

Biblical Name Eshbaal Found Outside of the Bible

Khirbet Qeiyafa excavators publish new Iron Age inscription

Robin Ngo • 06/05/2015



A 3,000-year-old inscription discovered at Khirbet Qeiyafa references the Biblical name Eshbaal. This is the first time the name has been found in an ancient inscription. *Photo: Tal Rogozin.*

Ner was the father of Kish, Kish the father of Saul, and Saul the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab and Esh-Baal.

—1 Chronicles 8:33

The Biblical name Eshbaal has been found for the first time in an ancient inscription. Incised before firing on a 3,000-year-old pithos (large ceramic storage jar), the inscription was discovered at [the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa in Israel](#). Researchers Yosef Garfinkel, Mitka R. Golub, Haggai Misgav and Saar Ganor have published their study of this inscription in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (BASOR).

The [Eshbaal inscription](#) reads “[] | ’šb’l | ’bn’ | bd’” (“’Išba’al son of Beda’”) and was written from right to left in the Canaanite alphabetic script. The name ’šb’l, commonly translated as ’Išba’al (or Esh-Ba’al—“man of Ba’al”), is known from the Bible. Eshbaal was the second king of Israel, King Saul’s son and a rival of [King David](#) (1 Chronicles 8:33; in 2 Samuel 2–4, this king is called Ish-Bosheth). The name Beda’, however, is unique.



Radiometric dating of the layer from which the Eshbaal inscription was unearthed dates the layer to c. 1020–980 B.C.E. The clarity and

precision with which the inscription was written suggest, according to the researchers, that the inscription was the work of a skilled hand—perhaps a trained scribe.

“This new inscription marks a transitional stage between the writing system used for 800 years and the official, standardized Phoenician script used by kingdoms and states in Canaan by at least the 10th century B.C.E.,” the researchers wrote in their *BASOR* article. *The **free eBook Life in the Ancient World** guides you through craft centers in ancient Jerusalem, family structure across Israel and ancient practices—from dining to makeup—throughout the Mediterranean world.*

The Eshbaal inscription, along with five other inscriptions—two of which are also from Qeiyafa, offers evidence that the Canaanite script was used in the late 11th–10th centuries B.C.E. Included in this important corpus is the [five-line Qeiyafa Ostrakon](#), a prize find unearthed during the 2008 season at Khirbet Qeiyafa and possibly the oldest Hebrew inscription ever discovered.*



The famous Qeiyafa Ostrakon. *Photo: Clara Amit, courtesy Yosef Garfinkel.*

Excavations at [Khirbet Qeiyafa](#), led by Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, were conducted from 2007 to 2013. Located about 18.5 miles southwest of Jerusalem, Khirbet Qeiyafa was occupied during several periods: Late Chalcolithic, Middle Bronze, Iron, Persian-Hellenistic and Byzantine. Qeiyafa’s main phase of occupation was during the Iron Age, when there was a heavily fortified city boasting a casemate wall, two gates and monumental buildings.

[In a *Biblical Archaeology Review* article](#), Yosef Garfinkel, Michael Hasel and Martin Klingbeil explain the importance of the Iron Age city at Qeiyafa:

The seven seasons of excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa [...] uncovered for the first time in the archaeology of the Holy Land a fortified city in Judah from the time of King David. The date of this site (1020–980 B.C.E.) is confirmed by olive pits sent to Oxford University for radiocarbon dating.

[...]

Khirbet Qeiyafa redefined the debate over the early kingdom of Judah. It is clear now that David’s kingdom extended beyond Jerusalem, that fortified cities existed in strategic geopolitical locations and that there was an extensive civil administration capable of building cities.

