes’s day, but as something yet to come. Jesus says in the Matthew’s Gospel (24,15): “So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.”

To Jesus’ mind, this sacrilege would be part of the immediate lead up to the return of the Son of Man. He favoured the expression that Gabriel used in Daniel (8,17).

Jesus took care to mention that he wasn’t referring to just any sacrilege, but to the specific phenomenon, “the desolating sacrilege that was spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (Matt 24,15: τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Δαυὶδ τοῦ προφήτου). Although Jesus would probably have been the first to grant that Epiphanes’s actions constituted an abomination at the time, even perhaps a layer of fulfilment of Daniel’s vision, the Gospel of Matthew puts the desolating event in the future as a disaster that Christians should prepare for. Daniel’s sacrilege was an event that still awaited fulfilment. The real thing was yet to come. Or, as Gabriel put it: “The vision is for the time of the end.”

### 2.3.3 Gabriel explains: a seemingly successful anti-Christ

Gabriel is going to give extra information, but does some explaining to Daniel first (Dan 8,20-22). The powerful ram at the beginning of the vision refers to the kings of Media and Persia. The malicious male goat who subdued it was the nation of Greece, under the leadership of her great first king who will be succeeded by four others.

After their reign, but only “when the transgressions have reached their full measure” (בְּאִתְּמַלְכוּתָם) a great and vicious ruler will stand up. This person will embody intrigue, deceit, death and destruction. He will personify an age

of sin. Each age gets the king it deserves. This is how the Septuagint translates: *καὶ ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτῶν, πληρουμένων τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν, ἀναστήσεται βασιλεὺς ἀναιδῆς προσώπῳ* (“At the end of their reign, when their sins will have become full, shall stand up the king with a bold countenance”). Those who serve the true God will be at the receiving end. Believers and the “Prince of princes” will be his particular target (Dan 8,23-25).

### 2.3.3.1 *Without a hand (Daniel 8,25)*

After this explanation of the vision, Gabriel seems to add an interesting new piece of information. At least, that is what most translations suggest. The earlier vision merely indicated that after a long period the sanctuary would be restored. It didn’t say anything about the fate of the vicious ruler as such. Now Gabriel explains that not only will his power over the sanctuary be broken, but the Masoretic tradition suggests that the evil king shall be dealt with as well. Heavenly justice will come to the rescue: “But he shall be broken, and not by human hands” (Dan 8,25). If this is a reference to the timely demise of the evil king, then all is well that ends well. But is this the correct philological interpretation?

The Hebrew (this part of Daniel is not in Aramaic<sup>13</sup>) puts it rather succinctly: “But without a hand he shall be broken” ( *בְּיָד אֲנוּס יִשְׁבַּח* : ). This implies, of course, the hand of God. The passage is difficult though. The Stuttgart Septuagint text, mainly based on the Alexandrinus, translates: “and he shall put his hand together and be destroyed” (*καὶ ποιήσῃ συναγωγὴν χειρὸς καὶ ἀποδώσεται*). This invokes a picture of the evil king shaking his fist or pleading for mercy while he is being destroyed by a power greater than he. This is more or less in line with the Masoretic Hebrew version in the BHS. Still, this picture of the destruction of the evil one by a higher hand is probably not the correct reading.

### 2.3.3.2 *Where do the eggs come from?*

A look at the Septuagint tradition of the Eastern Church,<sup>14</sup> the “majority text” of the LXX, suggests that the evil king is the administrator of destruction rather than the object. Using a construction that puts it as succinctly as the Hebrew, the Septuagint translates: “And he shall crush them as eggs in his hand” (*καὶ ὡς ὠὰ χειρὶ συντρίψει*). The Hebrew ‘consonants’ in egg are *בִּיצָה* which doesn’t even come close to *בִּיצָה*, consequently pondering about possible different Hebrew origins doesn’t seem a promising exercise. The gap looks simply too great to overcome, unless one supposes an ancient but farfetched exilic dialect for egg. But is it?

