

**IN SEARCH OF
THE LOST ARK:**

The Quest For The
Ark Of The Covenant

BY

Don Stewart

The Search of the Lost Ark:
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By Don Stewart

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Section 1

The Most Sacred Object Ever Constructed – The Ark Of The Covenant

We begin our study of the Ark of the Covenant with a look at the circumstances that led to its construction. There will also be an examination of the various theories as to the exact purpose of the Ark. This will set the stage for the remainder of the book—the past history of the Ark and the present day searches for this most sacred object.

CHAPTER 1

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

The summer of 1981 saw the release of the blockbuster movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” The fanciful plot, set in the 1930’s, depicted the search for the long lost Ark¹ of the Covenant—the container that held the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses by God. The searchers included a corrupt French archaeologist, treacherous Nazis, and a dashing American archaeologist named Indiana Jones, portrayed by Harrison Ford. In the end Indiana got both the Ark and the girl. It was a marvelous adventure film.

Many Questions Are Raised About The Ark

The film raised the consciousness of the world to the subject of the Ark of the Covenant. This ancient artifact, constructed so long ago, became a topic of interest to the general public. Questions abounded concerning this sacred relic. What was the Ark of the Covenant? Did it have some secret power? Does it still exist? What would happen if the lost Ark were found? Would the discovery of the Ark have anything to do with end-time Bible prophecy?

These questions, along with many others, will be the focus of this book.

Where Is The Ark?

The Ark of the Covenant was constructed some 3,500 years ago on Mt. Sinai under God-given directions to the prophet Moses. After forty years of leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, the Ark was brought to the Promised Land. Eventually the Ark of the Covenant was placed in a permanent home in Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem.

The last historical reference we have to the Ark is in 621 B.C. For some unknown reason the Ark had been removed from the Temple. King Josiah ordered it returned to its rightful place. The Bible says:

And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, “Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. You need not carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel” (2 Chronicles 35:3 ESV).

In 587 B.C. the armies of the Babylonian Empire under the command of King Nebuchadnezzar, came down and burned the Temple at Jerusalem and took captive some of the holy vessels.

The Second Temple Was Built Without The Ark

About seventy-one years after this destruction there was a Second Temple² built by a man named Zerubbabel. According to Jewish tradition, five

things that were in the First Temple were missing from the Second Temple: The Spirit of Prophecy, the Holy Fire, the Shekinah Glory, the Urim and Thummim³ and the Ark of the Covenant. Since the time of the Babylonian captivity the fate of the Ark has been a mystery. The most sacred object to the nation of Israel vanished without a trace. The Bible is silent as to the Ark's fate. What happened to the Ark of the Covenant remains a mystery to this day.

Historian Joan Comay, writes:

The Ark of the Covenant installed by King Solomon had apparently disappeared before the destruction of the Temple in 587 B.C. It is surmised that the Ark may have been removed and hidden; there is no mention of it among the sacred vessels carried off by the Babylonian conquerors and restored by King Cyrus at the time of the return. In this mysterious fashion the most sacred . . . object of the Hebrew faith and nation vanished from history, never to reappear.⁴

The Ark Is Most Important Treasure Of Humanity

The Ark of the Covenant is the most treasured object humanity could ever expect to find. Its importance can hardly be overstated. An ancient Jewish saying states the following:

Palestine is the center of the world.
Jerusalem is the center of Palestine.
The Temple is the center of Jerusalem.
The Holy of Holies is the center of the Temple.
The Ark is the center of the Holy of Holies.
In the center of the Ark rests the stone called
“The Foundation Stone of the World.”

The Ark of the Covenant was the central object of the Old Testament.

The Possibility Of Discovery

The ramifications of the Ark's discovery cannot be calculated. Rabbi Leibel Reznick, who believes the Ark may still exist under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, writes:

Of all the treasures yet to be discovered, what could be more important, more fascinating and more awe-inspiring than the Tablets of the Ten Commandments? No other archeological find would have greater impact on the destiny of man. These Tablets are the foundation of the three major religions. What a religious resurgence their discovery would cause. How it would cause scholars and laymen to reevaluate the past, examine the present, and speculate on the future cannot be imagined. Is it possible that such a sacred treasure lies but a few feet beneath what our eyes can see? Jewish tradition has always maintained that the treasures would remain until the coming of the Messiah. Muslim tradition forbids the site from being explored. Curiosity is nature's most powerful force. Tradition is God's immovable object of

faith. Here on the Temple Mount we find the answer to that ancient conundrum, “What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?” for the treasures are yet to be discovered.⁵

It would indeed be an incalculable find!

The Ark And Bible Prophecy

We have documented in another book, “The Jews, Jerusalem and The Coming Temple,” why we believe a Third Temple will someday be built in Jerusalem, as well as the place that it has in Bible prophecy. The Ark of the Covenant may play a significant role in this future Temple.

While the Ark was the centerpiece of the First Temple, it vanished before the Second Temple was built. If the Ark of the Covenant were to be found, it would provide unimagined motivation toward the Jewish goal of building a Third Temple.

We do not know if the genuine Ark still exists, or if it will someday be found. If, however, the Ark is discovered, it is possible that it may figure into end-time Bible prophecy. There are several Bible passages that we will consider later in the book, which may hint at the Ark’s future discovery.

The Ever Unfolding Story

As we examine the history of the Ark, the present state of the search, and its possible role in the future, we will embark on a journey that will span over four thousand years. It is the story of a people, the nation of Israel, and their special calling by God. Their story continues to this day, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still works His plan in our modern world. The movie Raiders of the Lost Ark, which brought worldwide interest to this subject, may be the preliminary act in an even greater drama—the actual discovery of the Ark of the Covenant.

