

# We Walk By Faith and By Facts!

**Sermon Given by Rabbi Moshe Yoseph Koniuchowsky  
9/30/04 Sukkot-Tabernacles First Day**



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*Delivered Live at B'nai Yahshua Synagogue North Miami Beach  
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Danieyl 12:4  
Yirmeyahu 16:21  
Bamidbar 6:24-27  
Devarim 29:29

Article read and taught to the Miami Beach Yisrael Revival. In addition to reading in order to provide factual data, the following key points were made.

- This incredibly significant discovery is a fulfillment of prophecy.  
Danieyal 12:4

- YHWH would cause events that would declare His Name to the world in the end of this age, and He would use BOTH increased spiritual and physical knowledge, such as archeology and the information superhighway of the internet to declare and restore His Name, even to those who don't want to receive it! Yirmeyahu 16:21
- Its is no accident that through the discovery of these twin amulets (for both houses of Yisrael!) that the oldest known complete verse we now have in our possession is the MEANS AND THE BENEDICTION by which Yahweh would ETERNALLY place and seal His Name upon all the children of Yisrael both male and female. The fact that the verse uncovered was Bamidabr 6:24-27 is a further validation of what Yahweh is doing in the earth at this time, sealing His people with His Name.
- The significance of this discovery is beyond words. This verse predates the Dead Sea Scrolls by 600 to 700 years!
- This discovery is a major confirmation that YHWH is taking the things that once belonged to Him in the past, and is now turning them over to us, as the revelations that were His, but have now become ours and our children's forever. Devarim 29:29
- Luke 19:40 Yahshua PROPHECIED that if the witness of the full truth of the gospel and the saving Names was not spoken by first century Jews, that at the end of the age the stones/rock/tombs around Yahrushalayim would cry out! That's exactly what has happened with this discovery, as the amulets have been found within the stones southwest of Yahrushalayim.
- Beresheet 25:8 and many other later verses refer to what this discovery was also all about! When a family member died in a Hebrew family, he or she was placed on a burial bench in the tomb along with personal items such as vases and jewelry. After the dead body decayed, the bones were collected and placed in a bone repository located in a separate area of the same tomb, to allow for other family members to later be buried in the same tomb. This Hebraic practice is referred to as being "gathered unto his fathers." This term used here in Scripture for the first time, is used many more times in the First Covenant. This key phrase helps to strongly establish the "One Yisrael" doctrine. The mention here of Abraham being gathered in this matter, lends further evidence that YHWH considered all those before Abraham to be faithful Torah keepers like Enoch, Noach,

- and Shem (Melech-Tzadik), who all walked in His ways. He honored them by calling them Abraham's fathers. In YHWH's view, the nation and people that would become Yisrael, started way before Abraham, and as such were the physical and spiritual fathers to whom Abraham was gathered.
- Yeshayahu 45:23-25. We see in these remarkable artifacts that even the common man, or woman used YHWH's true Name as a protection against unclean spirits, or demons. They stated on the amulet that a confession in the true Name of YHWH is their personal authority over demons. From this we discover that the people of Yisrael never trusted in HaShem, but in YHWH, prior to their 70 years in the sun at Babylon!
  - These artifacts contain the oldest known usage of YHWH's Name from the First (Solomon's) Temple times.

#### THE FACTS! FROM THE NY TIMES SEPT. 28, 2004!

The words are among the most familiar and ecumenical in the liturgies of Judaism and Christianity. At the close of a worship service, the rabbi, priest or pastor delivers, with only slight variations, the comforting and fortifying benediction:

"May the YHWH bless you and keep you; may the YHWH cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the YHWH lift up his countenance upon you and grant you peace."

An archaeological discovery in 1979 revealed that the Priestly Benediction, as the verse from Numbers 6:24-26 is called, appeared to be the earliest biblical passage ever found in ancient artifacts. Two tiny strips of silver, each wound tightly like a miniature scroll and bearing the inscribed words, were uncovered in a tomb outside Jerusalem and initially dated from the late seventh or early sixth century B.C. - some 400 years before the famous Dead Sea Scrolls.