### 2.3.3.3 *Philological agreement with Alexandrine text*

The eggs have much more to say for them than an initial glance at the text seems to indicate. As natural progress in philological understanding from the Greek the eggs make perfect sense, if one is prepared to drop the Masoretic glasses through which we have become used to read the text. As a philological stage the Alexandrine text can be read to be very much in agreement with other Septuagint traditions. This allows for the possibility of an ellipse which is based on the presence of *ἀποδώσεται*. Contrary to the Modern Greek *αυγό*, ancient Greeks used *ὠόν* for egg<sup>15</sup>. This is a neuter and the plural consequently corresponds with *ἀποδώσεται*: “<the eggs> they shall be crushed”. All of a sudden the Greek makes perfect sense and both Greek versions seem to talk about the same thing: “He shall put his hand together and <the eggs> they shall be crushed”. This translation is perfectly true to the Hebrew consonants, but makes a very different choice of interpretation than later Jewish tradition.

#### 2.3.3.4 *Vulgate not decisive*

But what about the Vulgate, does it support this view? No, Jerome sided with the Masoretic interpretation: “And he shall rise up against the prince of princes and be crushed without a hand” (*et contra principem principum consurget et sine manu conteretur*). One should, however, take into account that the Vulgate came in only six hundred years after the Septuagint and was controversial at the time. Many Christians in the West rejected Jerome’s translation because it was the first to be based upon Hebrew, instead of the Greek. They preferred the Old Latin because it was based upon the Greek Septuagint. Nonetheless, the Vulgate’s support suggests that the Masoretic interpretation of Daniel 8,25 goes back to at least the fourth century.

#### 2.3.3.5 *Theodotion’s support*

Still, both Jerome and the Masoretic tradition seem to go against earlier Jewish interpretation on this point. Added to the philological arguments mentioned for the gloomy ending in Daniel 8,25, there is historical evidence from the second century to support the picture of a terrifying enemy of God who crushes the bodies of Jews as if they were mere eggs. A picture likely to add to Daniel’s disturbance, it receives support from an unbiased manuscript tradition: the Hellenistic Jewish scholar and linguist Theodotion.

Towards the end of the second century, he produced a very literal translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. In the Daniel passage he sides with the egg-crushers: *καὶ ὡς ὠὰ χειρὶ συντριψέι* (“And like eggs <his> hand shall crush”). If a literal translator and Jewish scholar like Theodotion felt justified to translate the Hebrew text in this way, this passage was read quite differently in the second century than by later Jewish scholarship.

#### 2.3.3.6 *Hebrew consonants agree*

Let’s consider the Hebrew text more closely: “But without a hand he shall be broken” ( *וְכַאֲפֹסֵי יָדֵי שֶׁבַר* ). Unlike what translations from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (KJV: “He shall be broken without hand”) to the present (RSV: “But he shall be broken, and not by human hands”) suggest, the word *פֹּסֵי* does not literally mean “without”. It may also express non-existence (e.g. Brown 1979:67), even the idea of “end,” “extremity” or “only.”<sup>16</sup>

More fascinating possibilities present themselves if one considers the verb “shall be broken.” The Masoretic passive *יִשָּׁבַר* is not the only reading possible, based on the consonants. Taken without the later Masoretic interpretive small print, *יִשָּׁבַר* could well have been intended as an active imperfect (Piel, cf. Ps 46,10).

For all practical intents and purposes the Hebrew consonant text allows a translation like: “And to non-existence shall his hand crush.” If this expression led the ancient mind to fill in the ellipse of the object, the translation could easily end up as: “And <like eggs his> hand shall crush.”

#### 2.3.3.7 *The textual context affirms*

This interpretation of Gabriel’s explanation of the vision closing with doom is supported by the textual context.