Endnotes For Chapter 1

1 The word Ark is derived from the Latin term *arca*. It refers to a chest or a box. Other English translations render the term “chest” or “Covenant Box.” The Hebrew noun *aron* is used 195 times in the Old Testament for the Ark of the Covenant.

2. Zerubbabel built the Second Temple that was eventually enlarged by Herod. Herod’s enlargement is also referred to as the “Second Temple” though some writers call it the “Third Temple.” In this book the term “Second Temple” will apply to both Zerubbabel’s and Herod’s structures.

3. The Spirit of Prophecy was the gift of prophecy. This gift, however, was operating during the Second Temple period (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). Upon their death (all in the same year say the Rabbis) the gift of prophecy ceased. The Holy Fire came down from heaven on the altar. It descended first upon the altar of the Tabernacle when the sons of Aaron were consecrated to the priesthood. It descended a second time when the First Temple was inaugurated. It was continually kept lit by the priests. The Shekinah glory was the visible glory of God. The Urim and Thummim (lights and perfection’s) were the stones in the breastplate of the High Priest. They were used to help discern the will of God. All of these, including the Ark, were lacking in the Second Temple.

4. Joan Comay, *The Temple of Jerusalem*, New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1975, p. 134.

5. Leibel Reznick, *The Holy Temple Revisited*, Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990, pp. 146,147.

CHAPTER 2

MT. SINAI: GOD'S COVENANT AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

To understand the story of the Ark of the Covenant, we must go back in history some four thousand years to God's dealings with a man named Abram (Abraham). God singled out this one man from the rest of humanity and made specific promises to him and his descendants. The story of the Bible revolves around these promises:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1-3 NIV).

According to God's promise, Abraham's descendants would inherit a land where they would live as His special people and be a witness of Him to the world. There was, however, a warning. The Lord warned Abraham that before this happened his descendants would have to live as slaves in a foreign land for 400 years:

Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions" (Genesis 15:13,14 NKJV).

All of this was literally fulfilled. After 400 years of living as slaves in the land of Egypt, the time of their deliverance was at hand.

The Delivery From Slavery

During the time of their oppression, the people cried out for a deliverer. God answered their prayers and gave them both a deliverer and a prophet, a man named Moses. Moses demanded of the Pharaoh of Egypt that he let God's people go. Pharaoh refused. This refusal led to a series of ten plagues which were inflicted upon the Egyptians and the land of Egypt.

After the last plague, "the death of the firstborn," the reluctant Pharaoh allowed the children of Israel to leave Egypt for the Promised Land.

As the children of Israel departed Egypt, they took spoils with them from the Egyptians. Their plunder included much gold and silver:

And the people of Israel did as Moses had instructed and asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. The LORD caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave

the Israelites whatever they asked for. So, like a victorious army, they plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35,36 NLT).

This literally fulfilled what God had told Abraham. The people did not leave the land empty-handed but rather departed with much wealth.

The Parting Of The Red Sea

On the way to the Promised Land the children of Israel camped by the Red Sea.¹ The name “Red Sea” (*Yam Suf* in Hebrew), literally means “Sea of Reeds.”

While camped at the Red Sea, the children of Israel were pursued by the Egyptian army. The Israelites, trapped without any avenue of escape, cried out to God for deliverance. At that point one of the greatest miracles recorded in the Old Testament occurred—the parting of the Red Sea.²

The Bible says Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea and the Lord caused the waters to go back. The seabed became as dry ground and the children of Israel went across.

The Egyptian army attempted to follow, but were not so fortunate. You see, as they began their ascent, God then instructed Moses to stretch his hand over the sea again. As the Egyptians pursued the children of Israel, the Red Sea returned to full depth and drowned the entire Egyptian army. With the Egyptian threat now gone, the children of Israel continued toward the land God had promised Abraham and his descendants. They were supernaturally led by God along the way, being guided by a pillar of cloud during the day, and a pillar of fire given to them to light the night.

The Arrival At Mount Sinai

In the third month after their departure from Egypt, the children of Israel arrived at Mt. Sinai. The Bible calls Mt. Sinai by various names—among them “the mountain,” the “mountain of God,” and “Mount Horeb.” Yet the exact location of the site of Mount Sinai remains a mystery.³

God had warned the people that anyone coming too close to the mountain would be instantly killed. Barricades were set up at the base of the mountain to keep the people away.

A Kingdom Of Priests

At Mt. Sinai God revealed Himself to the people with great signs. The mountain smoked, lightning came from the sky and the thunder roared.

At the sacred mountain, the nation entered into a special relationship with God. The Lord gave the following promise:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy

nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites (Exodus 19:5,6 NRSV).

This event is crucial in understanding the history of the nation Israel. The Lord entered into an agreement with them where they would become a kingdom of priests to God on behalf of the nations. In other words, Israel would be God's unique representative to the nations on the earth. This would begin to fulfill part of the promise God made to Abraham. The Bible says:

All the families of the earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3 NLT).

The nation Israel and its descendants would be a blessing to the entire world. This, like all of God's other promises, has been literally fulfilled.⁴

A Covenant Is Made At Sinai

An altar was built at the foot of Mt. Sinai and sacrifices were offered. The people agreed with the terms of the covenant. The Bible explains it in this manner:

And he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "We are willing to do and obey all that the Lord has spoken." So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it over the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:7,8 NET).

This covenant would signal a unique relationship between God and the nation Israel. The Book of Exodus says the following:

And he [the Lord] said, "I am going to make a covenant; before all your people. I will do wonders such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation. And all the people among whom you are will see the work of the Lord, for it is a fearful thing that I am doing with you. . . And the Lord said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel" (Exodus 34:10, 27 NET).

