

## THE EARLIEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF JESUS EVER FOUND

# BATTLE OVER THE JAMES BOX - DECEMBER 2004 UPDATE -

### DESPERATE MEN ARE SEARCHING FOR EVIDENCE

“Two years ago, an Israeli antiquities collector produced a stone box with an inscription suggesting it had held the remains of Jesus’ brother James . . . As for the inscription on the ossuary (a limestone box in which first-century Jews stored the bones of their dead), ‘the overwhelming scholarly consensus is that it’s a fake,’ according to Eric Meyers, a Judaic-studies scholar at Duke. The Israeli police have confiscated the box from the owner, who claimed to have bought it for \$200. A minority, though, holds to the view . . . that the inscription may be genuine.”—*Newsweek*, August 30, 2004.

The above summary is full of inaccuracies. In a December 2002 tract set, we described at length the remarkable discovery of the James Box (*The Burial Box of James, the Brother of Jesus* [WM-1118]), with a rather complete coverage of what the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy has to say about James.

In October 2003, we published *Battle over the James Box* [WM-1169-1170], which disclosed the shocking efforts of the Israeli government to disprove the genuineness of this outstanding archaeological discovery. Apparently, there continues to exist a deep resentment in Israel against Christ. The Israeli government, working through their Israel Antiquities Authority, has tried every means to stifle investigation, produce false reports, and even prosecute the owner of the box as an evil man.

#### REVIEWING EARLIER EVENTS

In order to properly introduce the subject, I would have to repeat the 12 pages of data already sent you. But, in brief, Oded Golan, 52, a soft-spoken engineer who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel, has for decades privately collected antiquities. In the 1970s, he purchased an ossuary from an antiquities dealer for a few hundred dollars.

In the time of Christ, when a Jew in Palestine died, he was placed in a burial cave until the flesh rotted away. Then the bones were taken and placed in a rectangular stone box (an ossuary) with a stone lid on top. The name of the person was then scratched on the side of the box.

In some instances, the bones of several family members were placed in the box. In 1990, the box of family members of “Joseph son of Caiaphas” was found. The older bones were assumed to be those of the same Caiaphas before whom Jesus stood during His first of three trials early Friday morning, on the day He was crucified.

Not knowing the Hebrew script, after purchasing it, Golan stored the box among his collection and forgot it. In April 2002, André Lemaire, one of the world’s leading epigraphers, flew from the Sorbonne, in Paris, to Tel Aviv, and then drove to Jerusalem where he worked for over five months at Hebrew University’s Institute for Advanced Studies. Scholars from all over the world go there to consult with other scholars and work on projects. (*Epigraphy* is the study of ancient inscriptions. Lemaire’s field of expertise is Old Testament Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions on stonework and monuments from the Babylonian captivity on down through the first several centuries A.D.)

On each of his trips to Jerusalem, Lemaire learns of important new finds and he is asked to analyze the writing on various objects. New discoveries are continually coming to light, either through archaeological studies or the antiquities market.

One day during his 2002 stay in Jerusalem, Lemaire met a collector, Oded Golan, who asked him to examine some objects he had. One was an ancient stone box—an ossuary. Golan had no idea whether the box had any significance or value.

Before being shown the actual box, Lemaire was shown photographs of it. The inscription was easy to read and the writing expert immediately recognized its tremendous importance.

After very carefully examining the actual burial box, Lemaire concluded that, due to the spelling, shape, and slant of Herodian-era letter forms—the inscription was genuine.

Lemaire has examined purported finds for so many years that he can sense when he is examining a fake; that is, an inscription and object that is declared to be genuine and/or ancient, but is not. He concluded that this burial box was fully genuine in

every detail.

Although Lemaire was an expert on handwriting, he wanted experts on stonework to closely examine the box before he, Lemaire, issued a report.

I will not here repeat the initial investigations, except to say that they all confirmed Lemaire's findings—that the inscription, the patina (the thin aging discoloration on the surface of the inscription and the box), and even the type of limestone in the box—all came from the first century A.D.

This initial investigation included a careful analysis by the Geological Survey of Israel, a department of the Israeli Ministry of Infrastructures, which carefully examined the box itself and its patina. When it was completed, they privately handed Lemaire a copy of their report. —*Nether the Israeli government, nor the general public, had, as of yet, learned of this astonishing discovery.* Orthodox Jews in Israel, who hold a pivotal vote in the Keneset (the Israeli Congress), were unaware of the find.

