




THE MT. EBAL ALTARS AND THE CURSE TABLET.

A study in “facts do not
matter to us.”

**Presented at the February 19, 2024, meeting
of the St. Louis chapter of Reasonable Faith**



Professor Yoel Elitzur of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem “has noted that it has become fashionable in academic settings to reject the biblical narrative that the people of Israel were in Egypt, that they wandered in the desert that they conquered the land in a military campaign and that they settled the land with 12 tribes.” *Bible and Spade*, Spring 2023, p. 12.

The Documentary Hypothesis “was almost universally accepted for most of the 20th century. It posited that the Pentateuch is a compilation of four originally independent documents: the Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) sources. The first of these, J, was dated to the Solomonic period (c. 950 BCE). E was dated somewhat later, in the 9th century BCE, and D was dated just before the reign of King Josiah in the 7th or 8th century. Finally, P was generally dated to the time of Ezra in the 5th century BCE.” (Wikipedia, with its usual anti-Bible bias)

God's commands for Mt. Ebal

Deut. 27:1-3, ESV: Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, “Keep the whole commandment that I command you today. And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you.

God's commands for Mt. Ebal

Deut. 27:4-8: And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly.”

Fulfilling God's command for Mt. Ebal

Joshua 8:30-32: At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, “an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

Adam Zertal 1936 - 2015



Zertal excavated at the Mt. Ebal site from 1982 to 1989. He thought that a rectangular 7 m by 9 m altar he found there was Joshua's altar. He dated it to ~1200 BC.

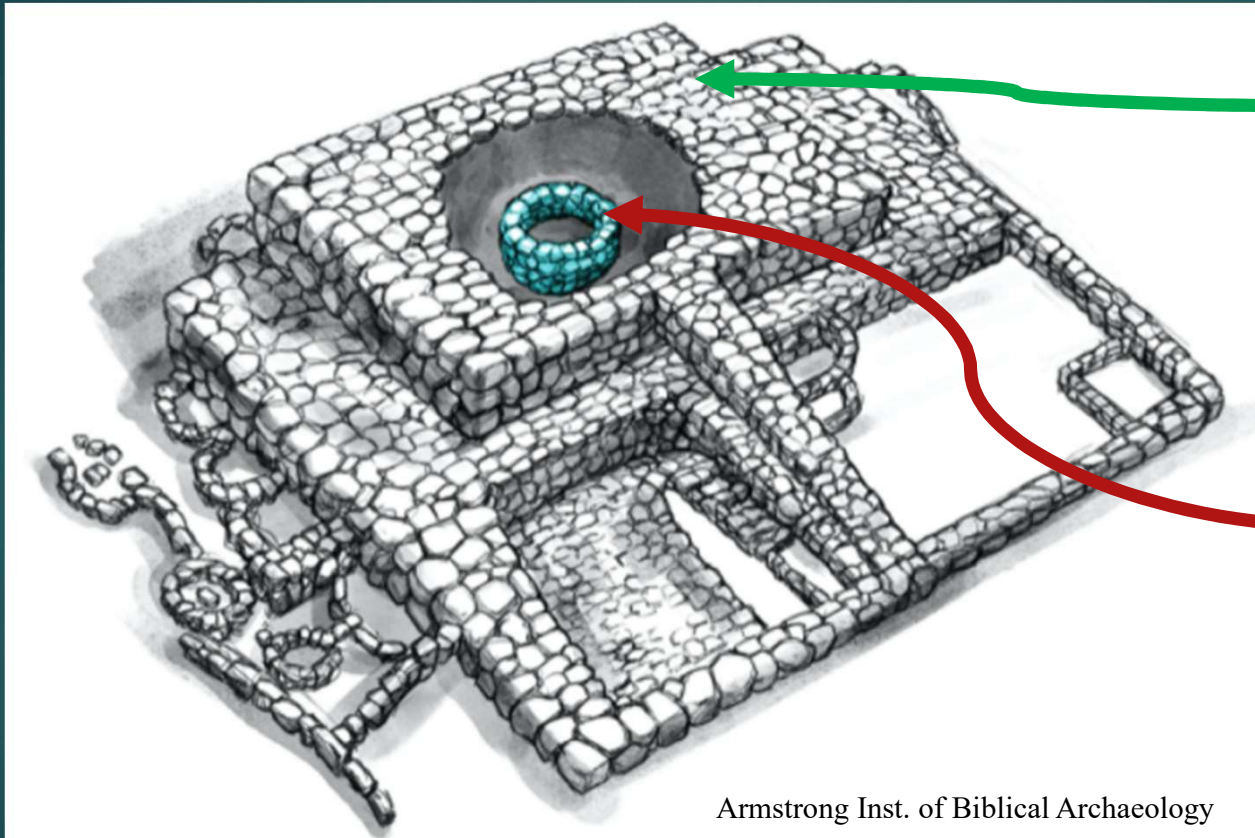
However, centered underneath it was a smaller round altar. The rectangular altar apparently had been built to honor and protect the smaller, circular altar. Steven Rudd pointed out to Zertal that the round altar was the real Joshua's altar. Zertal ignored this suggestion. His paradigm had already been set.

