

ΜΗΘΕΝΑΛΛΟΓΕΝΗΕΙΣΤΟΡΕΥΕΘΑΙ  
ΕΝΤΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΠΕΡΙΤΟΙΕΡΟΝΤΡΥ  
ΦΑΚΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΙΒΟΛΟΥ ΟΣΔΑΝ  
ΛΗΨΗΑΥΤΩ ΙΑΤΙ ΟΣ ΕΣΤΑΙ  
ΔΙΑ ΤΟ ΕΞΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΕΙΝ  
ΘΑΝΑΤΟΝ

These ossuary inscriptions, especially the so-called graffiti inscriptions that were scrawled by non-professionals, testify to a higher level of literacy in Jesus' Israel than is sometimes supposed. Even those people who had difficulty writing plainly and clearly knew how to read and were prepared to make a stab at writing, even on something as important as the ossuary of a family member.

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Ancient Hebrew  
not the  
BLOCK CRAP.

Though stone was the preferred material for official inscriptions in the ancient world, it was too heavy and expensive for everyday use. Far cheaper and more convenient were pottery sherds, which could be picked up for free anywhere, scribbled on and discarded. If they are inscribed, pottery sherds are called ostraca (singular: ostrakon). An ostrakon (at right) from Qumran displays rows of Hebrew letters, many of them repeated—the handiwork of a pupil learning to write.