The angel tells Daniel to seal up the vision because it referred to still distant future. Had there been a good ending, the prophet could have responded with: “all’s well that ends well, it is a long way off anyway” and enjoyed his retirement age in his majesty’s service. Other passages, like the visionary images in Daniel 7, conclude on a note like that. Although these portray a terrible struggle, in the end the saints overcome and their kingdom is going to be everlasting. Granted, things were quite rough, but there was a happy ending. Daniel was a little shaken up as a result, turned pale, but kept the matter in his mind (Dan 7,28).



Daniel's response to the vision in chapter 8 is very different. This Chapter provokes a far greater emotional and even physical impact. The prophet is shaken and rattled. As a result of this doomsday vision, the prophet was overcome and lay sick for some days. Although he eventually got better, Daniel mentions that he continued to be dismayed by the vision and did not understand it (Dan 8,27). A response like this is consistent with a bad ending to a vision. Although it was meant for the distant future, its contents were extremely disturbing.

The king who set himself up against God and the saints seems successful and unstoppable. This philological and literary evidence suggests that Theodotion's reading should be preferred to the Masoretic text. Especially as it agrees with the original Hebrew consonants and all Greek traditions.

### 3. *Additional Revelation Brings Hope*

In the previous section Gabriel served as a shock absorber and interpreter, who helped Daniel understand a distressing vision with a disturbing message. To set the prophet's mind at rest, however, additional information was required, as the vision promised success to the cause of evil. Was God going to overcome the wicked king eventually; was there a future for God's people? Or was the fate of this world going to be left to the devil and his consorts? Recorded as a response to the Daniel's intercessory prayer as an exile in the earlier part of this Daniel 9, the remainder of this chapter contains a revelation from the angel Gabriel to Daniel.

#### 3.1 *An irrelevant belief-system?*

Daniel was worried and physically affected by the successful evil emperor of the vision. On top of this, he was also doubtful about the future of his people. The return of the Jews to Jerusalem after seventy years, as indicated by the prophet Jeremiah, did not seem to be forthcoming. This drove Daniel to prayer and supplication.<sup>17</sup>

The pleas in chapter 9 contain an inner tension. Although Daniel claims that righteousness is on the side of the Jews, shame, distress and opposition is their part (Dan 9,7). This connects, on an existential level, to Daniel's anguish about God's future plans in the previous chapter. The LORD is supposed to be the governor of heaven and earth, but in the meantime the enemy is successful. He will crush God's people like eggs. Even exterminate his prince. How can that be God's plan for the future? All his beautiful promises to his people seem to have come to naught.

Perhaps Daniel's anguish was not about the future only, but also touched on exilic perplexities and fears. The prophet could have blamed everything on the lack of strength of his God (as compared to the gods of the Babylonians), but he doesn't. Despite the fact that everything seems gone: God's chosen land, city and sanctuary; Daniel still clings to his religious beliefs. These seem utterly irrelevant to a world that is run by other belief-systems and where the pagan gods seemed to be a successful reality. This is perhaps not unlike our Western society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where God seems largely irrelevant to everything in life, except to the 'private' sphere of one's personal religious convictions.

For Daniel his God had to make sense. He seeks the reason for the distressing state of affairs in the sins of the people of Judah (Dan 9,7-14). Daniel even proclaims the sovereignty of God despite the lack of apparent success of his religion. He supposes that God must have had a hand in the adversity. Daniel summarizes: "Indeed, the LORD our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice" (Dan 9,14). If his God is sovereign, a change in fate will also have to come about through him.

### 3.2 A relationship issue

The prophet's distress about country, city and sanctuary is first and foremost a relationship issue. Daniel pleads for a way out of exile and calamity by acknowledging the sins of his people before God. He supposes that God has sufficient reasons to reject the planet earth, and his people in particular. Spiritually, his sanctuary was defiled by sinning Jews long before he allowed the Babylonians to destroy it. Still the religious needs and disgrace are pressing Daniel to pray. He reminds God of his mighty acts in the past during a previous exile of Israel, when a famine, not soldiers, forced Jacob and his family into the land of Egypt. Daniel appeals to God's self-interest: his actions in Egypt made God's name renowned even to this day. (Dan 9,15). An also: in the prophet's mind it is a disgrace to God's name that his sanctuary lays waste. Daniel literally pleads: "Let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary" (מִשְׁמַח פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, Dan 9,17).