The Ten Commandments Are Given

While on Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments⁵ written on tablets of stone.⁶ These words, which had already been spoken, were now to be put in permanent form. God, with His own hand, wrote the Ten Commandments to testify to their importance:

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction" (Exodus 24:12 NRSV).

The written form of the Ten Commandments was God's pledge to His people. This required the people's response in belief and obedience. The significance of the Ten Commandments can scarcely be exaggerated, for they have served as the basis of morality for a great part of the world.

Moses Finds The People In Rebellion Against The Lord

While Moses was on Mt. Sinai for forty days receiving the Ten Commandments the Lord miraculously supported him. For the entire forty days, Moses did not eat bread nor drink water.

When he descended from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, he found the people in rebellion against God. They had fashioned a golden calf and were praising it for their deliverance from Egypt. The original Ten Commandments were then destroyed when Moses threw them down in anger after seeing the Israelites sinning against the Lord.⁷

God then instructed Moses to hew two more tablets of stone like the first where He [the Lord] would again write the Ten Commandments:

The LORD said to Moses, “Cut two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke” (Exodus 34:1 HCSB).

Moses obeyed and a second set of tablets was made. The agreement between God and His people had now been memorialized in stone.

Summary To Chapter 2

The children of Israel had gone from slavery to freedom, from certain death at the Red Sea to miraculous deliverance. They were now on their way to the land of Promise. The covenant that God had made with Abraham was being fulfilled. Four hundred years were spent in a foreign land. However, the people left with considerable wealth while their taskmasters, the Egyptians, were punished by God.

At Mt. Sinai, another covenant was made with Israel. They were to be a special people. The Lord would uniquely meet and speak with only them as they testified to the existence of the One True God.

To confirm this, the Ten Commandments were supernaturally given to the people on two tablets of stone. After Moses destroyed the first set, a second set was built.

With the gold, silver and the other articles that they had taken from the Egyptians, the materials were at hand to construct certain holy objects as God would command them.

It was now time to construct a sacred object which God had chosen to symbolize Himself and which would house the Ten Commandments—the Ark of the Covenant.

Endnotes for Chapter 2

1. As for the origin of the name “Red Sea,” a number of suggestions have been given. These include the color of its reeds, the corals in the water, the color of the mountains bordering the coasts, or the glow in the sky reflected on it. It is also said to have derived its name from the ancient nation of Erythria, so named because their inhabitants painted their faces red. It is possible that the name may also be associated with Edom, which means red. It is also said that it is called the Red Sea because it lies to the south, and the south is called the “red zone.”

2. There is no consensus of opinion as to where the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. In ancient times, the term Red Sea referred to what is now the Red Sea, as well as its two arms, the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. It also included waters to the south of Asia Minor, such as the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

The route of the Exodus is also an area of controversy. Tied up with this problem is the identification of the Red Sea.

3. The traditional site of Mt. Sinai is Jebel Musa in the Sinai Peninsula where St. Catherine’s Monastery, a fourth century structure, today marks the spot. Dozens of different mountains, both in the Sinai desert and in Arabia have been suggested as the site. The Arabian sites are thought to have been volcanic in the past. Since there is controversy as to the exact route of the Exodus, there remains no consensus as to the location of Mt Sinai.

4. For further documentation see our book on “Ten Reasons To Trust The Bible.”

5. The Ten Commandments are numbered according to two different traditions. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches combine the commandment forbidding the worship of other gods with that of the prohibiting of making images. They treat the coveting of the neighbor’s wife and his possessions as two separate commandments. The Talmud, Eastern Orthodox, and Reformed Church treat the commandment against coveting as one commandment. They separate the worship of other gods from the making of images.

The Ten Commandments differed from other stone monuments of antiquity in that they were portable and designed to be kept as a sacred treasure. Stone monuments usually stood upright and were kept in the open air.

Moses placed these commandments from God in the “Book of the Covenant.” There is no agreement as to the identity of the Book of the Covenant. Some authorities believe that this includes all of the Book of Genesis and Exodus up to the giving of the Ten Commandments. Other scholars believe that it was all the laws discussed up until this point, particularly Exodus 21:1-23:19. Still others say it was merely the Ten Commandments. Because the Bible does not specifically say, we cannot be certain as to what is contained in the Book of the Covenant.

6. We are not told as to the type of stone the commandments were written upon. These may have been made of the sapphire brick that the Israelites had previously seen (Exodus 24:10). This, however, is only a conjecture.

7. The question arises as to what Moses hoped to achieve by breaking the tablets. Since it is forbidden to break even the smallest vessel, how much more an object so precious and sacred as this? The action of breaking the tablets appears to be prompted by sheer anger, though other explanations have been offered.

CHAPTER 3

BUILD ME AN ARK

As God had previously told Noah to build an Ark of wood to save the world from the Great Flood, He also told Moses to build an Ark—whose ultimate meaning would later be revealed.

During his stay on Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the plans for the Ark of the Covenant. The command to build the Ark is recorded in the Book of Exodus. It reads as follows:

Make an Ark of acacia wood—a sacred chest 3-3/4 feet long, 2-1/4 feet wide, and 2-1/4 feet high. Overlay it inside and outside with pure gold, and put a molding of gold all around it. Cast four rings of gold for it, and attach them to its four feet, two rings on each side. Make poles from acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. Fit the poles into the rings at the sides of the Ark to carry it. These carrying poles must never be taken from the rings; they are to be left there permanently. When the Ark is finished, place inside it the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you (Exodus 25:10-16 NLT).

What Was The Ark?

The Ark of the Covenant was a rectangular container or chest made out of acacia wood and lined inside and outside¹ with pure gold, the appropriate metal for God's presence.

