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***Is this the End? More Evidence concerning the James Ossuary***

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I last mentioned the so-called James ossuary, the ancient Jewish limestone box for burying human bones inscribed with the words, "James Son of Joseph Brother of Jesus," I discussed the ruling of 14 experts assembled by the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) that it was a fake.

The experts, after examining many aspects of the bone box (philology, geology, paleography, etc.), decided that although the ossuary itself was authentic, the inscription linking it to Jesus' brother, James, the head of the Jerusalem church, was fake. The promoters of the ossuary's authenticity cried foul and have since argued in public forums that they are being persecuted by the IAA. Their response has muddied the waters just enough so that many people remain hopeful that the ossuary is authentic.

This week the last nail was driven into the coffin of the ossuary's authenticity.

This nail came in the form of an exclusive report published on the Bible and Interpretation website ([www.bibleinterp.com](http://www.bibleinterp.com)) sponsored by the University of Wyoming, Laramie County Community College and the University of Arizona. World renowned archaeologist Eric Meyers of Duke University revealed important information conveyed to him by another well-known, yet anonymous, archaeologist.

This archaeologist claims to have seen the ossuary in the early 1990s in the shop of a Jerusalem antiquities dealer on the Via Dolorosa. This archaeologist had been wiling away a slow afternoon having tea with the shop's owner when the dealer brought out the ossuary, showed the archaeologist the inscription and then discussed how he hoped to sell it for a high price and retire on the proceeds (which he has since done). The archaeologist distinctly remembers that only part of the inscription was incised on the box, namely, "James Son of Joseph."

This report has two important ramifications. First, the ossuary's owner, Oded Golan, has claimed that he bought the stone box "many years ago" and that it decorated his mother's balcony for some years before going into storage around 1987. Golan's claim, while vague, essentially means that he bought the ossuary in

the mid-1970s. The significance is that he acquired it prior to 1978, the year a law took effect criminalizing the buying and selling of newly discovered antiquities. If the ossuary was for sale in the 1990s and Golan purchased it, then he would be liable to severe penalties. He presently is under investigation by Israeli officials.

The second and more interesting aspect of this report is that only half of the present inscription was carved on the box at that time. This would mean that the second half of the inscription, "Brother of Jesus," has been carved in recent years and would make it a blatant forgery.

This result is not surprising, since a number of scholars have already identified the differences between the inscription's two parts. These scholars include major figures such as Professor Kyle McCarter of Johns Hopkins, as well as lesser known scholars such as Rochelle Altman of Israel, Jeffrey Chadwick of Brigham Young University and this column's author. The differences appear in the letter's script, in the philological character of the language and even in the way the chisel was used to carve the letters.

Altman characterized the inscription's first half as written in an official script, the kind in which a government proclamation would have been composed, while the second half seemed to consist of letters drawn from not one, but several different scripts, some of which were even cursive!

Meyers' source provides direct evidence that at least part of the James' inscription is a modern forgery, while the analyses of these scholars show that it was a rather poor forgery at that.

So this sordid affair begins drawing to a close. It has wasted the time of many scholars and experts, but more significantly, it has misled millions of Christian believers around the world. Believers who hoped that here at last was a real, physical link to Jesus and his family. That is the real tragedy of this affair.