

Slide 0 (no slides shown yet)

In Exodus chapter 12 we read that the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to remember throughout their generations the delivery from Egyptian bondage. The remembrance was to be particularly commemorated at the annual celebration of the Passover. For 3000 years the question was not asked at the Passover Seder, "But did the Exodus really happen?" Given the current zeitgeist, however, it is appropriate that we give some attention to this question.

1. So the first question is: Did the Exodus happen? Arguments typically used against it's happening are: a) We have no Egyptian record of it. b) Some scholars say there is no evidence for it in the archaeological record. c) If it happened, it must have been a miracle for a bunch of slaves and their families to escape from the dominant world power at that time, and we are told by reputable scholars that miracles are impossible.
2. Second question: If it happened, when did it happen?
3. Third question: If it happened, what was its magnitude?

*At this point the first slide was presented.*

## Slides 1-5 (each point by progressive disclosure)

### Puzzling events in Egypt, time of Amenhotep II and later

1. Avaris in northern Egypt had two 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty palaces, and it was home of Egypt's main god, Amun. Strangely, it was abandoned in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, specifically during the reign of Amenhotep II according to an article in the technical journal *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* (2013).
2. Amenhotep II issued the following command on his Karnak Stela: "His majesty has commanded for his nobles—the officials of the royal court [. . .] [the courtiers] who enter into [the palace] [. . .] the servants [of] the good god—to destroy all of the images of the gods, their bodies [. . .] Amu[n]-Re."
3. After the seventh year of Am. II, Egyptian power seems broken; no more campaigns in his reign of 25 years or more.
4. The Amarna letters, written in reign of Am. III and his son Am. IV/Akhenaton (ca. 1407-1353 BC), are pleas, unanswered, for help from Egypt because the Habiru are taking over Canaan.
5. Amenhotep IV changed his name from "Amun is Satisfied," to "Akhenaton = Effective for Aten." Aten is the sun-disk, regarded as a manifestation of the one true God.

Amenhotep II was a pharaoh of Egypt's 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty who ruled in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC.

*After item 1:* Why did the Egyptians abandon a city in which their chief god was supposed to dwell?

*After item 2:* In the text shown here, words that have been effaced or partially effaced in the Karnak Stela are shown in brackets, sometimes with a reasonable restoration based on context. Egyptologists have no explanation for this puzzling inscription. An exception is Egyptologist Douglas Petrovich, who says it relates to the defeat of Egypt's gods in the plagues preceding the Exodus.

*After item 5:* Akhenaton has been called the world's first monotheist. Freud wrote a book called "Moses and Monotheism," in which he said that Moses derived his monotheistic faith from Akhenaton. We shall see that Moses lived before Akhenaton, not after him. Why did Akhenaton abandon the worship of Egypt's chief god?

## Slide 6

Information from the Egyptian historian Manetho (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC), as quoted by Josephus, *Against Apion* (1<sup>st</sup> Century AD)

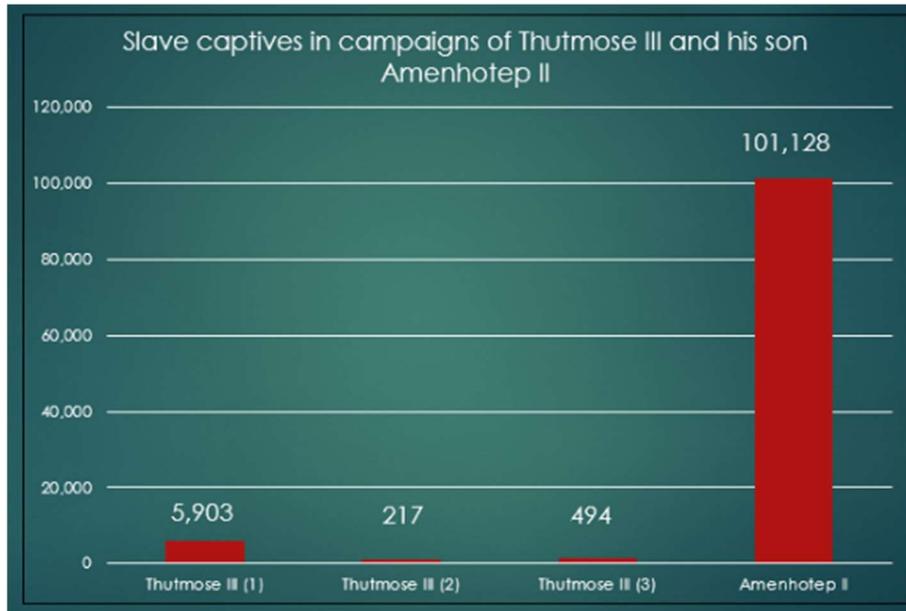
1. Egypt was invaded by an Asiatic group, called the Hyksos, who established their capital, **Avaris**, in Egypt's northern Delta region.
2. The Hyksos were driven out by the first pharaohs of Egypt's 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.
3. The 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty had slaves at **Avaris**, who worked in the rock quarries. These slaves revolted under the leadership of a priest of Heliopolis named **Osarsiph**.
4. **Osarsiph** changed his name to **Moses**. He taught the slaves that they should not worship the Egyptian gods. He led them into rebellion and they left the land.
5. When they left, the pharaoh at the time, named **Amenophis**, "then passed on with the rest of the Egyptians, being **300,000** of the most warlike of them, against the enemy [the fleeing people under **Osarsiph/Moses**], who met them. Yet did he not join battle with them, but thinking that would be to fight against the gods, he returned back and came to Memphis . . ."