Mt. Ebal and its altar(s)



Note: The upper left rectangle is the 13th century altar, 7 m x 9 m. The two rectangular pits are where Zertal excavated. The exact center of this altar covered, as if to protect and honor, the earlier small circular altar.

The two altars on Mt. Ebal



Armstrong Inst. of Biblical Archaeology

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

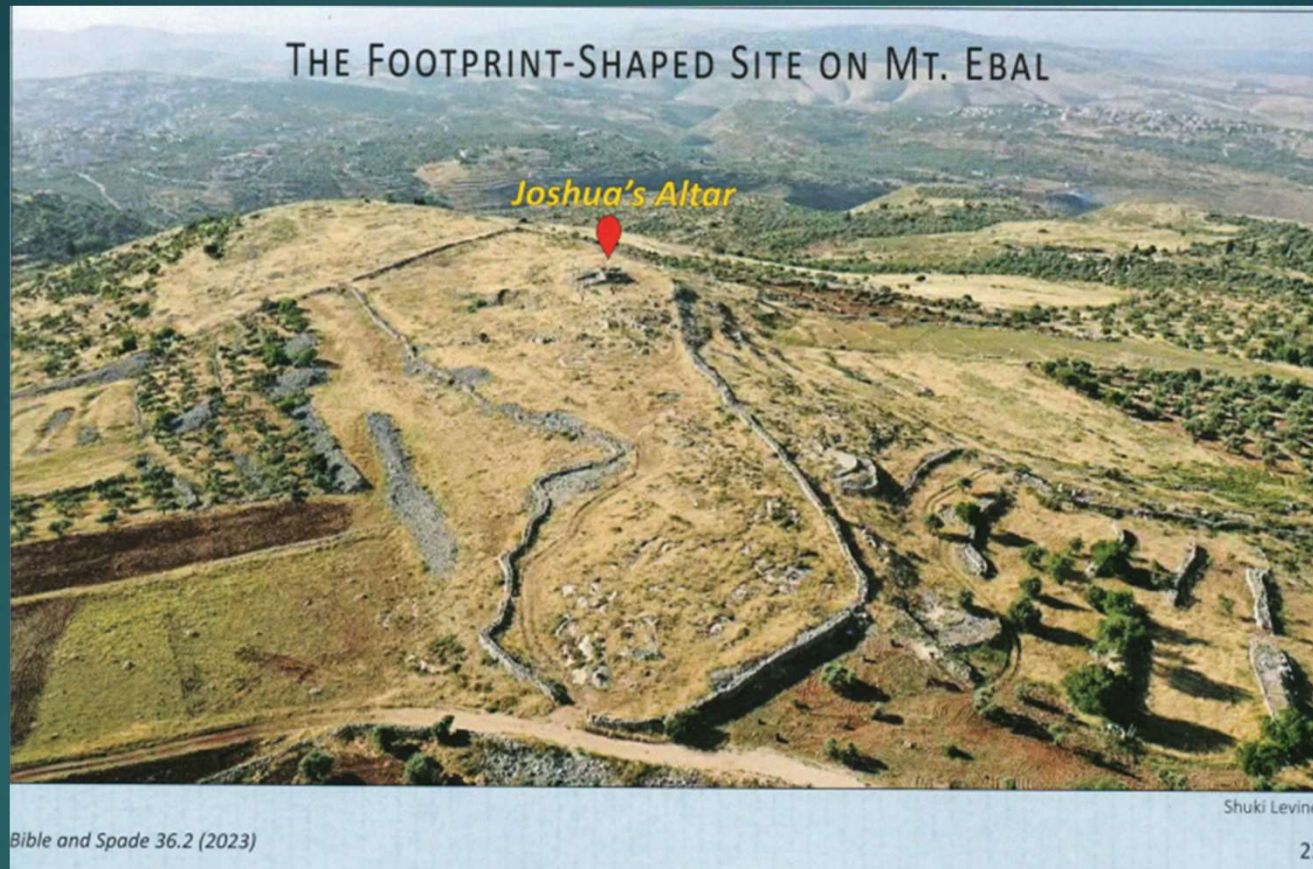
The rectangular altar was built over a round altar. Zertal called the earlier altar "primogenal"—an obscure term he used that was based on his strange theory that there were Israelites in Israel before Joshua, and there never was an Exodus from Egypt.