The expression is reminiscent of the vision in Daniel 8,13 (מִשְׁמַח) and may explain some of his puzzlement on the occasion of that vision even better. It is as if Daniel is saying in chapter nine: "But Lord, we have desolation now. Your service has been interrupted for seventy years. Aren't you concerned about that? Never mind some future desolation that has been sealed for many days to come. We have got problems now." The remainder and the climax of the prayer is a plea before God to act for his own Name's sake (Dan 9,17-19).<sup>18</sup>

#### 3.2.1 Greatly loved?

It was אֲתָה גָּדוֹל וְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, because you are greatly loved that God was providing additional revelation to clear up what was going to happen. In the RSV translation, this seems a reference to the first words of Daniel's prayer, because of the repetition of love. This is, however, not the case in the Hebrew, as quite different words are used. Daniel 9,4 has אֱמוּנָה וְחַסְדֵּי, indicating faithfulness and commitment on God's part. In Daniel 9,23 the Masoretic Hebrew points to Daniel as object of desire, someone to take pleasure in.<sup>19</sup>

In the Septuagint, on the other hand, the word "mercy" provides a linguistic link between Daniel 9,4 and 9,23, similar to that of "love" in the RSV. In Daniel 9,23 the reason for Gabriel's arrival is not described as "because you are greatly loved," but as: ὅτι ἐλεεινὸς εἶ ("because you have found pity," or "you have been granted mercy,"<sup>20</sup>). In the Septuagint, the words that moved the Most High at the very beginning of Daniel's prayer appealed to that very thing, ἔλεος (mercy): "Behold, Lord, you are God, great, powerful and fearful, who keeps covenant and mercy with those who keep your commandments" (Ἰδοὺ, κύριε, σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ ὁ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ ὁ φοβερὸς τηρῶν τὴν διαθήκην καὶ τὸ ἔλεος τοῖς ἀγαπῶσί σε καὶ τοῖς φυλάσσουσι τὰ προστάγματα σου).

In the Greek this link is not constituted by a mere resemblance of the concept mercy only. The Alexandrine text shows a link on the level of "commandment" as well. The Stuttgart Septuagint has: ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς δεήσεώς σου ἐξῆλθε πρόσταγμα παρὰ κυρίου, καὶ ἐγὼ ἦλθον ("At the start of your prayer session a commandment went out from the Lord and I came," Dan 9,23). Just like God's people keep his commandments (τὰ προστάγματα), God keeps his covenant and mercy (τὴν διαθήκην καὶ τὸ ἔλεος). Gabriel's words in Daniel 9,23 refer to both concepts: "You have found mercy" (ὅτι ἐλεεινὸς εἶ) and "a commandment went out from the Lord" (ἐξῆλθε πρόσταγμα παρὰ κυρίου). Because of God's mercy and his commandment Gabriel appears. God's commandments are not just being observed by a remnant of Jews who continue to love and serve him. The angel Gabriel follows orders as well.

God, in his turn, is moved by mercy.

The concepts above apply to the Alexandrine text of the Septuagint and have theological merit. Unfortunately, in this case there is compelling textcritical reason to prefer the Masoretic interpretation. This time Theodotion and the general Septuagint tradition of the Orthodox Church lend their support: “At the start of your prayer word went out, and I came to pass it on to you, because you are a desirable man” (ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς δεήσεώς σου ἐξήλθεν λόγος, καὶ ἐγὼ ἦλθον τοῦ ἀναγγεῖλαι σοι. ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐπιθυμιῶν εἶ σύ).·What about the Vulgate? Jerome supported the idea of a supernatural hand that ended the reign of God’s opponent in Daniel 8. Not surprisingly, this time he sides with Theodotion and the Masoretic text: “At the beginning of your prayer, word went out and I came to show it to you because you are a desirable man” (*ab exordio precum tuarum egressus est sermo ego autem veni ut indicarem tibi quia vir desideriorum es tu*). In other words, all the text critical evidence is against the Alexandrines in this case.