This addresses more specifically the problem of whether there are any Egyptian references to the Exodus. It is thought that Manetho was an Egyptian priest, because he had access to Egyptian historical records. Manetho's assigning the Egyptian pharaohs to dynasties is followed by all Egyptologists. He also assigned the name "Hyksos" to the Asiatic invaders who ruled Egypt before the first pharaohs of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty drove them out. He said the Hyksos capital was Avaris. Austrian excavations under Manfred Bietak at Avaris, 1973–2009, continuing to the present under Irene Förstner-Mueller, confirmed Manetho's statement that the Hyksos founded the city, and that it was later taken over by the first pharaohs of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, who built two large palaces there. Adjoining Avaris was a considerable settlement of Semitic-speaking people. How large the settlement was is not known because it extended to places that cannot be excavated since they are occupied by modern buildings. Here are some other items from Manetho that are highlighted in the slide:

1. If the fleeing slaves were only a few hundred or a few thousand, why did pharaoh chase them with an army of 300,000? Egyptians and other ancient people could exaggerate the size of the enemy to make their

- victory seem more glorious, but there would be little incentive to exaggerate the size of an army that failed in its objective.
2. Pharaoh turned back. Reading the last sentence here, “Yet did he not join battle with them, but thinking that would be to fight against the gods, he returned back and came to Memphis . . .” Memphis is about 130 kilometers south of Avaris. Did he go there to get support from the garrisons in the south because his northern forces had been wiped out?
  3. Manetho named the pharaoh that chased the slaves as Amenophis, which is the Greek form of Amenhotep. The only pharaohs with this name were in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.
  4. The only viable candidates for Manetho’s Amenophis, his pharaoh of the Exodus, are Amenhotep II and Amenhotep III. Amenhotep I was too soon after the time of the Hyksos; Manetho gave a long time between the Hyksos and Moses. Amenhotep IV, usually called Akhenaton, was basically erased from Egyptian history because of his heretical views.

## Slide 7



Thutmose III, father of Amenhotep II, was the Napoleon of ancient Egypt, with 17 campaigns into the Levant and going as far as the Euphrates. The number of slaves he took in his 17 campaigns is far less than those taken by his son in Amenhotep's second campaign. Amenhotep had only two campaigns; there were none after his seventh year, in which he took all the slaves, even though he reigned for a total of 25 years or more. Those taken captive were Canaanites, not Israelites. Further, the second campaign was in November, which has greatly puzzled Egyptologists. Egyptian campaigns began in the spring.

You don't raid Canaan and then flood the slave market with 101,000 slaves unless you just lost a comparable or even greater number.

The Bible doesn't explicitly say that the pharaoh of the Exodus died in the Yam Suf, or 'Sea of Reeds,' commonly rendered as "the Red Sea." Here is what it says:

Exodus 14:28: "The waters covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the army who went after them into the sea." We might think of Xerxes at the Battle of Salamis, where Xerxes was on a hill overlooking the bay as he watched his fleet, including his brother, perish.

Ps. 106:11: "The water covered their adversaries; not one of them was left." [Not necessary to read; seems to be echoing Ex 14:28.]

In Ps. 136:15: God “shook off” pharaoh and his army at the Sea of Reeds. The Hebrew verb is *na’ar* which means “to shake off.” It doesn’t say pharaoh was destroyed; just that he was shaken off so that he was no longer a problem.

## Slide 8

### Two good ways to measure time over a long period

1. In terms of an era. Examples:
  - a. Rome: *Anno Urbis Conditae*.
  - b. *Anno Mundi* sometimes used in modern Israel.
  - c. The familiar BC/AD.
  - d. The “Era of the Exodus” (next slide).
2. In terms of Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles (two slides after that).