Archaeological dating of the two altars

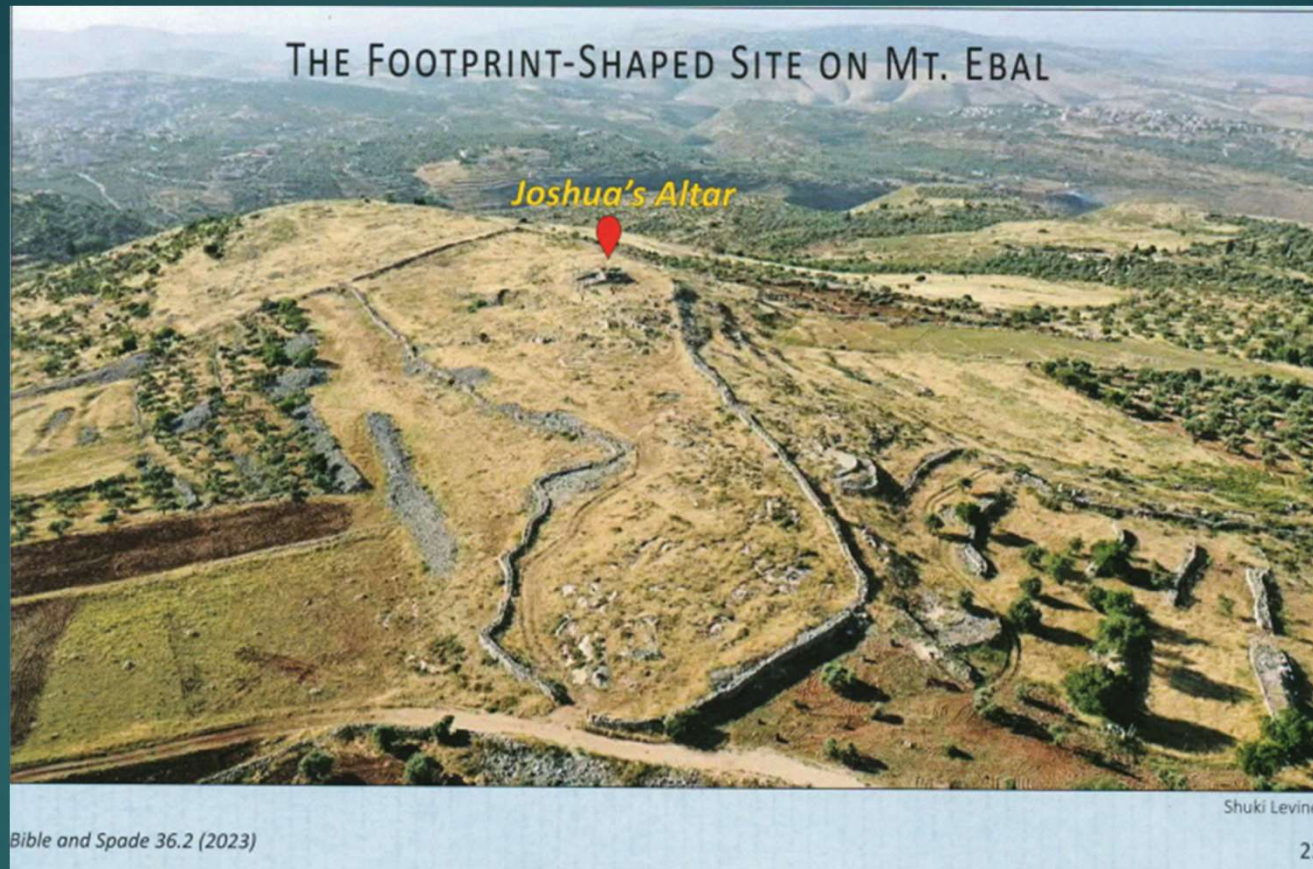
Although Zertal dated the earlier altar from 1250 to 1200 BC, Abigail Leavitt lists the following pottery portions, taken from the earlier altar's stratum, that precede 1300 BC:

Item	Bronze age date	BC equivalent
Carinated bowl	LB1b/LB11a	1450 to 1300 BC
Bowl/krater	LB11a	1400 to 1300
Chalice	LB1b/LB11a	1450 to 1300
Chalice base	LB1b/LB11a	1450 to 1300
Carinated bowl	LB1/LB11a	1550 to 1300

Abigail Leavitt, *The el-Burnat (A) Structure(s): Joshua's Altar?* (Katy, Texas: Nehemiah Press, 2022), pp. 47, 49.



There are 6 other foot-shaped large enclosures like this in the hill country of eastern Israel. The walls are too low to be used for defense or for keeping cattle. What was their purpose?



Deut. 11:24: “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours.” Joshua 1:3: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised Moses.”

“Virtually all modern secular scholars, and most Christian and Jewish scholars, reject the Mosaic authorship of the Book of Deuteronomy and date the book much later, between the 7th and 5th centuries BC.” (Wikipedia)

Wikipedia has a clever policy that any scholar who defends the basic historicity of the Bible is to be categorized as “fringe.” This automatically denigrates the more than 4,000 members of the ETS, most of whom have advanced degrees and teach in educational institutions.

Another Wikipedia statement that you will see on some of the pages where someone quotes the Bible: No quote from a ‘religious’ source is to be accepted unless can be independently verified by another source. Don’t the pseudo-scholars and censors at Wikipedia know that virtually every ancient inscription has religious statements?

“. . . Facts don’t matter to us . . . We control the narrative . . .”

