

The most ancient Proto-Hebrew inscription ever discovered!

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Recently, *Associates for Biblical Research* (ABR) announced an extraordinary, but tiny, discovery of a folded lead tablet. It beautifully corroborates an intriguing episode narrated in Deuteronomy 11:29, 27 and Joshua 8:30.¹ Here, Scripture records that, just after the people entered the Promised Land, blessings and curses were shouted out to Israel from two mountain tops, Gerizim (blessings) and Ebal (curses). On Mt Ebal, Joshua built an altar to the Lord and renewed the Mosaic Covenant (Joshua 8:30). ABR believes their new discovery is likely linked to this event or to a similar ritual in its aftermath.²

The ABR archaeologists found the small tablet in 2019 (see figure 1) on Mt Ebal using a process called wet sifting. The c. 2 x 2 cm (0.79 in²) tablet was discovered in archaeological material, including much plaster, within a foot-shaped enclosure (see figure 2) containing two previously excavated sacrificial altars,³ one more ancient than the other.

The lead of the tablet was analyzed, which determined the metal came from Greek mines dating from 1400–1200 BC. The dating of the tablet is consistent with an early Exodus date (1446 BC) and (after 40 years of wilderness wandering) the first year of Israel's Canaanite conquest of 1406 BC—during the Late Bronze I–II period (LBI–II). Inscribed lead tablets are also known from the Hittite Empire and Neo-Hittite states dating from the 14/13th–8th centuries BC (located in modern Turkey and northern Syria)—adding further reason to accept the Israelite tablet's antiquity.

Because the folded lead strip was impossible to unfold without destroying it, Daniel Vavrik and three colleagues



Figure 1. Small, folded tablet found in 2019 on Mt Ebal



Figure 2. Foot-shaped enclosure, containing two previously excavated sacrificial altars, where the lead tablet was found.

from Prague's Academy of Sciences in the Czech Republic used advanced imaging techniques involving thousands of tomographic scans, to visualize hidden text on the inside surfaces. Scott Stripling, ABR's Director of Excavations, Pieter Gert van der Veen of Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, and Gershon Galil of the University of Haifa collaborated to translate the writing. The text forms a passage, described as 'chiastic parallelism', a literary structure in which words are repeated in reverse order. Most importantly, it contains the name of the God of Israel, spelled twice in its short form 'YHW'.⁴

"You are cursed by
the God YHW, ...
You will die, Cursed
you will surely die.
Cursed you are by YHW."

The folded lead strip's wording⁵ likely represents a legal oath, designed to bind the oath-keeper(s) to keep the Law of Moses by invoking the covenant curses. Both covenant blessings and curses were fully accepted as incentives to keep the covenant.

According to ABR, the inside surfaces of the amulet contain 44 proto-alphabetic letters (a script which precedes paleo-Hebrew), and is centuries older than the oldest known Hebrew texts from ancient Israel. Douglas Petrovich, also an associate with ABR, has been working on even older proto-consonantal scripts found in Sinai dated to 1842 BC.⁶ These were featured in the film *Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy*.⁷ All this evidence is highly significant, because many liberal theologians postulate there was no evidence of an alphabet in which to write during the LBI–II period, hence, the Bible must have been written much

later than Moses—in contradiction to Jesus’s clear statement in John 5:46. Furthermore, the divine name *YHW* occurs at an Israelite covenant site of LBI–II age. This new discovery forever buries skeptical claims of the late formation of the Bible, or of Israel as a nation. It cannot be overstated how important this artefact really is: it truly is “one of the greatest discoveries to ever come out of the Holy Land.”⁸

ABR have yet to publish their translation of the outermost tablet surface text—which may reveal to whom the tablet belonged, who it was written by,⁹ or to whom it was addressed. We will wait with anticipation the publishing of their textual analysis (hopefully by the end of 2022)⁴ and for further exciting archaeological discoveries on Mt Ebal!

References

1. Anon, *ABR researchers discover the oldest known proto-Hebrew inscription ever found*, 24 March 2022, biblearchaeology.org/current-events-list/4896-abr-researchers-discover-the-oldest-known-proto-hebrew-inscription-ever-found. For interested readers, watch ABR’s significant press conference on YouTube dated 25 March 2022, youtube.com/watch?v=GUzBXZdpfLo.
2. The content of this article was updated on the basis of the current status of research on the lead tablet by ABR, special thanks to Pieter Gert van der Veen.
3. ABR analyzed material left over from Adam Zertal’s original excavations near the city of ancient Shechem (modern Nablus) from 1982–1989.
4. A final translation of the inside inscription will appear in Part A of a technical article on the lead tablet by the end of 2022. The outside inscription (currently in preparation) will appear in Part B (2023).
5. Once the lead strip was folded (under heating), it became permanently sealed, and a legally binding contract. The lead was likely inscribed by a metal stylus, strikingly consistent with the description in the ancient book of Job 19:23–24a “I wish that my words were recorded and inscribed in a book, by an iron stylus on lead . . .”
6. Windle, B., ABR associate Dr Doug Petrovich reveals ancient ‘Moses’ inscription, 08 January 2017, biblearchaeology.org/current-events-list/3816-abr-associate-dr-doug-petrovich-reveals-ancient-moses-inscription.
7. Bates, G. and Sanders, L., *Movie review: Patterns of Evidence: The Moses controversy*, 4 March 2019, creation.com/poe-moses.
8. Law, S., News alert—Hebrew curse tablet deciphered—mentions Israel’s God! 1 April 2022, patternsofevidence.com/2022/04/01/hebrew-tablet-deciphered-mentions-israels-god.
9. Galil stated of the tablet’s author that he was “not only a scribe, he was a theologian, he was a leader.”