We’ve been dealing with the question of whether there is any archaeological or other evidence, outside of the Bible, for the Exodus. Now let’s turn our attention to the question: If there was an Exodus, when was it?

To that end we will make use of two methods that keep track of the years over a long period of time: reckoning in terms of an era, or reckoning in terms of a repeated cycle in the calendar. We see some examples of eras in the first section of this slide. The second section introduces the cycles of the Jubilee and Sabbatical years. Both methods will be of use in determining the time of the Exodus.

## Slide 9

# Two good ways to measure time over a long period

## 1. Measure by an era.

The departure of Israel from Egypt marked the beginning of an era, the era of the “going-out” (Hebrew *motsae*).

Time is expressed in terms of this era in Exodus 16:1, 19:1, 40:17, Numbers 1:1, 1, 3, 9:1, 10:11, 33:38, Deuteronomy 1:3, and 1 Kings 6:1.

The underlined texts are where the year is given but the phrase “of the going-out” is not given but is understood. As we see from the examples, this was a well-defined way of measuring time. It endured all the way down to the kingdom period and the reign of Solomon, after which time was measured according to the years of the reigning king. Writers who say that the 480 years in 1 Kings 6:1 are 12 symbolic generations of 40 symbolic years ignore the technical usage of this exact numbering system in the texts illustrated.

## Slide 10

### “Do the math”

1 Kings 6:1: “Solomon began to build the temple for the Lord in the 480<sup>th</sup> year of the “going-out” (*motsae*) from the land of Egypt (=480<sup>th</sup> year of the Exodus-era), in the fourth year of his reign over Israel, in the second month, the month of Ziv.”

Ziv = *Iyyar*, so this was spring of 967 BC, i.e. in the Judean Tishri-based year that can be written as 968t.

$968t + 479 = 1447t$ . This means the Bible’s date for the Exodus was the spring of 1446.

It is important to translate 1 Kgs 6:1 properly. Most translations say it was 480 years “after” the Exodus that Solomon had the foundation of the Temple laid. The Hebrew of 1 Kgs 6:1 does not say that; it says it was the 480<sup>th</sup> year of the “going-out,” i.e. the 480<sup>th</sup> year of the Exodus era. 479 years, not 480, had passed since the Exodus.

We can say that something happened in our first year of college; that means we hadn’t been in college a full year yet. When we say that something happened “after” our first year of college, it means a full year had passed.

Judean years started in Tishri in the fall. In order to indicate that here, I have placed a ‘t’ after the year.

The calculation shown on this slide allows us to use 1 Kings 6:1 to place the Exodus, in terms that we are familiar with, in the spring of 1446 BC.

Slides 11 and 12  
(progressive disclosure)

## Two good ways to measure time over a long period

### 2. Measure by Jubilee and Sabbatical years.

The Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Sanhedrin* 40a,b, says that in the time of the judges the courts made a formal record of an event (a crime, a contract, etc.) by asking in which year of a Sabbatical cycle, and in which Sabbatical cycle of a Jubilee period, the event occurred.

The Seder 'Olam and the Babylonian Talmud list two Jubilee years: one in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah and one that began 49 years later when Ezekiel saw the vision of the last 9 chapters of his book ([Ezek 40:1](#)).

As in all ancient (and modern) legal contracts, some means of accurately measuring the time over an extended period of years is necessary so that, for instance, it would be known when the contract started and when the money is due, etc. The Talmud says that the Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles were used for this purpose in the time of Israel's judges.

If you have ever read the Talmud, you will know that its typical format is to present what some respected rabbi said on a subject, and then there will be several alternative opinions offered by other rabbis. Usually no conclusion is given about who was right. But in the case of the citation of what Rabbi Yose ben Halaphta, a student of the famous Rabbi Akiba, wrote about the Jubilee years in the *Seder 'Olam* there is no such discussion. The *Seder 'Olam's* statements about the two Jubilees are simply stated as a fact that apparently was so well established historically that no discussion or debate were necessary or allowed.

## Slide 13

### “Do the math”

Ezekiel 40:1 “In the 25<sup>th</sup> year of our exile ( $598t - 24 = 574t$ ), on Rosh HaShanah (רֹשׁ הַשָּׁנָה שְׁנֵי עָשָׂר), on the tenth day of the month, in the 14<sup>th</sup> year after the city was struck down ( $588t - 14k = 574t$ ), on that very same day (*be-etsem hayom hazeh*) . . .