As a result of this, despite its theological appeal, the Alexandrine “mercy”-link of 9,23 with 9,4 sadly disappears. There is mercy left, but only in 9,4. At least in that verse, Jerome (*miserordiam*) and Theodotion (τὸ ἔλεός), the Orthodox Septuagint (τὸ ἔλεός σου) agree on this interpretation of .ΤΩΗΗ

Likewise, the “commandment” connection is not as obvious as the Alexandrine text wants us to believe. Jerome (*sermo*), Theodotion (λόγος), the Orthodox Septuagint (λόγος) agree with the general wording, בַּד, of the Masoretic text. In this particular context, “word” would implies an order, as God’s word is Gabriel’s command. The text emphasizes God’s speaking. It is not his orders, rules and regulations, but the fact of him speaking that brings about change. God spoke and there was (cf. Gen 1). New revelation is on the way and Gabriel is about to pass it on to Daniel.

### 3.3 Additional revelation

#### 3.3.1 In response to prayer

It is as a response to Daniel’s confessing of sin, prayer and supplication that the angel Gabriel appears on the scene.<sup>21</sup> In the New Testament similar Divine responses are recorded. According to the book of Acts, the apostolic ministry to the gentiles was even initiated this way. The Roman centurion Cornelius was fasting for four days and it was during his late afternoon prayers, the time of sacrifice, when an angel appeared (Acts 10,1-3, 30). This angel, who is not mentioned by name, tells him to send for the apostle Peter. To prepare him to come to Cornelius, the apostle receives a vision, also when he is praying.

These examples from Daniel and Acts possibly indicate that, in Biblical literature, God acts in a significant and personal way within the context of a relationship. In Daniel this is confirmed by a personal touch: “because you are greatly loved” ( כִּי יְהִימְדָהּ מְאֹד מְאֹד , Dan 9,23). Gabriel hasn’t just come to pass on wisdom and understanding, valuable as these would have been to Daniel. God is interested in the prophet personally.

It was in response to Daniel’s supplications, and personal relationship with God, that something happened in heaven and that Gabriel descended in flight at the time of the evening sacrifice:

“At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved” (Dan 9,23). God’s action was independent of the amount of words. He didn’t have to be swayed by Daniel’s eloquence or convincing arguments. It was right at the beginning of Daniel’s supplications that God spoke and acted: בְּחֵלֶלֶת תְּחִנָּתְךָ יָצָא דְבַר . Daniel

acknowledged God's power in days when his public following and influence seemed negligible. As the first words of Daniel's prayer were uttered (Dan 9,4), God waited no longer and responded. The prophet had merely started to remind God of his faithfulness to the covenant and his steadfast love to those who love him.

The link with Daniel's prayer also comes out in the fact that several words from this prayer are repeated or recalled in the final stages of this chapter.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3.2 *Vision of the seventy weeks*

Gabriel is going to provide additional revelation. The prophet has to "pay attention to the word" and "understand the vision." The Hebrew might technically refer to Gabriel's countenance (i.e. "Pay attention to me") rather than a vision (e.g. Judg 13,6)<sup>23</sup>, but this interpretation is unlikely. Theodotion has the equivalent of a prophetic vision: "Look into the vision" (σύνεξ ἐν τῇ ὀπτασίᾳ). So has Jerome: "Understand the vision" (*intellege visionem*). As the words of the angel that follow (Dan 9,24-27) do paint an apocalyptic picture or sight, the context warrants the interpretation of הַמַּרְאָה as a vision. Gabriel appears as a result and Daniel is encouraged to look into it.