But doubts persisted. The silver was cracked and corroded, and many words and not a few whole lines in the faintly scratched inscriptions were unreadable. Some critics contended that the artifacts were from the third or second century B.C., and thus of less importance in establishing the antiquity of religious concepts and language that became part of the Hebrew Bible.

So researchers at the University of Southern California have now re-examined the inscriptions using new photographic and computer

imaging techniques. The words still do not exactly leap off the silver. But the researchers said they could finally be "read fully and analyzed with far greater precision," and that they were indeed the earliest.

In a scholarly report published this month, the research team concluded that the improved reading of the inscriptions confirmed their greater antiquity. The script, the team wrote, is indeed from the period just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar and the subsequent exile of Israelites in Babylonia.

The researchers further reaffirmed that the scrolls "preserve the earliest known citations of texts also found in the Hebrew Bible and that they provide us with the earliest examples of confessional statements concerning Yahweh."

Some of the previously unreadable lines seemed to remove any doubt about the purpose of the silver scrolls: they were amulets. Unrolled, one amulet is nearly four inches long and an inch wide and the other an inch and a half long and about half an inch wide. **The inscribed words, the researchers said, were "intended to provide a blessing that will be used to protect the wearer from some manner of evil forces."**

The report in *The Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* was written by Dr. Gabriel Barkay, the archaeologist at Bar-Ilan University in Israel who discovered the artifacts, and collaborators associated with Southern California's West Semitic Research Project. The project leader is Dr. Bruce Zuckerman, a professor of Semitic languages at U.S.C., who worked with Dr. Marilyn J. Lundberg, a Hebrew Bible specialist with the project, and Dr. Andrew G. Vaughn, a biblical historian at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. A companion article for next month's issue of the magazine *Near Eastern Archaeology* describes the new technology used in the research. The article is by the same authors, as well as Kenneth Zuckerman, Dr. Zuckerman's brother and a specialist in photographing ancient documents.

**Other scholars not affiliated with the research but familiar with it agreed with the group's conclusions.**

They said it was a relief to have the antiquity and authenticity of the artifacts confirmed, considering that other inscriptions from biblical times have suffered from their uncertain provenance.

Scholars also noted that early Hebrew inscriptions were a rarity, and called the work on the amulets a significant contribution to an

understanding of the history of religion in ancient Israel, particularly the time of the Judean Monarchy 2,600 years ago.

"These photographs are far superior to what you can see looking at the inscriptions with the naked eye," said Dr. Wayne Pitard, professor of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern religions at the University of Illinois.

Dr. Pitard said the evidence for the antiquity of the benediction was now compelling, although this did not necessarily mean that the Book of Numbers already existed at that time. Possibly it did, he added, but if not, at least some elements of the book were current before the Babylonian exile.

A part of the sacred Torah of Judaism (the first five books of the Bible), Numbers includes a narrative of the Israelite wanderings from Mount Sinai to the east side of the Jordan River. Some scholars think the Torah was compiled in the time of the exile. A number of other scholars, the so-called minimalists, who are influential mainly in Europe, argue that the Bible was a relatively recent invention by those who took control of Judea in the late fourth century B.C. In this view, the early books of the Bible were largely fictional to give the new rulers a place in the country's history and thus a claim to the land.

"The new research on the inscriptions suggests that that's not true," Dr. Pitard said. In fact, the research team noted in its journal report that the improved images showed the seventh-century lines of the benediction to be "actually closer to the biblical parallels than previously recognized."

Dr. P. Kyle McCarter of Johns Hopkins University, a specialist in ancient Semitic scripts, said the research should "settle any controversy over these inscriptions."

A close study, Dr. McCarter said, showed that the handwriting is an early style of Hebrew script and the letters are from an old Hebrew alphabet, which had all but ceased to be used after the destruction of Jerusalem. Later Hebrew writing usually adopted the Aramaic alphabet. There was an exception in the time of Roman rule, around the first centuries B.C. and A.D. The archaic Hebrew script and letters were revived and used widely in documents. But Dr. McCarter noted telling attributes of the strokes of the letters and the spelling on the amulets that, he said, ruled out the more recent date for the inscriptions. Words in the revived Hebrew writing would have included letters indicating

vowel sounds. The benediction, the scholar said, was written in words spelled entirely with consonants, the authentic archaic way.