**In Lev. 23:28-30, *be-etsem hayom hazeh* is used three times to refer to Yom Kippur. It was only in a Jubilee year that Rosh HaShanah was on Yom Kippur (Lev 25:9). In every other year it was (and is) on the first of Tishri.**

Ezekiel says that when he saw the vision that occupies the last nine chapters of his book, it was on *Rosh HaShanah* and it was also the tenth of the month. According to the book of Leviticus, only in a Jubilee year was Rosh HaShanah on the same day as Yom Kippur. The Talmud and the Seder ‘Olam make no appeal to Rosh Hashanah being on the tenth of Tishri as evidence that Ezekiel saw his vision at the onset of a Jubilee year. They simply state as a matter of fact that it was the beginning of a Jubilee. Again, there is no debate about this.

Independently of the historical evidence, notice that the phrase that Ezekiel uses, *be-etsem hayom hazeh*, is the same phrase used in Leviticus to refer to Yom Kippur. In this way too, besides indicating that Rosh HaShanah was on the tenth of the month, Ezekiel reinforces that in 574 BC Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur were on the same day, which was the case only at the start of a Jubilee year.

**“Do the math”**

**Ezekiel’s Jubilee was the 17th**

This is stated in the *Seder ‘Olam* (chap. 11) and the Babylonian Talmud (*‘Arakin* 12b, 13a).

There is no dispute in these sources about it being the 17th Jubilee, even though the chronology this gives for when the counting of Jubilee and Sabbatical years began is in contradiction to the chronology that Rabbi Yose derived for this time, as accepted in the Talmud.

Ezekiel’s Jubilee was the 17<sup>th</sup>. This is stated in the *Seder ‘Olam*, chapter 11, and the Babylonian Talmud (*‘Arakin* 12b, 13a).

The *Seder ‘Olam* is accepted as an authoritative source in the Talmud, and its statement that this was the 17<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, and it was preceded by a Jubilee in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of King Josiah of Judah is not challenged there. That a Jubilee began in Tishri of 574 BC can be supported by other historical considerations that I will not go into here but they are covered in my writings.

The importance of the fact that Ezekiel’s vision came at the onset of a Jubilee year, and that the *Seder ‘Olam* and the Babylonian Talmud say it was the 17<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, will be shown on the next slide.

## Slide 15

### **“Do the math”**

**Consequently, counting for the Jubilee and Sabbatical years must have begun in  $574t + 17 * 49 = 1407t$ . This would have marked a “zero” Jubilee, so year 1 of the first Jubilee/Sabbatical cycle was 1406t, indicating that the entry into Canaan was in the spring of 1406. The Exodus, 40 years earlier, was **spring of 1446.****

Lev. 25:1–8 says they were to start counting for the Jubilee and Sabbatical years when they entered the land of Canaan. Doing the calculation shown here, and based on the 17<sup>th</sup> Jubilee year beginning on Yom Kippur of 574 BC means that counting for the Sabbatical and Jubilee years began in the spring of 1446. There is nothing artificial in the calculation shown here.

## Slide 16

### “Do the math”

Calculation of time of Exodus from 1 Kgs 6:1:

$$968t + 479 = 1447t - \text{spring of 1446.}$$

Calculation of when counting for Sabbatical and Jubilee years begin, as measured from 17<sup>th</sup> Jubilee that started Tishri 10 (*Yom Kippur*), 574t (Ezek 40:1):

$$574t + 17 * 49 - 1 = 1406t.$$

Exodus was 40 years & 6 months earlier: **spring of 1446.**

### What does this mean?

The calculation of the date of the Exodus based on 1 Kings 6:1 gives the spring of 1446 for the Exodus. The calculation based on the Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles gives the same date. What does this mean?

1. First, the harmony of the two independent methods of calculating the year of the Exodus provides evidence that there really was an Exodus, independently of the evidence for its reality that was discussed earlier.
2. Second, it means that the Levitical Priests, which included Ezekiel, were faithful in recording when Sabbatical and Jubilee years were due, even though, in the First Temple period, the people were remiss at observing their stipulations.
3. Third, the independence of the two methods of calculating the years of the Exodus and the entry into the land testifies to their credibility and accuracy.
4. Liberal and conservative scholars alike agree that the only reasonable source for the legislation of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years is the book of Leviticus, chapters 25 and 27.
5. Therefore the book of Leviticus must have been in existence in 1406 BC.

## Slide 17



On March 24 of this year, the Associates for Biblical Research gave a press conference announcing the preliminary reading of the text of a curse tablet from Mt. Ebal. The tablet was small, measuring only two centimeters by two centimeters in its folded state. The curse tablet has been much in the news since then. Its existence, and its interpretation, have a lot to do with the subject we are discussing today, that is, whether there actually was an Exodus, and, if so, when did it take place?