#### 3.2.2.1 *Seventy years of exile*

The angel understands that Daniel is concerned about the restoration of Jerusalem. This had been the occasion for his fasting and supplications (Dan 9,2). God had promised, through the prophet Jeremiah, that the devastation of Jerusalem would come to an end after seventy years. These years seemed to have passed, but nothing happened as yet. Daniel was saying in so many words: "What about it, Lord? You promised this exile would come to an end after seventy years. The time is up and it hasn't happened."<sup>24</sup>

Gabriel's response is to point out that Daniel should reckon with the overall picture of God's bigger plan. "Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city" (Dan 9,24). Literally the Hebrew speaks of "seventy units of seven," which may be read as seventy weeks (שִׁבְעָה עָשָׂר שָׁבָעִים). In this interpretation week stands for a year. In other words, "seventy sevens" (NIV), or 490 years are still decreed for God's plan with Jerusalem. This generally held interpretation<sup>25</sup> results in the following timetable:

- 7 weeks, i.e. 49 years during which the city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt;
- 62 weeks, i.e. 483 years of Jerusalem and the sanctuary, ending with the termination of the Messiah;
- 1 week, i.e. 7 years, halfway during which the sacrifice ceases and the abomination desecrates the temple, after which city and sanctuary will be destroyed.

#### 3.2.2.2 *An interpretation beyond the exile*

Although the previous explanation seems to work fine for most, it should be realized that to equal year with week is imported into the understanding of the passage. It does not sit well with the context necessarily. To challenge the paradigm, one might suggest another way of reading this prophecy. Crucial to the interpretation of this passage is the relationship of Daniel 9,25 with the textual context in 9,1 (the Word that went out from the Lord through Jeremiah about Jerusalem being restored after seventy years). Although Daniel 9,20-27 functions as a literary response to 9,1-19, some would not recognize any relationship rather than an opportunity for Gabriel to put in another prophecy.

But does this do justice to the wording of the passage, the literary style?

Would it be a mere coincidence that Daniel worries about *seventy* years and that Gabriel responds by painting a picture that speaks about *seventy* units of seven (or of fullness of time)? What if Daniel 9,25 should not be applied to

the words of a pagan king who permitted the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but to the Word of the Lord that announced it through Jeremiah? This would make perfect sense in the textual context. Gabriel explains that the time from Jeremiah's prophecy to the restoration of Jerusalem is only a relatively small part of a bigger picture. In other words, the seventy years of Jeremiah are equalled to a period of seven weeks or perfect time units (Dan 9,25). In the light of Daniel 9,2 these seven heavenly weeks stand for seventy years, with one week roughly equalling ten years on earth. Some take this as a reference to a human lifetime, roughly but not necessarily exactly seventy years.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2.2.3 *God's anointed king*

Then the anointed prince arrives on the scene. He has a ready candidate in Zerubbabel, governor of the Persian Province of Judah (Haggai 1,1), who was the grandson of Jehoiachin, penultimate king of Judah. This would also have been easily understood by those familiar with Mesopotamian traditions in which a future prince was normally expected to rebuild and anoint the temple.<sup>27</sup>

Jerusalem shall be built again and stand for 62 heavenly weeks until a second "Anointed" or Messiah (without the qualification prince) is destroyed. During the last week or phase of the Divine decree the abomination that causes desolation is placed in the temple and the sanctuary lays destroyed until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. This explanation would discourage the fundamentalist maths-game that is played with this prophecy,<sup>28</sup> do justice to the Biblical phenomenon that God's timetables tend to work out differently than man's and have the advantage of interpreting Gabriel's prophecy within the context of this chapter in Daniel's, rather than importing external historical information into the text. It still would cover roughly the same historical data and period. Zerubbabel restored the altar in Jerusalem around 530 BC and six centuries later the conquest of Jerusalem takes place: sixty two weeks later (620 years of twelve moonphase-months of 29.53 days equals exactly 600 Gregorian years; 1 moon year = 354.36 days).

