

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE LOS LUNAS MYSTERY STONE

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There it was, the Hebrew Ten Commandments engraved in stone on a mountain.

No, not Mount Sinai in the Middle East. Rather, a mountain known by Indians as the “Cliff of Strange Writings” and now often called Mystery Mountain or Hidden Mountain, west of a small town called [Los Lunas](#) about 22 miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

We of the Foundation for Moral Law believe the Ten Commandments are the moral foundation of our legal system. I had heard of the **Los Lunas Mystery Stone**. Skeptical but curious, I researched the stone on the internet and communicated with several archeologists to gain their perspectives. And last week, 25 February 2010, I hiked up the mountain to see for myself.

Hiking with me were [Dr. Steven Collins](#), Dean of the [College of Archeology and Biblical History](#) at Trinity Southwest University, who has supervised numerous archeological digs in the Middle East, and [Dr. Denis Otero](#), Professor of Hebraic Studies at Trinity Southwest University and an authority on the local Hispanic and Sephardic cultures. Also hiking with us were my wife Marlene, our daughter-in-law Donna, our grandchildren Erik (2) and Elizabeth (6, pictured with me below . . . she's the one in the pink coat, in case you are not sure), as well as several Trinity Southwest students and their families.

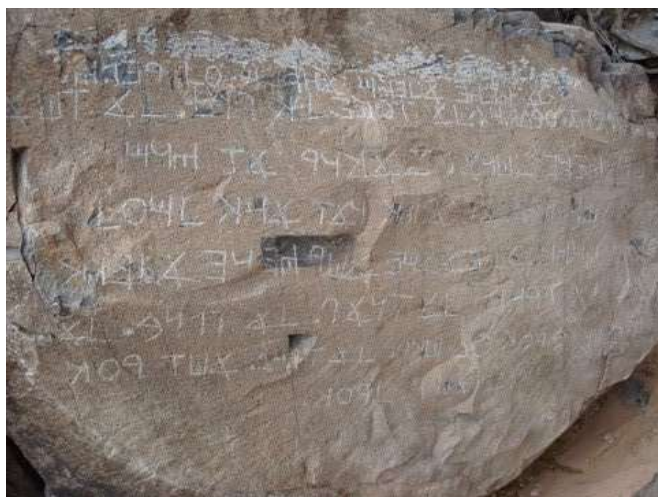


The stone is a huge boulder weighing an estimated 70 -100 tons. The inscription is on a specially-prepared surface which has a *patina* (or “desert varnish”) indicating moderate age, and the letters are similar to paleo-Hebrew, an early form of Hebrew writing that *went out of* popular use around 500 BC.

This is a close-up of the Los Lunas Stone:

Written in Hebrew fashion from right to left, it reads, translated very roughly and literally,

“I [am] Jehovah your God who has taken you out of the house of slaves of land of Egypt. Not there be other gods before my face. You shall not make idol. [You must] not take name Jehovah in vain. Remember day of the sabbath to keep holy. Honor your father and your mother so that will be long your days upon that ground that Jehovah your God to you has given. You must murder not. Not you commit adultery.



You must steal not. [You must] not give testimony against neighbor as witness false. You must desire not [the] wife of your neighbor and all that is your neighbor's."

A translation by the Epigraphic Society is similar:

"I (am) Jehovah [the Eternal] Eloah [your God] who brought you out of the land of Mitsrayim [Mizraim or the two Egypts] out of the house of bondages. You shall not have other [foreign] gods in place of (me). You shall not make for yourself molded (or carved) idols [graven images]. You shall not lift up your voice to connect the name of Jehovah in hate . Remember you (the) Sabbath to make it holy. Honor your father and your mother to make long your existence upon the land which Jehovah Eloah [the Eternal your God] gave to you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery (or idolatry). You shall not steal (or deceive). You shall not bear witness against your neighbor, testimony for a bribe. You shall not covet (the) wife of your neighbor and all which belongs to your neighbor."

So how did this inscription come to be on a mountain in New Mexico? Is it an ancient testimony, or is it a modern prank? I'll explore some of the most commonly-advanced possibilities.

An Ancient Writing?