The official report of the Geological Survey concluded that the box was about 2,000 years old and that the one-line inscription etched into its side was of the same age.

This type of burial box is generally dated between about 20 B.C. and A.D. 70; and the practice of placing remains in stone boxes was widespread among the Jews of Judaea, from about A.D. 1 to A.D. 70.

Here is additional information about the lettering—the inscription—scratched on the side of the box:

Not only do the letter shapes have to fit into the time period, but the spelling should also match. In order to confirm that fact, it must be compared with every other inscription from that period. The language and historical context are also important.

Lemaire found that the distinctive shape (orthography) of the Aramaic letters, engraved on the box, closely agreed with this time period. None of these letters have any of the characteristics of lettering in a later period of time.

However, three letters on the inscription were unique: These are the *dalet*, *yod*, and *aleph*. (See the top of the next page.) On the James box, all three are somewhat slanted (cursive). As a result, these special letters and the overall pattern of the sentence date this inscription to the last few decades prior to A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed—and to no other time period in history.

After careful examination and later confirmed by other writing experts, in his report Lemaire dated this burial box to A.D. 63. As explained in the previous tract (*Battle over the James Box [WM-1169-1170]*) there is evidence that James, the brother of

Jesus, died only one year earlier.

Hershel Shanks, publisher of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, the largest popular journal dealing with matters relating to Biblical archaeological studies, announced the discovery in the November / December 2002 issue of that publication. News of the find created a sensation throughout the world.

Recognizing that it would bring immense numbers of tourists to Canada, the Toronto Museum asked to have the box shipped there; so that, for three months, it could be examined by experts from America and Canada, and also displayed to the general public.

However, because it had not been packed well, when the box was shipped in November, it was cracked in transit. After being carefully repaired, thousands of tourists came to see it. All the experts which examined the box pronounced it to be genuine.

One new and highly significant test, done at Toronto, was the ultraviolet light test. It showed the box and inscription to be very ancient. In February, the James box was shipped back to Golan, in Tel Aviv.

When Shanks, in a November 2003 interview with *Christianity Today*, declared the ossuary to be “the most important find in the history of New Testament archaeology,” public excitement increased even more.

Thoroughly enraged, the Israeli government stepped into the picture as soon as the box was shipped back from Toronto. First, they had been told nothing about the box's existence until Shanks in America published an article on it. Second, if genuine, the box would provide evidence that Jesus actually existed and the New Testament was true! Something had to be done.

To begin with, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) declared that the box belonged to them! Back in the 1980s, a law had been enacted that all finds within the borders of Israel must be turned over to the government.

But Golan stood firm in his contention that he had purchased the box in the 1970s, before that law went into effect.

Many feared that if the IAA gained permanent possession of the box, it would be hidden somewhere and never seen again.

Within a few days, Shuka Dorfman, Director-General of the IAA, notified Golan that he must let IAA experts carefully examine this purported “box of Jesus' brother” for themselves. Only then, Dorfman said, could an official decision be made.

Press reports were immediately issued by the IAA that, at last, an accurate investigation of the

**YOD**

**ALEPH**

**DALET**

**YOD**

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**But three letters on the inscription are unique: These are the *dalet* (“d” sound), the *yod* (“y” sound), and the *aleph* (soft breathing sound).**

**On the James box, all three are some-**

**what slanted. As a result, these special letters, along with the overall pattern of the sentence, date this inscription to the last few decades prior to A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed—and to no other time period in history.**

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box would be made. It would be followed by an exhaustive report.

Only a few weeks had passed since the totally favorable press conference by scientists at Toronto.

The thoroughly flawed, and essentially useless, IAA summary report was issued on June 20, 2003. It is discussed in *Battle Over the James Box* [WM-1169-1170].

**THE LATEST UPDATE**

It is now December 2004, and the IAA investigation has continued for over two years! Yet during that time they have been unable to produce any evidence sustaining their charge that the box is a fake, so Golan could be charged in court with a criminal act of some kind.

More than a hundred potential witnesses have been interrogated and thousands of documents collected. But no charges have been filed against Golan.

Yet IAA deputy director Uzi Dahari has repeatedly declared that the IAA is not 99 percent certain—but 100 percent certain—that the ossuary (the James box) and its inscription constitutes a gigantic hoax.