Some Biblical background. In Deuteronomy chapter 27, Moses charged the people that, when they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, half of the people should stand on Mount Gerizim to read and recite the blessings that would come if the people would be faithful to keep the commandments of the Torah. These were commandments that Moses had written in the book that we call Deuteronomy. The other half of the people should stand on Mt. Ebal to recite curses that would come upon them if they neglected or disobeyed the words of the Torah. Mt. Ebal therefore became known as the mount of cursing.

The tablet was found when wet sifting was applied to the garbage dump of excavations that were done on Mt. Ebal in the 1980s and 1990s. Wet sifting is a technique that finds many small items like scarabs and coins that can be missed by the dry sifting technique because they were covered with dirt. Scott Stripling, head of the archaeological excavations at Shiloh since 2017, obtained permission to remove a good portion of one of the garbage dumps from the excavations at Mt. Ebal to a safe place where a wet-sifting apparatus was set up. When the tablet was found in December of 2019, Stripling immediately

recognized it as a curse tablet because of its form: a small piece of lead that, after being written on, was folded over, thus supposedly sealing the curse. Later analysis of a piece of lead that broke off from the tablet showed that the lead came from a Greek island that was known to export lead in the Late Bronze Age, that is from about 1500 to 1200 BC. The fact that a curse tablet was found on Mt. Ebal is important in itself, because it means that Mt. Ebal really was a place of curses, just as the book of Deuteronomy said it was to become when Israel entered the land.

## Slide 18

### Mt. Ebal and its altar(s)

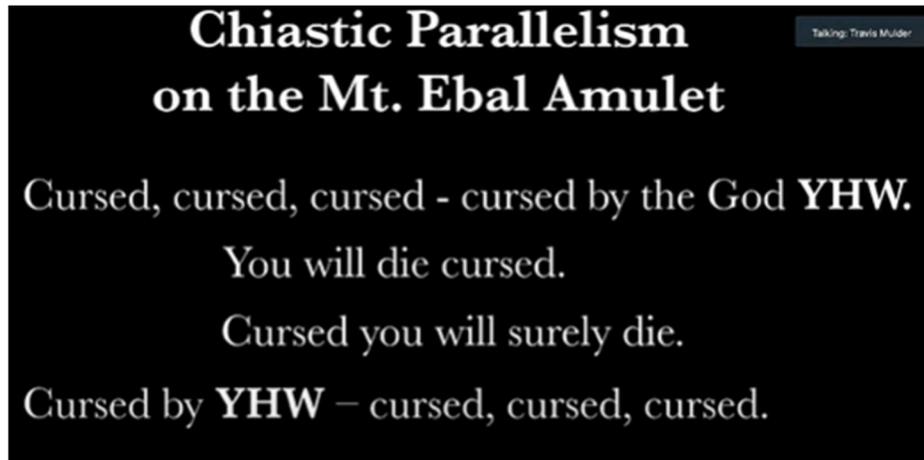


Dr. Stripling should be given credit for several decisions that made possible the finding and reading of the curse tablet. Although he was primarily concerned with the excavations at Shiloh, he was also interested in the archaeological finds at Mt. Ebal. In about 1982, Adam Zertal of the University of Haifa observed that a large mound existed on the mountain, although it was a barren place with no other signs of settlement. He received permission from the Palestinian Authority that controlled the area to carry out archaeological research. He went there in 1983 and found that the topmost stones of the mound were piled over a large rectangular altar measuring 7 meters by 9 meters, and these stones were apparently placed over the altar to protect it when the site was abandoned. By means of pottery found at the site, the altar was dated to about 1225 to 1250 BC, and it was covered with stones and abandoned around 1150, so it was in use only about 100 years. Zertal thought he had found the altar that Moses, in Deuteronomy chapter 27, commanded Joshua to build on Mt. Ebal after the recitation of the curses and blessings. Advocates of the Late Date of the Exodus then claimed that this supported their 13<sup>th</sup> Century date for the Exodus. That would be in contradiction to the material that we have looked at today that shows that Biblical texts date it to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, not the 13<sup>th</sup>. It would also contradict the circumstantial evidence from Egypt that we looked at that places the Exodus in the reign of Amenhotep II, again in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

Zertal died in 2015. In the course of his excavations at Mt. Ebal, he and his co-workers left behind three garbage dumps. Stripling was interested in the dump that, according to Zertal's notes, contained material dug up from the altar. Stripling and other Associates for Biblical Research members received permission to take a truck and move about 30 percent of that particular dump to a safe place in Israel where they could employ the wet-sifting apparatus that was designed and built by my friend and fellow ABR associate, Steven Rudd. The sifting was done in December 2019 and January 2020, during which time they found the amulet. It was known that amulets like this would be written on and then folded over, so that the curse would be on the inside. At first only one letter could be discerned on the outside, an aleph. It was thought that the amulet would be too brittle to allow opening it to read the curse. Dr. Stripling used his contacts with experts in related fields to ask specialists at the University of Prague if they could use their scanning techniques and equipment to read the inside of the tablet without opening it. The techniques used would be similar to a medical CAT scan.