The Hebrew word translated “Ark” means “box” or “chest.” The word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament of a chest:²

Then Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in the lid of it and set it beside the altar on the right side as one entered the house of the Lord. And the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord. And whenever they saw that there was much money in the chest, the king's secretary and the high priest came up and they bagged and counted the money that was found in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 12:9,10 ESV).

This suggests that the primary function of the Ark was to be a container.

The Size Of The Ark

The exact size of the Ark is difficult to determine. The standard of measurement at that time was the cubit. The cubit was measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. There is no agreement as to the exact length of the cubit.³ The various estimates range from fourteen to twenty-four inches. Using an eighteen-inch cubit, the Ark would have been three

and three quarters feet long, two and one quarter feet wide, and two and one quarter feet high.

Is The Exact Size Known?

There are those who argue that the exact size of the Ark is known. They believe there is strong evidence that the nation Israel at that time used a cubit which was 17.5 inches or 45 centimeters. This would make the size of the ark as follows: 3 feet 7.5 inches or 111.3 centimeters in width and 2 feet 2.25 inches or 66.8 centimeters in height.

Support for this length of the cubit comes from a number of ancient sources. For example, in the city of Jerusalem there is an ancient tunnel known as Hezekiah's tunnel. It was built around 700 B.C. by the engineers of King Hezekiah. It is a marvelous engineering feat.

The Siloam Inscription, which describes the work, states that Hezekiah's water tunnel, was 1,200 cubits in length. The tunnel has been measured and the cubit used was 17.49 inches or 44.4 centimeters. While this tunnel was built some seven centuries after the construction of the Ark, it is assumed by many that the same cubit was used.

The discovery of other buildings from that era, which reveals a cubit of 17.5 inches, gives further evidence as to the cubit the Israelites used.

Interestingly, there have been two differing Egyptian measuring sticks which have been found with one of them measuring almost exactly the same as the Israelite cubit (17.7 inches long). Again, this seems to confirm the exact size of the cubit used in building the Ark. However, we cannot be certain that this is the case.

The thickness of the walls of the Ark is not stated. Estimates range from three quarters of an inch to three inches thick. The Bible simply does not say. The exact size of the Ark, therefore, cannot be determined with precision.

The Ark Was Made From Acacia Wood

The Ark was made out of acacia wood⁴ (*shittim* in the Authorized Version). The acacia is a tall tree with a thick trunk. It is one of the few trees that will grow in a hot dry desert climate. Acacia trees are common in the Sinai Peninsula and are good for construction purposes. Acacia wood is strong and durable and resists insects and rot.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, renders this word as “incorruptible” wood or “decay proof” wood. The wood is very light and hard and it does not absorb moisture. The Talmud,⁵ Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament, states that the acacia tree is a member of the cedar family.

The Ark Was Covered With Gold

The Ark was lined inside and outside with gold, so that nothing but gold was visible. Jewish commentator Umberto Cassuto explains the possible methods used:

From archaeological finds in Egypt we learn that wooden furniture was covered with gold in one of two ways: either hammered plates of gold were attached to the wood by means of small nails, or thin leaves of gold were glued to a fine layer of plaster spread over the wood. Here, apparently the first method is intended, since if the second method were used, the overlay would not hold very long, especially inside the ark, where two tables of stone were to be kept.⁶

Around the top of the Ark was a “molding” or “border” made of gold. The exact look and purpose is debated.⁷

The Ark also had four “corners” or “feet.” Their appearance and purpose is likewise debated.⁸

The Ark Had Rings And Poles

The Ark had four golden rings,⁹ two on each side. There were two poles made of acacia wood. These poles were covered with gold and were permanently inserted into the rings for the Ark’s transporting. The poles would always remain in the rings whether the Ark was stationary or moving. This made the carrying of the Ark more practical.

Some authorities believe that the carrying poles actually went through the walls of the Ark, and these rings acted like reinforcements.⁹

It is uncertain as to the exact placement of the poles that were used to carry the Ark. Some authorities believe they ran lengthwise alongside the Ark, while others believe the poles were parallel to the shorter ends of it.¹⁰

The Mercy Seat Was On Top Of The Ark

All around the top of the Ark was a gold rectangular plate known as the “Mercy Seat.” The Mercy Seat was to be placed on top of the Ark—having the exact same dimensions. The Bible says:

Then you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you (Exodus 25:17,21 NRSV).

The translation “Mercy Seat”¹¹ can lead to misconceptions. The basic meaning of the Hebrew word *kapporeth* is “to cover.” The Mercy Seat was the cover of the Ark. However, the Mercy Seat was more than a simple covering,¹² it was an “atonement covering”—the place where sins were covered up. The New International Version translates the term as “atonement cover.”

Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you (Exodus 25:17,21 NIV).

The New English Translation calls it a “propitiatory lid:”

And you are to make a propitiatory lid of pure gold; its length is to be three feet nine inches, and its width is to be two feet three inches. And I will meet with you there, and from above the propitiatory lid, from between the cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will command you for the Israelite (Exodus 25:17,21 NET).

God promised that He would speak to His people from above this sacred object. We read the following in the Book of Exodus:

There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites (Exodus 25:22 NIV).

Was The Mercy Seat An Independent Object?

Some Bible scholars have assumed that the Mercy Seat was a separate object, independent of the Ark.¹³ It is more likely, however, that they are two components of the same thing. Each of them is incomplete without the other. Without the Mercy Seat the Ark would be open at the top and the contents in the Ark would be uncovered.

There is nothing in Scripture that states that the Ark had a cover on its top, hence the need for the Mercy Seat.

Likewise, without the Ark, the Mercy Seat would not have a base to rest upon. Therefore, both the Ark and the Mercy Seat needed each other. This is why Scripture uses the term “Ark” while referring to both the Ark and the Mercy Seat.