The IAA and Israeli police have confiscated hundreds of antiquities from Golan’s collection, including the James box. Because, according to Israeli

law, the government was only permitted to keep them three months, it repeatedly asked the court for extensions so it could examine the box still more.

Finally, Golan filed a legal paper opposing any more applications for extensions, claiming that the government should either charge him so that he can clear his name or return the confiscated items, including the ossuary.

Pleading for still more time, on January 11, 2004, the head of the police investigation told the court that “the investigation is close to completion and the authorities require several weeks before a charge is made.” Another extension was granted, and the weeks turned into months.

At the May 10 hearing, the judge was becoming upset over the repeated delays. The government told the court it wanted to keep the box, and all the other antiquities, for *an unlimited amount of time*, until it had completed its investigation. The judge refused this request.

In response, the government asked for a six-month extension. But the judge said it could only have three months—and only because it was claimed that the police had opened up new avenues of investigation” *which were “of significant international importance.”*

With such a dramatic announcement, what judge

could refuse such a request? Later that same month, IAA deputy director Uzi Dahari announced that an indictment against Golan would be filed within three or four months.”

The three and four months passed, and still there was no indictment. And still the antiquities were not returned to Golan.

In early August 2004, once again the government appeared before the judge and asked for another time extension. Quite angry, the judge said he found the government’s position “on its face unreasonable.” He also said this:

“It is not possible that the state should hold the rope from both ends, on one hand making serious allegations against the respondent [Oded Golan], and on the other hand preventing Golan from facing the charges in court as part of a legal proceeding . . . Therefore I instruct the release of the confiscated items, unless the applicant [the Israeli government] files an indictment by September 1, 2004.”

The judge also ruled that no further extensions would be granted.

The IAA and Israeli government were now under severe pressure to do something: either issue an indictment or return all the antiquities. By issuing the indictment, it could continue the investigation.

But no indictment was issued. More time passed and then, a few days before the first of September, the government suddenly appealed the district court’s ruling to a higher court. Why did the government take a chance of losing the case in the appeals court, when all it had to do was bring an in-

dictment?

*There could be only one solution to this puzzle:* The IAA and police knew that they had absolutely no evidence that either the box or its inscription were not genuine, so they could charge Golan with a fraudulent act.

At the appeals hearing, once again the government asked for an unlimited extension of time. Golan, who was present, declared through his attorney that this was a totally unreasonable request.

Finally, both parties agreed that, if the government was given just one more extension—to January 1, 2005, it would ask for no more extensions.

So we wait until the January 1 deadline. What will it bring?

Some fear that the IAA is so desperate that it might put the box in a nearly empty building,—and then secretly burn it down and afterward say it happened by accident.

Or perhaps it will have carefully cleaned off the patina and placed other, newer substances on the surface. The problem with this latter sabotage is that so many experts had previously photographed the box and taken patina samples. They knew the exact positioning and spelling of the inscription.

When asked what the charges are that will be brought against Golan, Police Major Yonatan Pagis—who is in charge of the ossuary investigation—freely says they will include fraud, interfering with the investigation, money laundering, trading in antiquities without a license, selling property illegally, and exporting antiquities without a permit.

Yet still no charges have been filed.

#### OTHER IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES

**The Dead Sea Scrolls**—Found in 1947 at Qumran, near the Dead Sea, they are 1,000 years older than any other version of the Hebrew Scriptures.

**Pontius Pilate Inscription**—Found in 1961 in Caesarea, it helps confirm the existence of the Roman governor of Judea who sentenced Christ to death.

**The Qumran Ostrakon**—Found in 1996 at Qumran, this deed may include a reference to the community that wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**The Caiaphas Ossuary**—Found in 1990 in Jerusalem, it has the name of the Caiaphas family; and it is believed to have contained the bones of the

Caiaphas who condemned Christ in the Jewish trial early on Friday. This bone box has extremely beautiful rosette engravings, indicating that its first century A.D. owners were very wealthy.

**The James Box**—Revealed to the world in 2002, this ossuary has the inscription, “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” As mentioned in our earlier reports, this may be the only ossuary ever recovered which mentions two relatives of the deceased. This indicates that at least one of those relatives must be a very important person. The inscription is dated by experts to about A.D. 63, about a year after James is believed to have died.