The results from the scans of the University of Prague were submitted to two experts on ancient writing, Gershon Galil of the University of Haifa and Pieter van der Veen of the Johannes-Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. The results far exceeded anyone's expectations. The reading of the inside of the tablet was the substance of the press conference given on March 24.

## Slide 19



Here is the text, in a preliminary reading that could be modified when the images are reproduced in a peer-reviewed article currently in process. It exhibits chiastic parallelism—that is, an A-B-B-A structure—that is found in several of the Psalms. Gershon Galil, in the press announcement on March 24 (28:31), said this is “absolutely the most exciting inscription ever found in Israel.” He also said, “No one can claim that the Bible was written at a later period.” To me, it is encouraging that Galil was willing to change his mind when new evidence is presented, because I know from what he has written over the years that Galil’s previous stance was that the historical events of the Bible were not written by eye-witnesses, but by redactors and inventors . . . hundreds of years later. In his statements on March 24, Dr. Galil provided a good example of someone who was willing to change his ideas when presented with new evidence.

If anyone is interested in literary structure, you will notice that the chiasm is perfect. That is, it is entirely reflective.

The writing apparently was inscribed on the lead with an iron stylus. In Job 19:23,24, Job said: “Oh that my words were recorded! Oh that they were written in a book, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead!”. This is just before the well-known two verses which have Job’s great affirmation of his faith : “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the latter day He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.” Job’s words actually were preserved—not on lead, but in a more sure place, the Tanak.

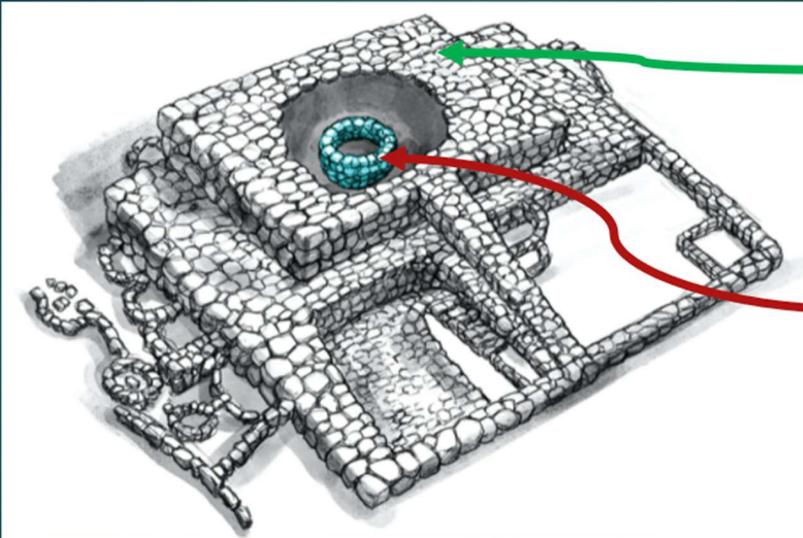
This preliminary reading of the tablet is significant for several reasons.

1. The first has to do with the approximate date that can be assigned to the writing, based on the form of the letters. On April 4, Stripling said “This type of writing is more characteristic of the very beginning of LB2, that LB1B/LB2A horizon, around 1400.” This argues against the position that the Exodus occurred around 1260 BC and, instead, is consistent with the 1406 BC date for the entry into the land that, as we have attempted to show in today’s presentation, is the date derived from the Biblical texts.
2. The second conclusion is that, if Stripling and his advisors are correct on the approximate date of the writing, then it means that the argument no longer holds that Moses could not have written the Torah because alphabetic writing, in particular Hebrew writing, was unknown at the time.
3. The third conclusion is that this writing is Hebrew in an early form of the Hebrew alphabet. The amulet is Israelite, not pagan, not Canaanite. It was found in an Israelite sacred site, not a Canaanite site. That it is Hebrew is shown by the two occurrences of the divine name. The God of the person who wrote this tablet was the Hebrew God, not one of the pagan gods of the Canaanites. This then is the earliest example, by two centuries or more, of any Hebrew script found in Israel and also of any writing in Israel that had the divine name.

