

King David Era Pottery Shard Supports Biblical Narrative

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(IsraelNN.com) A breakthrough in the research of the Hebrew Scriptures has shed new light on the period in which the Bible books of the Prophets were written. Professor Gershon Galil of the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Haifa has deciphered an inscription dating from the 10th century BCE (the period of King David's reign) and has proven the inscription to be ancient Hebrew, thus making it the earliest known example of Hebrew writing.

The significance of this breakthrough relates to the fact that at least some of the Biblical scriptures are now proven to have been composed hundreds of years before the dates presented today in research and that the Kingdom of Israel already existed at that time.

The inscription itself, which was written in ink on a 15x16.5cm trapezoid pottery shard, was discovered a year and a half ago at excavations that were carried out by Professor Yosef Garfinkel near the Elah valley, south of Jerusalem, and west of Hebron.

The researchers dated the inscription back to the 10th century BCE, which was the period of King David's reign, but the question of the language used in this inscription remained unanswered, making it impossible to prove whether it was in fact Hebrew or another Semitic language.

Professor Galil's deciphering of the ancient writing testifies to it being authentic Hebrew based on its use of verbs particular to the Hebrew language and content specific to Hebrew culture not adopted by other regional cultures at the time.

"This text is a social statement, relating to slaves, widows and orphans. It uses verbs that were characteristic of Hebrew, such as "asah" (did) and "avad" (worked), which were rarely used in other regional languages. Particular words that appear in the text, such as "almana" (widow) are specific to Hebrew and are written differently in other local languages. The content itself was also unfamiliar to all the cultures in the region besides the Hebrew society: The present inscription provides social elements similar to those found in the Biblical prophecies and very different from prophecies written by other cultures postulating glorification of the gods and taking care of their physical needs"

Galil added that once this deciphering is received at research centers, the inscription will become the earliest Hebrew inscription to be found, testifying to Hebrew writing abilities as early as the 10th century BCE. This stands opposed to the dating of the composition of the Bible in much current academic research, which does not recognize the possibility that the Bible or parts of it could have been written during this ancient period.

Galil also noted that the inscription was discovered in a provincial Judean town, explaining that if there were scribes in the periphery, it can be assumed that those inhabiting the central region and Jerusalem were even more proficient writers. "It can now be maintained that it was highly reasonable that during the 10th century BCE, during the reign of King David, there were scribes in Israel who were able to write literary texts and complex historiographies such as the books of Judges and Samuel." He added that the

complexity of the text, along with the impressive fortifications revealed at the site, refute theories that attempt to deny the existence of the Kingdom of Israel at that time.

The contents of the text express social sensitivity to the fragile position of weaker members of society and the inscription testifies to the presence of strangers within the Israeli society as far back as this ancient period, calling on native Hebrews to provide support for these strangers. It advocates care for widows and orphans and encourages the king – who at that time had the responsibility of curbing social inequality – to be involved in improving Israeli society. This inscription is similar in its content to Biblical scriptures (Isaiah 1:17, Psalms 72:3, Exodus 23:3, and others), but according to Galil it is not copied from any Biblical text.

The deciphered text:

[.....]

1' 'l t's w'bd 't

2' špt% [']b[d] w'lm[n] špt% yt[m]

3' [w]gr [r]b 'll rb [d]l w

4' '[l]mn šqm ybd mlk

5' '[b]yn [w]'bd šk gr t[mk]

[.....]

1' you shall not do [it], but worship the [Lord].

2' Judge the sla[ve] and the wid[ow] / Judge the orph[an]

3' [and] the stranger. [P]lead for the infant / plead for the po[or and]

4' the widow. Rehabilitate [the poor] at the hands of the king.

5' Protect the po[or and] the slave / [supp]ort the stranger.