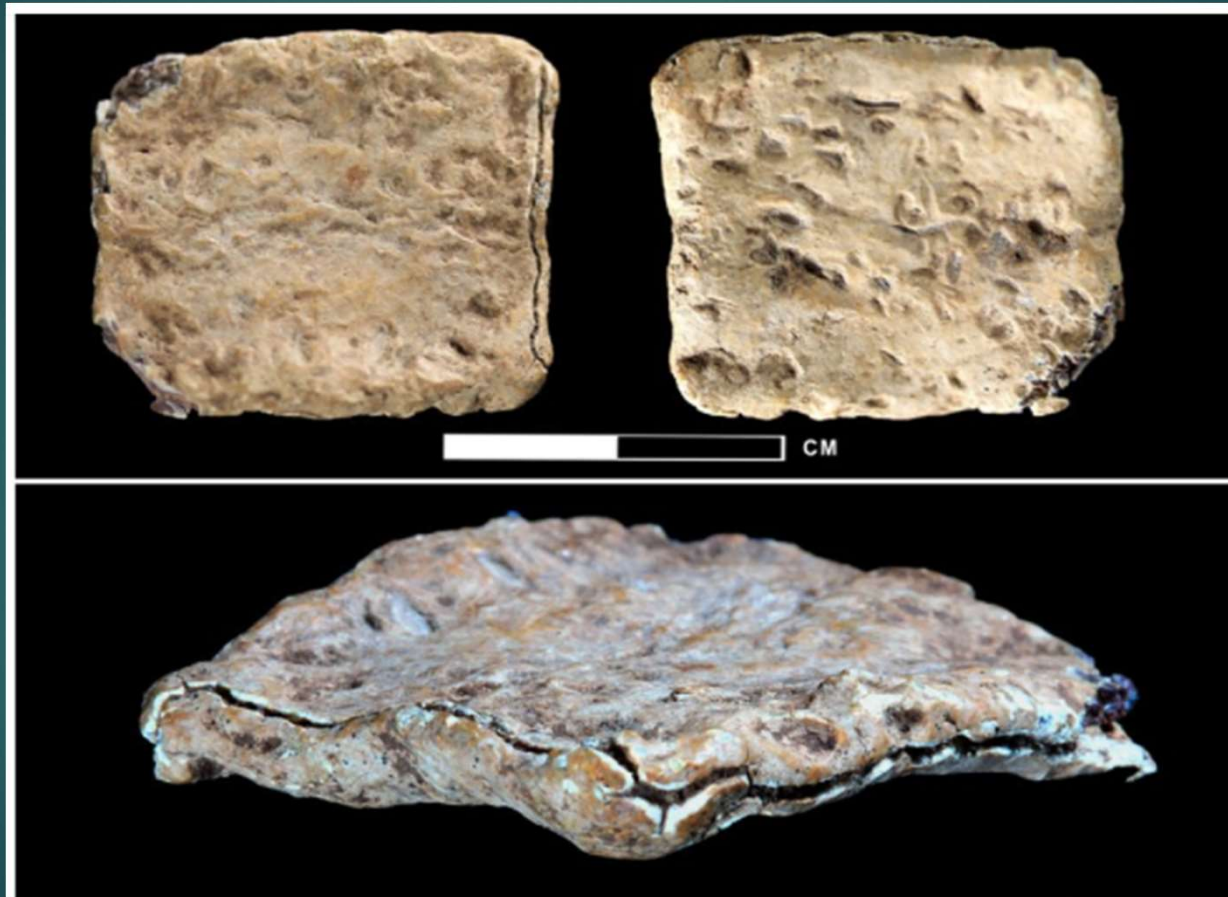
Deut. 11:24: “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours.” Aren’t the six foot-shaped enclosures, the one on Mt. Ebal enclosing an altar built around 1400 BC, evidence (not absolute proof, of course) that Deuteronomy was written ca. 1400 or before?


Stages of use of the two altars at Mt. Ebal

(Adapted from presentation by Abigail Leavitt, 2023 NEAS meeting, San Antonio)

- **1406 BC – Joshua builds the small round altar on Mt. Ebal**
- **1406 – 1200 BC Israelites occasionally sacrifice at Mt. Ebal**
- **1200 – Israelites build the large rectangular altar to commemorate the site and protect the round altar on which the words of the Law were written**
- **1200 – 1150 Israelites continue to use the site**
- **1150 – Israelites bury both altars. They remained buried until the 1980s AD.**
- **AD 1980s – Adam Zertal uncovers the pile of stones and finds the 2 altars.**
- **AD 2007 – Steven Rudd suggests to Zertal that the earlier altar is Joshua's. Zertal ignores the obvious logic of Rudd's suggestion.**
- **Dec. 2019 – Scott Stripling and wet-sifting team find a *defixio* (curse tablet) in Zertal's garbage dump of material from the altars.**
- **May 2023 – Publication of the curse tablet in *Heritage Science*, a peer-reviewed online journal.**

The lead curse tablet






In further wet-sifting of the pile in which the curse tablet was found, the Associates for Biblical Research team found an iron stylus. Scott Stripling thinks this may have been the stylus that was used in writing the words onto the curse tablet.

Job 19:23-25 “Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives . . .”

Judging by Job 2:11, (Eliphaz being the grandson of Esau, who was born in 2006 BC), the book of Job was written before Moses was born, which was in 1528 or 1527 BC. That makes Job the oldest book of the Bible.



Epigraphical dating of the curse tablet agrees with the archaeological dating of the earlier round altar (Joshua's altar)

“Enhanced photogrammetry and tomographic reconstructions revealed letters written in a proto-alphabetic (=Proto-Hebrew) script, likely dating to the Late Bronze Age II (ca. 1400-1200 BCE), but no later than ca. 1250 BCE. The original archaeological context and analysis of the lead reinforce this date. . . The use of the divine name *YHW* leaves no doubt that the text is Hebrew and not Canaanite.”

“ ‘You are Cursed by the God YHW:’ an early Hebrew inscription from Mt. Ebal” *Heritage Science* 11:105 (2023), p. 22. Available online.