The two silver scrolls were found in 1979 deep inside a burial cave in a hillside known as Ketef Hinnom, west of the Old City of Jerusalem. Dr. Barkay, documenting the context of the discovery, noted that the artifacts were at the back of the tomb embedded in pottery and other material from the seventh or sixth centuries B.C. Such caves were reused for burials over many centuries. Near this tomb's entrance were artifacts from the fourth century, but nothing so recent remains in the undisturbed recesses.

It took Dr. Barkay another seven years before he felt sure enough of what he had to announce details of the discovery. Even then, for all their microscopic examination of the inscriptions at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, scholars remained frustrated by the many unreadable words and lines.

About a decade ago, Dr. Barkay enlisted the help of Dr. Zuckerman, whose team had earned a reputation for achieving the near-impossible in photographing illegible ancient documents.

Working with scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Dr. Zuckerman's group used advanced infrared imaging systems enhanced by electronic cameras and computer image-processing technology to draw out previously invisible writing on a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The researchers also pioneered electronic techniques for reproducing missing pieces of letters on documents. By examining similar letters elsewhere in the text, they were able to recognize half of a letter and reconstruct the rest of it in a scribe's own peculiar style.

"We learned a lot from work on the Dead Sea Scrolls," Dr. Zuckerman said. "But at first a processing job like this would send your computers into cardiac arrest. We had to wait for computer technology to catch up with our needs."

As the researchers said in their magazine article, the only reasonably clear aspect of the inscriptions was the Priestly Benediction. Other lines preceding or following the prayer "could barely be seen."

To get higher-definition photographs of the inscriptions, Ken Zuckerman applied an old photographer's technique called "light painting," brought up to date by the use of fiber-optic technology. He used a hand-held light in an otherwise dark room to illuminate a spot on the artifact during

a time exposure. In addition, he photographed the artifact at different angles, which made the scratched letters shine in stark relief. The next step was to convert the pictures to digital form, making possible computer processing that brought out "the subtleties of the surface almost at the micron level." This analysis was particularly successful in joining a partial letter stroke on one side of a crack with the rest of the stroke on the other side. It also enabled the researchers to restore fragments of letters to full legibility by matching them with clear letters from elsewhere in the text.

In this way, the researchers filled in more of the letters and words of the benediction itself and for the first time deciphered meaningful words and phrases in the lines preceding the benediction.

Scholars were particularly intrigued by a statement on the smaller artifact. It reads: "May h[e]/sh[e] be blessed by YHWH, the warrior/helper, and the rebuker of Evil."

Referring to God [sic], Yahweh, as the "rebuker of Evil" is similar to language used in the Bible and in various Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars said. The phraseology is also found in later incantations and amulets associated with Israel, evidence that these artifacts were also amulets, researchers concluded.

"In the ancient world, amulets were taken quite seriously," Dr. Zuckerman said. "There's evil out there, demons, and you need protection. Having this around your neck, you are involving God's presence and protection against harm."

Dr. Esther Eshel, a professor of the Bible at Bar-Ilan and an authority on Hebrew inscriptions, said this was the earliest example of amulets from Israel. But she noted that the language of the benediction was similar to a blessing ("May he bless you and keep you") found on a jar from the eighth century B.C.

If the new findings are correct, the people who wore these amulets may have died before they had to face the limitations of their efficacy. They might then have asked in uncomprehending despair, "Where was Yahweh when the Babylonians swooped down on Jerusalem?"

Other scholars, including those previously skeptical, will soon be analyzing the improved images. In a departure from usual practices, the researchers not only published their findings in a standard print version

in a journal but also as an accompanying "digital article," a CD version of the article and the images to allow scholars to examine and manipulate the data themselves.

The research group said, "As far as we are aware, this is the first article to be done in this fashion, but it certainly will not be the last."