The Cherubim

Facing each other at opposite ends of the Mercy Seat stood two cherubim¹⁴ made out of hammered gold. Cherubim are winged creatures that represent heavenly beings in God’s service. The cherubim covered the Mercy Seat with their spread out wings:

Then use hammered gold to make two cherubim, and place them at the two ends of the atonement cover. Attach the cherubim to each end of the atonement cover, making it all one piece. The cherubim will face each other, looking down on the atonement cover with their wings spread out above it (Exodus 25:18-20 NLT).

They Had An Unknown Appearance

Neither the size, nor the form, of the cherubim are described. The Bible, in other passages, gives various descriptions of cherubim. The two cherubim in the Tabernacle, and Solomon's Temple, seemed to have two wings each:

One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long, and the other wing five cubits—ten cubits from wing tip to wing tip. The second cherub also measured ten cubits, for the two cherubim were identical in size and shape. The height of each cherub was ten cubits. He placed the cherubim inside the innermost room of the temple, with their wings spread out. The wing of one cherub touched one wall, while the wing of the other touched the other wall, and their wings touched each other in the middle of the room (1 Kings 6:24-27 NIV).

They also had one face. The description is as follows:

The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover (Exodus 25:20 NIV).

In the vision of Ezekiel, the cherubim have four wings and four faces. Most likely positioned in front was the face of a man, with a lion on the right side, an ox on the left side, and an eagle behind. In describing cherubim, the prophet Ezekiel wrote:

In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form (Ezekiel 1:5 NRSV).

Some authorities assume the cherubim on the Ark also had four faces. Samuel Ridout wrote:

They were composite creatures with four faces—of a lion, of an ox, of a man, and of an eagle (Ezek. 1: 4-14; Rev. 4:6,7).¹⁵

Some have thought they resemble Egyptian models such as the Sphinx.

Jewish writer and politician, Abba Eban, wrote the following:

There in the shadows the sacred Ark was placed, and the presence of YHWH¹⁶ resided enthroned upon two huge, human-headed, lion-bodied, winged creatures called cherubim. In other cultures of the time, where those figures were also found, they were called by different names. We know them too as sphinxes.¹⁷

First century writer Flavius Josephus¹⁸ declared that the cherubim resemble figures that were once known to humankind but that in his day their form was utterly lost. As to their appearance there has been much conjecture.¹⁹

What Did They Represent?

Though no one can be certain of the exact appearance of the cherubim, they represented the presence of the Lord. God is called “He who dwells between the cherubim.”

Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth (Psalm 80:1 NIV).

The Book of Genesis describes the cherubim as the ones guarding the Garden of Eden. God had stationed them at the entrance to the garden to guard the way to the tree of life:

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24 ESV).

The Contents Of The Ark

The Lord gave specific orders as to what the Ark would contain. The Ten Commandments, written by the hand of God, were placed inside the Ark. Later in Israel’s history, Moses recounted the story:

Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the LORD commanded me (Deuteronomy 10:5 NKJV).

The depositing of the Ten Commandments inside the Ark was not an unusual practice. In the ancient Near East, it was common practice to place the treaties of alliance in a temple. This served as a testimony for the future. Similarly, the tablets which contained the essential requirements of the covenant were also called ‘Testimonies.’

The Ark Contained The Two Tablets Of The Law

Two tablets of the Law were placed inside the Ark. First century writer Flavius Josephus says that each of the tablets contained five precepts. Both Jewish and Christian tradition have held that one tablet contained four commandments, and the other tablet six. The Scripture does not state it as such. It is possible, however, that each tablet contained all Ten Commandments:

The Ten Commandments were written on two stone tablets. This probably means two copies. The reason for having two copies of the Ten Commandments has only recently been understood. When a written covenant was made in the world of the Bible, each party making the covenant had a copy of its contents. If the covenant was between two nations, for instance the Hittites and the Egyptians, the two copies would be kept far apart, in the temple of the god of each land. In Israel, though the covenant was between God and his people. Both copies of the Ten Commandments were kept in the Covenant

Box (Ark). This was the centre of Israel and it was also the place of God's presence. So God's copy and Israel's copy could be kept together. The Ten Commandments, then, were the terms of the covenant that God had made with his people. At Sinai, in response to all that God had done for them, the people of Israel accepted these terms.²⁰

The Bible said the Ark also contained Aaron's rod that budded and a pot of manna.²¹

The Work Was Finished

Bezaleel and Oholiab built the Ark²² upon Moses' order. To complete their task, they were given special wisdom from the Lord. God said to Moses:

I have also selected Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be with him. I have placed wisdom within every skilled craftsman in order to make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony, the mercy seat that is on top of it, and all the [other] furnishings of the tent (Exodus 31:6,7 HCSB).

The Bible records that the work was finished as ordered. It was at the beginning of the second year of the Exodus that the components of the Ark of the Covenant were brought to Moses:

So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses: the tent and all its furnishings, its clasps, frames, crossbars, posts and bases; the covering of ram skins dyed red, the covering of hides of sea cows and the shielding curtain; the ark of the Testimony with its poles and the atonement cover (Exodus 39:32-35 NIV).

The Ten Commandments were then placed inside the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat was secured on top:

He took the covenant and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat above the ark (Exodus 40:20 NRSV).

The Ark of the Covenant was now completed.

It Was A Sacred Object

The completed Ark was a sacred object as can be seen from the different titles the Old Testament uses to identify it. Over twenty different terms are used to describe this holy artifact. They include the following.

The Ark Of God

Thirty-four times the title "Ark of God" was used in describing this object:

The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was (1 Samuel 3:3 NIV).