Interpretation of the contents of the curse tablet agreed upon by the three epigraphers, following extensive tomographic analysis and published in *Heritage Science*.

Cursed, cursed, cursed – cursed by the God YHW.

You will die cursed.

Cursed you will surely die.

Cursed by YHW – cursed, cursed, cursed.

- B -

You will die cursed.

Cursed you will surely die.

- A' -

According to the “Documentary Hypothesis,” The divine names “El” (God) and YHWH were never used together until after 600 BC. They are on the Curse Tablet together. By ignoring this, those who follow the JEDP theory show their anti-intellectual bias: “Facts don’t matter to us.”

Cursed, cursed, cursed – cursed by the God YHW.

El

You will die cursed.

Cursed you will surely die.

Cursed by YHW – cursed, cursed, cursed.

The Flood Chiasm: Gen 6:10–9:19

From the *toledoth* ('histories,' not 'generations') of
Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 10:1). JEDP theory says Gen 6-9
is a hodgepodge by various authors at various later times.

A Noah (6:10a)	A' Noah (9:19)
B Shem, Ham and Japheth (6:10b)	B' Shem, Ham and Japheth (9:18b)
C Ark to be built (6:14–16)	C' Ark (9:18a)
D Flood announced (6:17)	D' No flood in future (9:11–17)
E Covenant with Noah (6:18–20)	E' Covenant with all flesh (9:8–10)
F Food in the ark (6:21)	F' Food outside ark (9:1–4)
G Command to enter ark (7:1–3)	G' Command to leave ark (8:15–17 [22])
H 7 days waiting for flood (7:4–5)	H' 7 Another 7 days waiting (8:12–13)
I 7 days waiting for flood (7:7–10)	I' 7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:10-11)
J Entry to ark (7:11–15)	J' Raven and dove leave ark (8:7–9)
K Yahweh shuts Noah in (7:16)	K' Noah opens window of ark (8:6b)
L 40 days flood (7:17a)	L' 40 days (end of) (8:6a)
M Waters increase (7:17b–18)	M' Waters abate (8:5)
N Mountains covered (7:19–20)	N' Mountain tops visible (8:4–5)
O 150 days waters prevail (7:21–24)	O' 150 days waters abate (8:3)
P God remembers Noah (8:1)	

Facts do not matter to us . . .

Quote in the archaeological journal *IEJ*: “The alleged inscribed ‘tablet’ is, in fact, a fishing-net weight (sinker).”

Note: no lakes, rivers, or even ponds on or by Mt. Ebal. No crease as found on real fishing sinkers. No sinkers have been found except in coastal regions.

Do archaeological facts mean nothing to an archaeological journal, because their minimalist paradigm must be maintained at all costs? And does it not mean something that a defixio –curse tablet—was found on the Mount of Curses?

This is *Paradigm Paralysis* at its finest. For these critics, the Bible, in particular the Book of Joshua, is not real history. No credence should be given to any evidence that contradicts this paradigm. This is not science, and not even good archaeology; this is support-my-view-at-any-cost.

Problems for the skeptics

- 1) If the Book of Joshua is a fiction invented in around the eighth century BC, we would expect the story of an altar on Mt. Ebal also to be a fiction. It could not be a story made up hundreds of years later to explain an altar that was observed there, because both altars were completely covered over with a pile of rocks ca. 1150 BC.
- 2) Why was plaster found with the altar? That is not the usual case for altars, but it is consistent with Moses told Joshua in Deut. 27:2,3: “Set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on the all the words of this law . . .”
- 3) Why is the lead tablet in the exact shape and material of defixios (curse tablets) that were used even down to Roman times, so that the wet-sifting team immediately identified it as a defixio, before seeing any writing on it?
- 4) Why is the very early form of the characters, as compared with the earliest alphabet examples in Sinai, consistent with the Bible’s date for entry into the land in the late 15th Century BC?

More Problems for the skeptics

5) The “JEDP” theory, the relics of which are still taught in liberal seminaries and Wikipedia, says that the “E” author who used El or Elohim for the name of God was different from the “J” author who used Yahweh (Jehovah). Someone later than both of these combined their two accounts. But the curse tablet has both: “El” and “YHW,” the latter known as the earliest form of the later YHWH. By any fair measure, then, the curse tablet, if its reading is correct, is fatal to the central thesis of the JEDP hypothesis.