Some years ago the Phoenicians were given credit for inventing the alphabet, although there are no known Phoenician alphabetic inscriptions earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC. That idea is now discarded and scholars want to give credit to the Canaanites. Currently the earliest examples of alphabetic writing, found at the Egyptian turquoise mines in the Sinai, are called “proto-Canaanite,” even though, according to the books of Genesis and Exodus, it was the Israelites who were in Egypt at this time. According to a 2020 book by Douglas Petrovich entitled “The World’s Oldest Alphabet,” the alphabet was invented by the immediate descendants of Jacob during their time in Egypt. They formed the alphabet by starting with the Egyptian writing and then extracting the hieroglyphs that represented phonemes, using them to represent sounds in any language, rather than employing the complicated picture-based system of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Curiously, the main opposition to giving Hebrews the credit for inventing the alphabet seems to come from modern Israeli scholars, such as Israel Finkelstein of Tel Aviv University.

## Slide 20

### The two altars on Mt. Ebal



Rectangular altar, ~1250 BC, that Zertal thought was Joshua's altar.

The rectangular altar was built over a round altar, as if to honor and protect this earlier altar. Zertal called the earlier altar "primogenital."

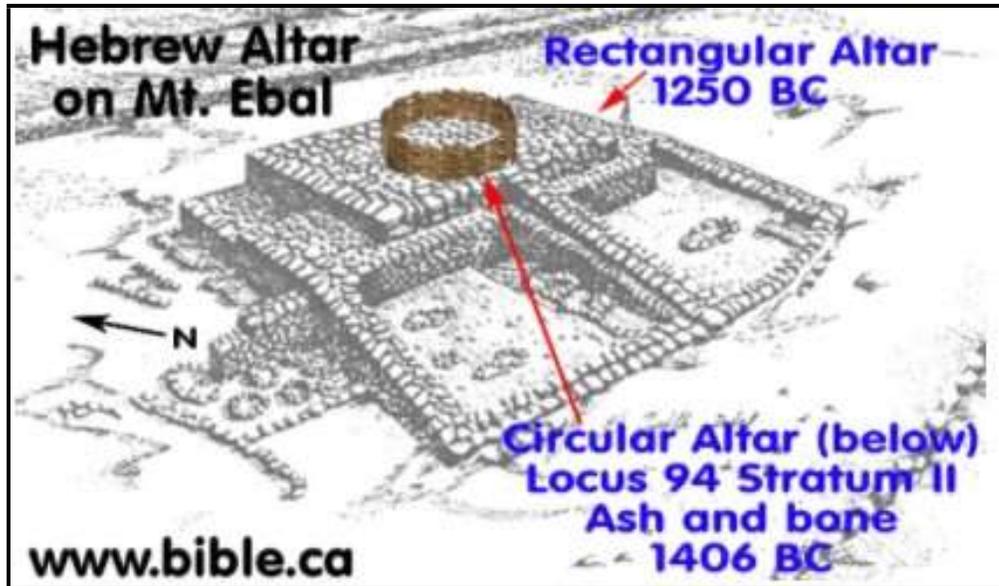
In his excavations at Mt. Ebal, Zertal discovered that there are two altars at the site. The seven meter by nine meter rectangular altar was built over, and centered on, an earlier round altar of uncut stones, as if to honor and perhaps preserve the earlier altar. Steven Rudd, who had accompanied Zertal to the site in 2005, suggested to Zertal that the earlier altar, not the rectangular altar that was built over it to protect it or honor it, was the real Joshua's altar. By this time, however, Zertal was widely publicized as the discoverer of what he called Joshua's altar, meaning the rectangular altar, and he was unwilling to modify that opinion in order to agree with Rudd's suggestion. The paradigm had been set; the larger altar was Joshua's altar, and its construction in the 13<sup>th</sup> century showed that the Biblical date of the Exodus, some 150 years earlier, was wrong. What then was this earlier altar? . . . a very important question.

Zertal apparently recognized the challenge to his paradigm. If the earlier altar was built before Joshua entered the land then it would have to be a Canaanite, i.e. pagan, altar. In his writings, therefore, he ignored Steven Rudd's suggestion, but neither could he bring himself to say the obvious: If the round altar preceded the time of Joshua, then it had to be Canaanite. Would Joshua honor a Canaanite altar in this way? He and all the Israelites were commanded to do just the opposite: In Exodus chapter 34 the Israelites were commanded to tear down Canaanite altars, break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim.