The Ark Of Your Strength

It was also called the “Ark of Your strength.” The psalmist wrote:

Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might (Psalm 132:8 ESV).

This reference is to the power of the Ark. The Ark was sometimes spoken of as representing God’s power and glory:

He abandoned the tabernacle at Shiloh, the tent where He resided among men. He gave up His strength to captivity and His splendor to the hand of a foe (Psalm 78:60,61 HCSB).

The references here to His “strength” and “glory” are to the Ark when it was taken captive by the Philistines.

The Ark Of God The Lord

Later in Israel’s history, it was called, the “Ark of God the Lord:”

David and all Israel went to Baalah of Judah (Kiriath Jearim) to bring up from there the ark of God the Lord, who is enthroned between the cherubim —the ark that is called by the Name (1 Chronicles 13:6 NIV).

The Ark Of The Testimony

One of the earliest titles used is the “Ark of the Testimony:”

There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites (Exodus 25:22 NIV).

This phrase is used 14 times in Scripture. Testimony is the Hebrew word meaning “sign” or “reminder.” It speaks of the two stone tablets within the Ark. Concerning the “testimony” Walter Kaiser writes:

vs. 16 *edut* means testimony or laws of the Ten Commandments that were placed inside the Ark. In Egypt, Babylonia, and the Hittite Empire, important documents were deposited in the sanctuary at the feet of the deity²³

The Ark Of The Covenant Of The Lord

Because the Ark revealed the presence of the Lord, the sacred object was called the “Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.” This term is used some thirty-one times in Scripture:

At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day (Deuteronomy 10:8 NRSV).

The Ark Of The Covenant

The most significant title is the “Ark of the Covenant.” A covenant is an “agreement” or “testament.” This title is used because the Ark contained the two tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments, the covenant between Israel and the Lord. Old Testament authority Marten Woudstra writes:

The phrase “ark of the covenant” no doubt refers to the fact that the ark was to contain and did contain the tables of the covenant. These tables were called the “testimony.”²⁴

The now completed Ark of the Covenant was the most holy object Israel possessed, for it symbolized God’s presence among them in a special way. In the future, God would speak to His people from the Ark.²⁵

As God appeared upon Mt. Sinai, He promised that His visible presence would remain with His people. The glory cloud in which God had brought deliverance at the Exodus would regularly appear between the wings of the cherubim over the Mercy Seat of the Ark.

Summary To Chapter 3

The Ark is described for us in Scripture in basic terms. It was a small chest lined inside and outside with gold. Though the acacia wood formed the dimensions of the Ark, its appearance was all gold—no wood could be seen. There are, however, many points that we cannot express with certainty including: The Ark’s size, its “feet” or “molding,” and the look of the cherubim. Hence any artist’s conception can only be viewed as an approximation of what it looked like.

What is known for certain is that the Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred object God has ever ordered humanity to construct. Not only did it contain the tablets of the Law, the Ten Commandments, written with the finger of God, it symbolized the covenant, the promises that God has made with His people and continues to keep.

Endnotes For Chapter 3

1. Biblical authority R.C.H. Lenski noted:

The ark is described as “having been overlaid with gold.” Exodus 25:11 says “within and without,” it also has “a crown of gold round about.” That is why the word which is used here is not gold as material, but the diminutive, wrought gold, gold work in designs (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Hebrews*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966, p. 278).

2. In Genesis 50:26 the word *aron* is translated “coffin.” *Aron* is probably related to the Akkadian *aranu* which means, “box.” Allen Cole writes:

‘Chest’ (rather like a small seaman’s chest, or a Chinese camphorwood box) given the meaning of aron is better than the older translation ‘ark.’ A different word is used for the ‘ark’ of Noah and Moses (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973, p. 190).

3. James G. Murphy wrote:

Babylonian cubit, which consisted of seven palms seems to have been sometimes employed (2 Chron. iii. 3, Ezek. xi. 5), but only after the captivity (James G. Murphy, *The Book of Exodus*, Boston: W. H. Halliday and Company, 1868, p. 168).

4. A.R. Fausset writes:

F.W. Holland measured acacias nine foot in girth, in the region of Israel’s wanderings; he attributes their being usually stunted there to the Arabs cutting off the young shoots for the she goats. Thus Colenso’s cavil that “not a single acacia,” is to be seen where the Ark is said to have been constructed is answered . . .

It is a propriety characteristic of the truth of the Scripture narrative that it represents the Ark as not made of oak or cedar, the best of the Holy Land, but of acacia, the wood the wilderness. Cedar actually was the wood used for Jerusalem’s Temple. In the thorn of man’s curse appeared the angel of the covenant to Moses to bless man; and out of wood was formed the Ark of the Covenant, the typical source of his blessing (A.R. Fausset, *Bible Encyclopaedia and Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, n.d., pp. 49,50).

5. The Word *Talmud* comes from the Hebrew word “to study.” It was a written compendium of oral law, completed by about the fifth century A.D. It is comprised of the Mishnah and Gemara, a commentary on the Mishnah. The Talmud exists in two versions: the Jerusalem and the Babylonian.

6. Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967, p. 329.

On the covering with gold Murphy says:

This was not a mere gilding but covering of the surface with thin plates of gold as we infer from 1 Kings vi. 16 and 2 Chron. iii. 3. The Talmud goes so far as to conclude that three chests were made, an outer one of gold, a middle one of shittah, and an inner one of gold plate (Murphy, *ibid.*, p. 168).

Jewish commentator Rashi said:

Bezaleel made three arks, two of gold and one of wood, each having four walls (sides) and a bottom, being however open at the top. He put the wooden ark into the larger golden one and the smaller golden one into that of wood and covered its upper rim (that of the wooden ark) with gold; consequently, it can be said that the wooden ark was overlaid with gold within and without (*Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentaries*, London: Shapiro, Valentine and Co., 1945, p. 133).