Dr. Cyrus Gordon, a world-renowned archeologist and specialist in Middle Eastern languages, was convinced the inscription is ancient. He noted that the boulder stands at the entrance to an *arroyo* that leads up the mountain. On the top of the mountain are piles of stone from structures of unknown origin and function, and at the very top is a large stone with the Hebrew inscription "Lord our God," and several other Hebrew writings as well as Native American petroglyphs. The Jews were commanded to write God's Word on the doorposts and gates of their houses (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:14-21**), and they commonly did so in a box or decorative case called a mezuzah. Dr. Gordon believed the Decalog inscription on the Los Lunas boulder at the entrance to an *arroyo* constituted a mezuzah at the entrance to an open-air wilderness tabernacle. Noting that the Jews commonly used a small box or case on the doorpost while the Samaritans commonly put their mezuzas on boulders or pillars, Dr. Gordon suggested that the inscription may be Samaritan, and possibly by Samaritans during the Byzantine period.

Others have suggested that the inscription may have been written by Israelites of the Ten Lost Tribes of Northern Israel, or by Jews traveling on sea voyages during Solomon's reign (1030 - 970 BC) when sea voyages took pace (**I Kings 10:22; II Chronicles 9:21**), possibly jointly with the Phoenicians whose language was similar to Hebrew. Dr. Barry Fell of Harvard argued for the ancient origin of the inscription, contending that the script is consistent with ancient Hebrew.

And here's an interesting factor: The tree that is growing beside the boulder is a Tamarisk, a species which is native to the Middle East and which, according to the New International Version and the New American Standard Version of the Bible, is the tree Abraham planted at Beersheba when he called upon the Name of the Lord (Genesis 21:33).

Dr. Collins doubts that the Los Lunas inscription is ancient. He observes that the characters of the inscription are aligned at the bottom, while traditional Hebrew writing would align the characters at the top or in the middle. He also notes that the spaces between the words and the apparent use of punctuation are not characteristic of ancient Hebrew, although Dr. Gordon and Dr. Fell disputed this. It should be noted that although Dr. Fell was a Harvard professor, *his academic credentials were in the field of marine biology, and although Dr. Gordon's*

credentials in the field of archeology were impressive, he never actually visited the Los Lunas site.

Here is Dr. Collins explaining the Los Lunas inscription to our group:

Dr. Collins's linguistic objections are significant and convincing. I note only that new evidence frequently requires us to rethink our theories about ancient languages. And as a professor who has graded thousands of exams, I can attest that people's handwriting styles vary greatly even among those who live in the same time, place, language and culture.



A variation of the ancient origins theory is that the inscription was chiseled by Native Americans of Hebrew origin. Mormons believe the Ten Lost Tribes of Northern Israel migrated to America and divided into two groups, the godly Nephites and the ungodly Lamanites, who eventually exterminated the Nephites. Some (but not all) Mormons have looked upon the Los Lunas inscription as evidence of a Nephite presence in North America.

This idea is not unique to Mormons. Many of the early English colonists believed the Native Americans were of Hebrew origin. This view was especially common among the Puritans, including Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards. They found many cultural and linguistic similarities between the Hebrews and the Native Americans, and they believed they themselves had been called to America to bring the Gospel to these lost Hebrews and restore the true Israel of God.

However, I have found nothing in the Bible that suggests the Hebrews ever came to America, and DNA testing so far has provided no evidence of a connection between Hebrews and Native Americans.

A Modern Prank?

Many authorities believe the Los Lunas inscription is of modern origin. Some believe it was a chiseled by some students as a prank played upon a professor; others suggest it was done to fool Mormons, or possibly by Mormons to fool others. They point to the alignment of the letters at the bottom, the spacing of letters, and the apparent use of punctuation as evidence that the inscription could not be ancient, as well as the fact the several of the characters appear to resemble letters of the Greek alphabet more than letters of the Hebrew alphabet. And then they point to the location: Even if we accept the possibility that ancient Hebrews could have crossed the Atlantic, how likely is it that they would have ended up on a mountain in central New Mexico?

But before we dismiss the inscription as a modern prank, we need to look at its known history. Dr. Frank Hibben, a Harvard-educated archeologist with the University of New Mexico, first publicized the inscription in **1933**. He said he had been led to the stone by a guide who claimed to have first seen it when he was a boy in **1880**. Dr. Hibben said that at that time (**1933**) the

inscription was apparently old and barely visible as it was covered by moss and lichens. He further related that the rancher who owned the property told him that, according to Indians in the area, the inscription had been there at least since **1800**.

These are only oral traditions, but that does not mean they are false. If the inscription was in place before **1800**, that would eliminate any possibility of Mormon involvement, as the Book of Mormon was not published until **1830** and Mormons did not reach Utah until **1847**. Los Lunas is **622** miles from Salt Lake City, and throughout the **1800s** Mormons were not welcome in the Los Lunas area because of Native American hostility.