6) Two internationally renowned epigraphers argued that there was no writing on the artifact at all but just random bumps and scratches. One of these experts, in an interview with Sean McDowell, said that nothing can be made of the letters on the tablet. How does he explain the three letters shown here that are contiguous and form the consonants of the Name of God, YHW, in an alphabetic form that dates to around 1400-1300 BC?



7) The earliest pottery associated with the earlier altar is from LBI/LBIIa, before 1250 BC and consistent with its being constructed around 1400 BC. This is inconsistent with Zertal’s dating of the ‘primogenial’ altar to 1250 BC; to date it earlier would mean it is the real Joshua’s altar. Further paradigm paralysis, contradicting both archaeology and epigraphy in order to discredit the Bible.

Biblical dates associated with the construction of Joshua's altar

1446 BC, spring (Nisan): Exodus. Dated from 1 Kgs 6:1 and the firm date for Solomon's 4th year when Temple construction began (spring 967 BC).

1406, late winter (11th month): Moses dies. Israelites mourn for him 30 days (Deut 1:3, 34:8).

1406, 10th day of first month (early spring): Israelites cross Jordan into the Promised Land. They celebrate Passover on 14th of month (Josh 4:19, 5:10).

1406, shortly after Passover: Jericho is encircled for 7 days and captured (Josh 6:3,4).

1406, next event: Initial defeat, then victory, at Ai. Probably within 2 weeks of defeat of Jericho (Josh 7, 8:1-29).

1406, Next event, according to Josh 8:30-35: Building of altar on Mt. Ebal.

The Biblical sequence of events indicates that Joshua's altar was built in early 1406 BC, within three months of the death of Moses. The 1406 date is in agreement with the pottery and epigraphic studies that show the altar was built before Zertal's 1250 BC date for the earlier (round) altar.

What is the consequence of the dating from the previous slide:

If the Bible is relating reliable historical facts regarding the Exodus and Conquest, then any writing found on that altar would be from the writings of Moses, very likely the curses of Deut 27 and possibly the blessings of Deut 28, in accordance with Moses's command to Joshua in Deut 27:1-8. In other words, we would have Scriptural texts dating back to within three months of when Moses finished writing the Pentateuch.

The fact that the small altar found by Zertal had plaster, in addition to ashes and kosher animal bones, should have been an alarm to the critics that their theories were in jeopardy. Ashes and bones would be expected, but why plaster? Plaster is usually not found on altars in the Ancient Near East. But Moses told Joshua to write the words of the Law on plaster on the altar.

What is the consequence of the dating from the previous slide:

The Biblical sequence of events indicates that Joshua's altar was built in early 1406 BC, within three months of the death of Moses.

As of this writing (Feb. 2024), an Israeli scholar has been given the task of seeing if, by using the infrared and ultraviolet scanners available at the University of Haifa, he can discriminate any letters on the plaster that Zertal took from the Mt. Ebal altar over 30 years ago. If he finds any writing, the theory that the Bible is historically accurate predicts that it would be from the Torah.

Conversely, the theory that the Exodus and Conquest are unhistorical would predict such a thing could never happen because of the universal creed among the higher critics that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, and the Exodus did not happen as described in the Bible.

Dr. Scott Stripling at Joshua's Altar, June 2023



Facts matter to my friend Scott

Addendum: The Mt. Ebal Site, and all of the Holy Land, are given to the people of Israel forever. This is taught in the Bible, Gen 13:14-17, 26:3-5, etc. Not so well known is that **the Qur'an also says Allah gave the Holy Land to Israel, and to no one else.**

- **Surah 4:54:** “But We had already given the people of Abraham the Book [the Torah, OT] and Wisdom and conferred upon them a great kingdom.” The Holy Land is the only place Israel ever had a kingdom.
- **5:20, 21:** “Remember Moses said to his people . . . ‘O my people! Enter the Holy Land which Allah hath assigned unto you . . .’”
- **7:137:** “And We made a people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both East and West . . . The fair promise of the Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel . . .”
- **10:93:** “We settled the Children of Israel in a beautiful dwelling place . . .”
- **17:104:** “And we said thereafter to the Children of Israel, ‘Dwell securely in the land of promise . . .’”