

## May 21<sup>st</sup>

There was **another departure in 1492**. In 1469 Ferdinand, crown prince of Aragon married his cousin Isabella, daughter of the king of Castile. Royals marrying related royals was eventually how almost all the monarchs of Europe, originally just fighting strongmen, became related like one huge extended family. (Try not to think about intermarried hillbillies wearing crowns.) Ferdinand and Isabella ruling together meant a united Spain. Hence, a united Christian nation defeated the small but lush country of Grenada, last surviving Muslim kingdom in Iberia, 1492. Ferdinand and Isabella together with the Spanish Catholic Church had introduced the Inquisition in 1479, a tribunal to find and remove heresy. The Jews were a particular target. While outwardly professing Christianity they secretly practiced Judaism at home. Today, of course, we would celebrate Messianic (Jesus believing) Jews. Such were Jesus' original followers! But Spain's Jews became baptized to save their lives. They had legal rights of Spanish Christians. The Spanish referred to them as *marranos*, "swine". The Inquisition accused them of not being truly Christian. (Try not to think of big government programs run amuck amid prejudice.)

This was part of an expulsion of all non-Christians from Spain. About ¾ million Grenada Muslims fled to North Africa, most were of the same Spanish racial stock as the Christians. Their families had converted to Islam during the Andalusian period. But Christian Jews, who were bankers, merchants, and artisans, were needed economically.

The Spanish Inquisition violently targeted all manner of people deemed enemies of the Church. (Try not to think about Mafia in vestments.) In total 341,000 *marranos* were targeted, 32,000 were burned to death, though some scholars say far fewer. Finally there was an Edict of Expulsion stating that every Jew who would not be baptized must leave Spain within 3 months of August 2, 1492. At that time there were still 200,000 Jews living in Spain. Half fled to Portugal where they were expelled just 4 years later, many traveling to the New World of Brazil. Many in Spain chose baptism, including the senior rabbi and a majority of leading families. 50,000 fled to North Africa. Hence, Morocco developed a Jewish minority. Others fled to Turkey or Netherlands, the only European country that would accept them.

Christopher Columbus set sail half an hour before sunrise August 3, 1492. His crew included a sizable number of *marranos* including the just-baptized Luis Torres, his secretary. Columbus always signed his name Colon, a Jewish *marrano* name of Genoa, Italy, strong evidence that he too was from a family of Hebrew Christians. It may also be a reason why he received little title and credit for having discovered the new land.

August 2 is a significant date for Jews. That day in 1492 was the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab on the Hebrew calendar. Ab 9 was also the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC by Babylon and the beginning of Diaspora in foreign nations. In 70 AD it was the date when Romans began destruction of the Temple and Jews were ordered out of the Promised Land. It was also the same date that Jews were expelled from England in 1290. From the Roman massacre, mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century to the Holocaust, Ab 9 was the most momentous date on Jewish calendars.

Spanish Jews became known as *Sephardic* Jews from the ancient word for Spain. If you are looking for a way to start dialog with a Jewish friend, tell him or her how sorry you are for such history done in the name of Christianity. It is diametrically opposed to Jesus and his teachings. That is, by God's forgiveness alone, we are adopted as His children. One of the most significant archeological discoveries of our time may be unfolding right now. In the 1980s an altar was discovered and unearthed on Mt. Ebal. Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim are twin peaks in the hill country north of Jerusalem. They are distinctive because Mt. Ebal is barren rock while Mt. Gerizim is a lush forest (or was before some deforestation. Ancient Shechem, is the city that is built in the crotch of the two mountains On those two peaks Joshua built an altar and renewed the covenant after Israel began conquest of the Promised Land. (Josh 8:30) The twin peaks symbolize the "Blessing and the Curse" for Israel if they do or don't obey the covenant—Gerizim the blessing and Ebal the curse (Deut. 30).

In 2019, some archeologists from the Biblical Seminary of Texas were sifting through the debris of the unearthed altar and found a tiny lead tablet, just 2 cm. square. These things are known as curse tablets. Something is written on a small sheet of lead, folded over to hide the inscription and heated so that nobody can see the curse but God alone. Joshua or a priest would then throw the lead curse tablet into the fire. But this one survived. Dr. Scott Stripling, head of the team announced the find to the Jerusalem Post which is a cringe for professional archeologists and the Americans were roundly decried. (Announcements are to be done for review in archeological scholastic journals) And subsequently, many authorities said the tablet was a nothing without anything written on it. And what was it's date? Well there are methods. First and least accurate are radioisotope decay sampling which yielded a stunning age of 1400 BC. Then there are studies of lead corrosion which yielded 1200-1400 BC. But what was written inside the tablet? By X-ray methods we can now "look" inside layers of metal and here is what the tablet said.

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

You will die cursed.

Cursed you will surely die.

Cursed by YHWH – cursed, cursed, cursed."

It is written in proto-Hebrew, a writing style and language that was forerunner of Hebrew. That is stunning on many levels. First, YHW and YHWH are ways of writing Yahweh, God's name. And both forms are within this tablet. Biblical skeptics often say that God's name changed over time to YHWH, but here are both in the same passage. It shows that the Israelites were literate when they entered the land and at about 1400 BC, this puts the tablet right after the 1410 BC many scholars say is 40 years after the wandering in the desert by Israel—exactly as it reads in the Bible. Many skeptics of Biblical accuracy claim that there was no Moses. He supposedly was an invented legendary figure hundreds of years later as was the Torah. But here is the Blessing and the Curse ceremony Moses commanded Joshua to carry out at Mt. Ebal testifying to Deut. 30. Likely there was a real Moses who wrote the Torah.

But where did Moses learn to write? The Egyptians had hieroglyphs, with a different character for each word. Only priests and some commerce people could read it, perhaps a few thousand in all. Thus foreigners and others who desired literacy tried to learn the script. Consequently, in the early Middle Kingdom, there arose a phonetic by-script that gave verbal sounds of consonants in the Egyptian language. This was written next to a hieroglyph and if you knew how to speak Egyptian you could catch on to what the glyph stood for. About 1700 BC, it has been discovered, some Semitic metal workers in the land south of present Israel, invented vowel letters they could add to those consonant marks—the world’s first and only discovery of an alphabet (All subsequent alphabets are just imitators of known alphabets.) With about 40 voice sounds in most languages, an alphabet can phonetically teach the pupil how to read. It is this discovery that led to Hebrew writing and indeed some of the first practitioners were the Midianites whose writing has the oldest previously found mention of YHW, about 1400 BC. Moses, of course fled to Midian after he murdered an Egyptian. God’s timing is unbelievably good.

Finally, many skeptics say that there never was an Exodus. Israelites were just a local tribe of Canaanites who somehow became monotheistic (one God) and fought with all the others until they won (somewhat) This is upended by DNA tests showing the Israelites were different.

Proof of Joshua’s two mountains and altars, likelihood of a real Moses leading a non-Canaanite people, having a name for God written in two variants may have pushed back proof of the Bible 400 years. And it is written on a tiny piece of lead, half melted, on a rocky mountain in Israel.

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