7. Concerning the molding or crown W.H. Gispen writes:

The molding ran probably around the top of the ark on all four sides; it is possible that the lid rested on this molding. However, it is also possible that the molding encased the atonement cover, so that the cover could not slide, e.g., when the ark was lifted up or put down (W.H. Gispen, *Exodus*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, pp. 246,247).

Cassuto wrote concerning the molding of gold:

an adornment in the form of a garland of flowers or leaves running right round the four sides of the ark on the outside, bisecting its height, and resembling in its form a similar adornment that was to be made for the table and its frame and the altar of incense; all the sacred appurtenances were to be fashioned in the same style (Cassuto, *ibid.*, p. 329).

Murphy remarked:

This was a border or cornice of pure gold round the upper edge of the ark, adorning, and at the same time strengthening it for support of the Mercy Seat (Murphy, *ibid.*, p. 168).

8. Some scholars think the Ark was a simple box without legs while others believed that it had legs or a lower rim. The “legs” would have had to have been small but of adequate size to raise the Ark above ground level. Old Testament authority Walter Kaiser, writes:

The meaning of feet is uncertain but “its . . . artificial feet” probably is the closest to its basic meaning . . . Whatever it was, four rings were attached to it. The King James Version reads “four corners” which is to be rejected. Whatever it was, the four gold rings were attached there (Walter Kaiser, *Exodus, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, General Editor

Frank E. Gaebelein, Volume 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, pp. 454,455).

9. We are not told where the rings were placed on the Ark. Some authorities maintain they were at the very top of the Ark while others contend they were about 7 inches (two and one third handbreadths) from the top. Still others state the rings were at the very bottom of the Ark.

10. For example, commentator Henry Soltau believed that the poles (staves) were to be placed sideways:

It will be seen that the Staves are . . . placed sideways, and not lengthways in the Ark. This seems to be their right position, because it is not probable that the Ark would be turned about, when it was taken up to be carried in the journeys, but would be borne straightforward. Also from 1 Kings viii. 8, it would appear, that, when drawn out of the rings, the Staves reached forwards toward the holy place; and the high priest, when taking in the incense and blood on the great day of atonement, would (if this were the position of the Staves) go in between them up to the Mercy Seat, instead of going up as it were against one of them (Henry Soltau, *The Holy Vessels and Furniture of the Tabernacle*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971, p. 43).

11. William Tyndale was the first to translate this word as “Mercy Seat.” This was followed in 1534 by Martin Luther’s translation. Modern translations have rendered the term variously such as “Place of Reconciliation” (Translators New Testament).

12. The verb that lies behind the noun “atonement” in the expression “atonement cover” means “to ransom or deliver by means of a substitute.”

Concerning the weight of the Mercy Seat, Aryeh Kaplan notes:

The Talmud states that the ark cover was one handbreadth (3 inches) thick (Sukkah 5a). It can easily be calculated that if it were solid gold, it would weigh, without the cherubs, some 2500 pounds, or 17 talents . . . Some sources state that the ark cover was considerably thinner (Tur), since we find the ark had to be light enough to be carried easily . . . One source states that the ark-cover weighed one talent (1500 pounds) just like the menorah . . . The ark cover would therefore have been around 3/16 inch thick. It may have been made like an inverted open box, so that its sides were one handbreadth thick on the outside (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *The Living Torah*, Brooklyn, New York: Moznaim Publishing Company, 1981, pp. 384,385).

13. Some see the Ark and Mercy Seat as separate object. Frank White writes:

Notwithstanding the Ark and Mercy-Seat were inseparable, the latter frequently spoken of in Scripture as something distinct from the former, and a separate place is assigned it in the various descriptions given of the Tabernacle furniture . . . The fact goes to show that the

Mercy Seat had a special purpose of its own, and was by no means to be regarded simply as the lid of the Ark. This implies that the Mercy-Seat was to be looked upon as the most prominent and important object contained in that part of the House of God, even beyond that of the Ark itself (Frank H. White, *Christ in the Tabernacle*, London: S.W. Partridge and Co., 1910, pp. 153,154).

14. On the position of the cherubim facing one another Kaplan writes:

Directly. Others say that they faced toward the east, toward the opening of the Holy of Holies, with their heads inclined toward each other (*Bava Bathra* 99a). Others say that their bodies faced toward the east, but their heads faced each other . . . They faced each other so that they would not appear to be gods (*Moreh Nerukhim* 3:45) (Kaplan, *ibid.*, p. 384).

15. Samuel Ridout, *Lectures on the Tabernacle*, New York: Loizeaux Publishers, 1914, p. 44.

16. The Hebrew name Yahweh (the Lord) means “I am” (cf. Exodus 3:14).

17. Abba Eban, *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*, New York: Summit Books, 1984, p. 38.

18. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3:6:5.

19. It is also said that the cherubim were fashioned from the same piece of gold as the Mercy Seat.

Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends (Exodus 25:19 NIV).

Although it is possible, they were formed from one piece of gold, this is not necessarily the case. The text may convey that, when *finished*, the cherubim should be seen connected to the Mercy Seat. It does not necessarily mean that they were fabricated out of the same mass of gold.

20. *Eerdmans' Family Encyclopedia of the Bible*, First American Edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978, p. 132.

21. Aaron's rod that budded was later placed inside the Ark:

And the LORD said to Moses, “Put back the staff of Aaron before the covenant, to be kept as a warning to rebels, so that you may make an end of their complaints against me, or else they will die” (Numbers 17:10 NRSV).

The story of Aaron's rod is dealt with in chapter 6.

