

Message Decoded: 3,000-Year-Old Text Sheds Light on Biblical History

By [Sasha Bogursky](#)

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Archaeologist Eilat Mazar shows off her 3,000-year-old Biblical find. (Key to David's City/Youtube)

All experts agree that the language on the Ophel Inscription is an early-Semitic language. The question remains, which one is it? (Key to David's City/Youtube)

A few characters on the side of a 3,000-year-old earthenware jug dating back to the time of King David has stumped archaeologists until now -- and a fresh translation may have profound ramifications for our understanding of the Bible.

Experts had suspected the fragmentary inscription was written in the language of the Canaanites, a biblical people who lived in the present-day Israel. Not so, says one expert who claims to have cracked the code: The mysterious language is actually the oldest form of written Hebrew, placing the ancient Israelites in Jerusalem earlier than previously believed.

"Hebrew speakers were controlling Jerusalem in the 10th century, which biblical chronology points to as the time of David and Solomon," ancient Near Eastern

history and biblical studies expert Douglas Petrovich told FoxNews.com.

"Whoever they were, they were writing in Hebrew like they owned the place," he said. "It is just the climate among scholars that they want to attribute as little as possible to the ancient Israelites."

[First discovered](#) near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem last year, the 10th century B.C. fragment has been labeled the Ophel Inscription. It likely bears the name of the jug's owners and its contents.

If Petrovich's analysis proves true, it would be evidence of the accuracy of Old Testament tales. If Hebrew as a written language existed in the 10th century, as he says, the ancient Israelites were recording their history in real time as opposed to writing it down several hundred years later. That would make the Old Testament an historical account of real-life events.

According to Petrovich, archaeologists are unwilling to call it Hebrew to avoid conflict. "It's just the climate among scholars that they want to attribute as little as possible to the ancient Israelites," he said.

Needless to say, his claims are stirring up controversy among those who do not like to mix the hard facts of archaeology -- dirt, stone and bone -- [with stories from the Bible](#).

Tel Aviv University archaeologist Israel Finkelstein told FoxNews.com that the Ophel Inscription is critical to the early history of Israel. But romantic notions of the Bible shouldn't cloud scientific methods - a message he pushed in 2008 when [a similar inscription was found](#) at a site many now call [one of King David's palaces](#).

At the time, he warned the Associated Press against the "revival in the belief that what's written in the Bible is accurate like a newspaper."

Today, he told FoxNews.com that the Ophel Inscription speaks to "the expansion of Jerusalem from the Temple Mount, and shows us the growth of Jerusalem and the complexity of the city during that time." But the Bible? Maybe, maybe not.

Professor Aren Maeir of Bar Ilan University agrees that ...

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