### 3.2.2.4 *Messiah cut off*

Whichever interpretation about the week-periods is followed, Gabriel's words are strongly messianic. Early Christian tradition received them as such,<sup>29</sup> but the philological case for this is quite strong as well, particularly at closer inspection. The underlying literary tension between the devil's prince (Dan 8) and JHWH's anointed (Dan 9) seems to confirm this interpretation. There will be an anointed prince (מָלְכִיּוֹן) who will be involved in the restoration of Jerusalem (9,25). Whether this prince should be identified with the "Son of Man," as traditional Christian interpreters would have it<sup>30</sup> and the late interpretive punctuation marker by the Masoretic scholars tries to prevent this,<sup>31</sup> is largely irrelevant to the Messianic character of this passage. The Messianic idea as such continues to be suggested by the text. Because this anointed prince is connected with the restoration of Jerusalem it is not unlikely that Zerubbabel was intended. He was the governor of the Persian Province of Judah at the time when Jerusalem was rebuilt (Haggai 1,1) and was given the task of rebuilding the Temple in the second year of the reign of Darius I, along with the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak. The times were sufficiently troublesome all right (vs25). He also fits the Messianic lineage of David as grandson of Jehoiachin, the second last king of Judah. The reference to the Messiah in verse 26 as a different prince from this same lineage makes sense, particularly to the Hebrew mind-set.

Jerusalem will stand again for 62 heavenly weeks, or roughly six centuries

(Dan 9,26). By this time the or an “anointed one” (מָשִׁיחַ) shall be cut off and shall no longer have a place or possessions on earth (כִּי תִכַּח מִשִּׁיחַ וְאֵין לוֹ). There seems to be an echo of Isaiah 53,8: “For he was cut off from the land of the living” (כִּי נִגְזַר מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים). Daniel 9,26, however, uses a very different word for cutting, one that brings the covenant relation between God and his people to mind. The Hebrew way of expressing calls for “cutting” a covenant rather than making one. Using this same word, Gabriel tells Daniel that the Anointed King of the Covenant will be “cut off”. This has a strong sacrificial connotation.<sup>32</sup> The Hebrew refers to cutting up a sacrificial animal that seals the covenant with blood. The Masoretic wording suggests that the Messiah may well be cut off as a sacrifice as part of a covenant. There are literary pointers that would make this notion significant. Gabriel arrived at the traditional moment of Israel's evening sacrifice (cf. Exodus 29). In exile, far from the Promised Land, not to mention a destroyed temple, the Jews could not offer a sacrifice in the prescribed place. It was a notion that would have been sorely missed and the mention of sacrifice would bring this to mind to the exilic Daniel whom the reader meets in chapter 8 and 9 (cf. 6,10). At first glance, the Greek translations seem less specific about the exact means of demise of the Messiah. Closer inspection, however, shows that much of the same idea is reflected there. Theodotion and the present Septuagint of the Greek Orthodox Church say that the Messiah will be destroyed despite the lack of legitimate cause (ἐξολοθρευθήσεται χρίσμα καὶ κρίμα οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ). Like the Hebrew that was discussed earlier, the verb ἐξολοθρευθήσεται has a covenant context and is used for cutting the uncircumcised from the covenant elsewhere (e.g. Genesis 17,14: ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη ἐκ τοῦ γένους αὐτῆς). The Alexandrine version says in so many words that Messiah will be removed and no longer be (ἀποσταθήσεται χρίσμα καὶ οὐκ ἔσται). Both these translations (ἐξολεθρευθήσεται, ἀποσταθήσεται), particularly against the background of the Masoretic Hebrew, suggests a ritual context to the deposition of Messiah.

### 3.2.2.5 *The ultimate destruction of the wicked king*

These ritualistic connotations are intimately related to the context, which speaks about the fate of sanctuary and sacrifice after the death of Messiah (see also Talmud Yalkut II.79B, Babylonian Talmud Nazir 32B).<sup>33</sup> A powerful military leader will turn up with his army and destroy the city and the sanctuary.

The last week (70-7-62=1) is reserved for the time of the end. During this time the enemy will have many allies. As a result “sacrifice and offering will cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator” (Dan 9,27).