Unfortunately, the stone has been unguarded since its discovery. A permit is required to enter the land, but in this open ranch country that is difficult to enforce. Plans are in place to erect a shield to protect the stone, but at present anyone can enter the land and touch the stone in whatever way they choose. As a result, there is much graffiti on the stone and on surrounding rocks, and many persons, probably with good intentions, have cleaned out the characters of the inscription. These cleanings make it difficult to estimate the age of the inscription. But geologist G.E. Morehouse compared the inscription to nearby modern graffiti and concluded that the inscription is between **500** and **2,000** years old.

And before **1800**, or in **1880**, or around **1933**, who would have had the specialized knowledge, let alone the time, to pull off a hoax like this one?

A Third Alternative?

Dr. Collins's linguistic objections cause me to doubt whether the inscription is truly ancient. But this history of the stone's sightings, coupled with the analysis of Dr. Morehouse, lead me to doubt that it could be modern. Could there be a third alternative?

I believe there is.

On **2 January 1492**, as the Alhambra surrendered to Spanish Christians, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella succeeded in freeing Spain from Muslim domination. In the same year they determined that Spain was to be a Christian kingdom, so they decreed that all Jews living in Spain must either be baptized and become Christians or leave the country. Some left; others stayed and converted, at least externally. These became known as *conversos*, or converted Jews.

Some of these *conversos* came with the conquistadors to the Western Hemisphere. Some of them settled in New Mexico, and their descendents today are known as Crypto-Jews. Outwardly they are Roman Catholic, and perhaps they believe Catholic doctrine; but in their homes they continue some of the rituals of Judaism, such as beginning the Sabbath at dusk Friday evening.

I suggest that sometime in the **1500s**, **1600s**, or thereafter, to honor the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a Jewish *converso* carved the Ten Commandments on the Cliff of the Strange Writings to memorialize the covenant his people had made with Jehovah in the days of Moses. Possibly he and his fellow believers followed the *arroyo* and trail to the mountaintop, and there at the altar they worshipped Jehovah, the God of their fathers.

This would explain the aging of the inscription and its presence in central New Mexico. It could also explain why the maker of the inscription, who may have known Hebrew only as a second language, would have aligned the characters at the bottom as would have been done in English or Spanish, would have used spacing and punctuation, and might have shaped some his letters more like the Greek alphabet. Dr. Collins questions whether a *converso* or Crypto-Jew would have

used this paleo-Hebrew script. But travelers and people who live in multiple cultures often obtain wide varieties of information and use it in many different ways, and a *converso* who has left his homeland years or decades or generations earlier might remember his Hebrew imperfectly. A modern forger might have been more careful to get it right. A *converso* far from home would honor the Decalogue in the best way he could.

Based on my own research and observation, this seems to be the most likely possibility. But my mind is open, and I'd love to hear from anyone who has additional thoughts or information.

Whether the Los Lunas inscription is ancient, medieval, or modern, it is a testimony of the centrality of the Ten Commandments as the moral foundation of law.

And in their relentless drive to censor the Ten Commandments and remove them from the public arena, how has the ACLU missed this one?

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Note by Gamaliel: Although I have not seen them, it was reported to me that there are hieroglyphs of Phoenician rowing ships engraved in some rocks at a spring, on the east side of the road between Deming, New Mexico and Silver City, New Mexico. The next time I visit the area, I will go out of my way to verify this, and get pictures.

Please send any comments about this article to:

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יהוה

The name of our Creator is made up of four, Hebrew **VOWELS**, **Y H W H** יהוה (source: Flavius Josephus - *Antiquities of the Jews*)

The letter ה (h) when used as a vowel, usually has the "ah," "ha," or the "huh" sound. The ה is the *definite* article, or **THE, SPECIFIC, to the EXCLUSION of ALL others.**

This is exemplified in showing the difference between the word "eretz," meaning land, and the words "ha Eretz," meaning **THE Land of Israel, to the exclusion of all others.**

In Hebrew, the letters י (y) and ו (v)(w) are used interchangeably, and when located in the first, second, or third position in a word, indicate the tense of the word, either past, future, or continuing.

Being placed in the first and third positions, the י and ו indicate that the name is **both past and future**, or, - *Eternal*.

The ה preceding **both** the י and the ו means that the name is specifically, to the exclusion of all others, both *past* and *future*, or **THE Eternal**.

Furthermore, being *singular*, and *being found twice*, the ה would also allow the addition of the word, **ONE**, as a descriptor.

The Name, **YHWH**, could then be logically rendered as **The Eternal ONE**, because **He** has eternal existence, **to the exclusion of all others.**

It is pronounced in one, long breath, like the wind, with the accent on the middle syllable. .

eeeeeeaaaaaa UUUUUU' waaaah