So how did Zertal handle this contradiction to the rectangular altar

being Joshua's presented by the archaeological evidence that he himself uncovered? He handled it in a very strange way. Instead of coming right out and saying that the earlier altar was pagan and Canaanite, as would be required by his 13<sup>th</sup>-Century-Exodus paradigm, he described it, in his writing, as a "primogenial" altar, whatever that means. Zertal avoided using the obvious terms of "pagan" or "Canaanite" to describe the smaller and older altar because of the damage this would do to his identification of the larger and later altar as Joshua's altar. He could not admit the obvious. This is paradigm paralysis at its finest. . . . I'm sure we'll see more of such paradigm fixation in the coming weeks and months from those who do not want to accept the clear implications of both the curse tablet and the evidence that the earlier, round altar, is the real Joshua's altar, dating to a time well before the 13th Century construction of the rectangular altar. There will be many who are unwilling to follow the implication that this has for the date of writing of the Books of Moses.

## Slide 21



This is a drawing of the two altars taken from Steven Rudd's Web site. Steve drew the circular altar above its actual location in order to emphasize it and show that the rectangular altar was centered on it. There are some additional facts about the circular altar that will be publicized by the Associates for Biblical Research in the coming months.

In Deuteronomy 27 verses 5 and 6, when Moses was giving instructions to Joshua about the altar that Joshua was to construct on Mt. Ebal, Moses said that the altar should be built with uncut field stones, and sacrifices were to be made on it. The circular altar that Zertal uncovered, and is there to this day, is made of uncut field stones. Animal bones and ashes were found with it. But unlike most altars, Zertal found something else mixed in with the fieldstones, ashes, and bones: plaster. What was the plaster for?

Let us read Moses's charge to Joshua in the Deuteronomy 27 passage: "Set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over this Jordan into the land the Lord your God is giving you . . . you shall write very clearly all the words of this law on these stones you have set up." In Joshua chapter 8, Joshua did just that: he wrote on the stones, i.e. on the plaster that covered them, the law that Moses had written. This explains why Zertal found plaster mixed in with the stones of the lower altar.

Now if you have followed the logic this far, it should be clear that this plaster is of tremendous interest. Perhaps Zertal recognized that, because early in his excavations he boxed up some of the plaster pieces and had them

sent to the University of Haifa. That box has been in the basement of the university's museum for about 30 years now, with apparently no rigorous investigation of its contents. Those of us at ABR are, naturally, very curious to see if modern technology could be used to identify and read any writing on the plaster fragments. If so, and if the altar is really Joshua's altar as we believe, that writing would be from the words of Moses that Joshua, according to his mandate from Moses, wrote down within 3 months after the death of Moses. If only a few letters could be discerned, that would give valuable insight into the development of the alphabet. If, however, some consecutive words or phrases were found, and these could be correlated with what we have in the Book of Deuteronomy, that would be the most important discovery ever made in the field of Biblical studies and Israelite archaeology, more important, and more decisive in establishing the authenticity of the earliest books of the Bible, than the Dead Sea Scrolls or any other archaeological discovery.

Steven Rudd is a personal friend of mine, and we have had some discussion on this matter. I knew that Steve had developed, at his own expense, a scanning machine that scanned ostraca from the Shiloh dig in both infrared and ultraviolet, and this made legible faded writings on clay that could not be read by the unaided eye. But Steve says that his equipment is far inferior to the scanning equipment that the University of Haifa possesses, and which he thought was priced at from 70 thousand to 125 thousand dollars. In a follow-up to the March 24 announcement, on April 4 Scott Stripling said that there will be an examination of the plaster. He also said that just that morning he had gotten the results of a Carbon-14 measurement of the date of some organic material in the plaster, but he naturally did not give the result because that would be premature at this stage.

I would also mention that there is some danger and difficulty associated with getting access to the Mt. Ebal site. When Steve Rudd went there in 2005 with Adam Zertal, they were accompanied by armed Israeli soldiers, and Steve said there were military planes flying overhead. In February 2019, the Palestinian authority took some of the stones from the site to use as foundational material for a road they were building. As the site will receive more publicity in the weeks and months ahead, it is also possible that the Palestinians will decide to vandalize it because it is evidence that the Jewish nation has a historical right to the land, something that the Palestinians try to ignore or deny, even though in their holy book, the Qur'an, it is stated in five places that Allah gave the Holy Land to the Jewish nation. **Qur'an 5:21, 7:137, 10:93, 17:104, 44:54.**

## Slide 22

*That's all, folks!*

[www.rcyoung.org/papers.html](http://www.rcyoung.org/papers.html)

<https://oxford.academia.edu/RodgerYoung>

Some of you may be old enough to know where this signoff comes from. Now I'm not going to know to what extent this presentation made sense unless we have some questions, comments, and challenges. So I would like to close the slide show and turn this over to Lennie and Paul so they can open the session for discussion. Thank you.