The early Church recognized the desecration of the temple by the Romans in particular. This is, for instance, evidenced by the Commentary on the Syriac *Diatessaron*, which refers to this as a specific fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy (XVIII§12):

“[Jerusalem] was destroyed many times and then rebuilt, but here it is a question of its [total] upheaval and destruction and the profanation of its sanctuary, after which it will remain in ruins and fall into oblivion. The Romans placed standards representing an eagle within this temple just as [the prophet] had said, On the wings of impurity and ruination, the sign of its terrible destruction, foretold by the prophet Daniel. Some say that the sign of its destruction was the pig's head which the Romans gave Pilate to carry into the interior of the temple to place there.”<sup>34</sup>

Justice will take place in the end. Evil shall not prevail. As such this vision is

a response to the disturbing 'bad moon' that was rising in Daniel 8,25, which at the time caused the prophet to lay sick for some days. Now Gabriel assures the prophet that the desolator shall be dealt with. His end is decreed by the Most High (Dan 9,27).

Gabriel's final words in the Old Testament are about God's anointed king, the Messiah. This Messianic climax of Gabriel's revelation in Daniel 9 is continued in Luke's Gospel, where both the angel and the Messiah return, when Gabriel announces the birth of Jesus to Mary. This emphasis in Luke is highlighted by Tannehill<sup>35</sup>: "the first proclaimer of the view that Jesus is the messianic redeemer of Israel is the angel Gabriel (1,32-33), who speaks as God's messenger and therefore with unquestionable authority within the implied author's story world."

In this way the person of the angel Gabriel functions as a literary bridge between the Old Testament and the New.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article calls for a recognition of the shock factor that is associated with Divine revelation in Daniel. The disclosures about a seemingly successful antichrist (in chapter 8) function as such. The main role of the angel Gabriel in chapters 8 and 9 lies in assisting Daniel to deal with the shocking and puzzling aspects of God's revelation. In chapter 8 this concerned the efficaciously wicked king; in chapter 9 Daniel's distress because of outstanding revelatory promises (in Jeremiah).

By his angelic presence, interpretation and additional revelation, Gabriel helps the prophet to make sense out of God's revelation. This takes place against the background of a literary tension between the wicked king who set himself up as God's opponent (chapter 8) and God's anointed prince who should ultimately win the day (chapter 9). Gabriel's mission bears a pastoral character, as he assists Daniel to come to terms with a God who initially seemed powerless against the forces of evil, and unable or unwilling to make good on his promises regarding Israel's return to the Promised Land. Gabriel's actions appear to be the result of God recognizing Daniel's puzzlement and concerns. In chapter 8 Gabriel lends his assistance to Daniel in obedience to a heavenly voice ("Gabriel, help this man understand the vision.") In Daniel 9 the angel arrives in swift flight as God's response after Daniel himself has clearly expressed his distress and presented supplications. From a philological analysis of Gabriel's role and messages in Daniel 8 and 9, two distinct tools are used in dealing with the shock-factor of Divine revelation:

- a) Interpretation, as the angel explains the puzzling and disturbing contents of the vision about the successful antichrist;
- b) Additional revelation. Gabriel's appearance in chapter 9 is to provide subsequent revelation in response to the prophet's distress and intimate involvement with God about the apparent lack of fulfilment of earlier revelation to the prophet Jeremiah. Gabriel proclaims new information from God that shed fresh light on the matter, and also announces that despite the success of antichrist, God's kingdom shall prevail.

In this way the shock-factor of God's revelation is met by a combination of angelic presence (expressing Divine interest), interpretation and the additional revelation. Daniel was satisfied to learn that antichrist should fail and that God would make good on his promises to Israel. The ultimate message of these chapters is one of comfort: Whatever befalls this world, the Almighty won't be overcome by the forces of evil. There remains a hope and a future for God's people. A philological approach to Daniel 8 and 9 shows that bewildered

humans are invited to trust their God to save the day, despite prevailing present darkness. *Post tenebras lux*.

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