Upon Moses' orders, Aaron put two quarts of manna in a jar and placed it before the Lord.

And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept (Exodus 16:33,34 ESV).

Concerning the pot of manna, Kaplan notes:

urn. A large clay jar . . . According to others, the word *tzintzeneth* denotes a glass jar, so that the manna could be seen. . . It might also have been a gold vessel (one possible translation of the Septuagint). In Egyptian, *tzenat* is a vase, and *snu* a jar, while *serbet* is a vessel of silver-gold alloy. *Sen* is a kind of precious stone (Kaplan, *ibid.*, pp. 338,341).

That the pot of manna and Aaron’s rod were to be placed *inside* the Ark is not stated in these passages, but it is assumed that it took place from the words “before the Lord.” The writer to the Hebrews says both the golden jar and Aaron’s rod were inside the Ark:

In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant (Hebrews 9:4 NRSV).

Later Moses put the complete book of the law by the side of the Ark of the Covenant:

Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you (Deuteronomy 31:26 NKJV).

Church father John Chrysostom said that the contents of the Ark were significant memorials of Israel’s rebellion; the tables of the covenant, for the first were broken on account of their sin; the manna reminding them of their murmuring; and the rod that budded of their jealousy of Aaron.

22. The name Bezaleel means “in the shadow of God’s protection.” He was a descendant of Caleb (1 Chronicles 2:19). His ability to work in the arts and his skills as a craftsman were gifts of the Holy Spirit. Oholiab, Bezaleel’s assistant, was from the tribe of Dan. His name means “tent of my father.” These two skilled craftsmen were responsible for the construction of all that pertained in the Tabernacle and its service, though they themselves possibly only supervised in the construction of various items.

23. Walter Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 455.

24. Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 79.

25. King David later recognized that God dwelt in a unique way between the cherubim.

David and all the Israelites with him went to Baalah of Judah (Kiriath Jearim) to bring up from there the ark of God the LORD, who is enthroned between the cherubim-- the ark that is called by the Name (1 Chronicles 13:6 NIV).

King Hezekiah also realized that the Ark was symbolic of God's presence:

And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: "O LORD the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, thou art the God, thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth" (2 Kings 19:15 RSV).

CHAPTER 4

A TEMPORARY HOME FOR THE ARK: THE TABERNACLE

At Mt. Sinai, the *holy* Ark of the Covenant was the first and most important object that God commanded to be built. In the same manner that the Lord gave Moses instructions to build the Ark, He also gave him the plans for its resting place. This structure would be the earthly counterpart to one that is in heaven. The most common designation for this sanctuary was the “Tabernacle.”¹

The Tabernacle was a “tent of testimony” to remind Israel that God does dwell with His people and reveals Himself to them.

During their years of wandering in the wilderness, this structure was portable. It was built in such a way that it could be easily taken apart and carried when the people journeyed toward the Promised Land.

It Was Made According To Pattern

Several articles of furniture were to be built and kept inside the Tabernacle. All the furnishings of the Tabernacle were to be made according to the pattern that God showed Moses. The Lord said:

Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it (Exodus 25:9 ESV).

Since the Tabernacle and its furniture were to be constructed according to a divinely-given blueprint, strict attention had to be paid to the smallest of details.² Moses, not only received detailed instructions, God may have also supernaturally shown him a pattern or model of the Tabernacle.

After Moses was given the pattern, the materials were brought to him, supplied by the free will offerings of the children of Israel.³ The building materials included three different metals (gold, silver, bronze), the skins of animals, wood, oil and precious stones.

The Tabernacle Was A Holy Place

The Tabernacle itself was a rectangular structure that consisted of two rooms: the first, called the “Holy Place,” comprised two thirds of the area. The smaller inner room was known as the “Holy of Holies.”

The Holy Place contained several articles of furniture: The Golden Altar for burning incense, the Golden Lampstand (Menorah) that held seven lamps to give light, and a Table of Showbread, where twelve loaves of bread were placed. The bread was renewed every Sabbath.

The two rooms of the Tabernacle were separated by a veil. The veil, made of fine linen, was colored blue, purple, and scarlet. Embroidered upon it

were the figures of the cherubim. The veil that divided the two chambers of the Tabernacle had the function of sealing off the way into the inner room.

The outer room was used on a regular basis. This, however, was not true of the inner room of the Tabernacle.

The Holy Of Holies

The Holy of Holies was the most sacred place in the Tabernacle. Only one article of furniture was to stand inside the Holy of Holies—the Ark of the Covenant. The Lord gave the following command:

And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy (Exodus 26:33 NKJV).

Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he could only come in one day a year—the Great Day of Atonement. On that special day, the High Priest presented an offering for the sins of the people as he sprinkled blood on the Mercy Seat, the Atonement Cover, above the Ark.

There Was No Natural Light

Daylight was not allowed to penetrate either the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. Only the Golden Lampstand illuminated the Holy Place. The Holy of Holies, however, was left in total darkness. This is symbolic of the invisible God whom no human has seen or can see. The Apostle Paul wrote of God's nature:

It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen (1 Timothy 6:16 NRSV).

The Ark Is Outlined First

The Bible describes several articles of the Tabernacle's furniture before the Tabernacle itself. This shows that they were of greater importance. The building instructions began with the Holy of Holies and worked outward. The Ark was the first and most important piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. Jewish Commentator Umberto Cassuto writes:

After the general introduction regarding the contribution to the Tabernacle, the Divine communication deals separately with each of the holy articles that are to be placed within the Tabernacle and kept there. The articles are described here before the Tabernacle itself, because they are of primary importance, and their sanctity is greater than that of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle serves to protect them; but they do not serve the Tabernacle.⁴

The Ark was the primary article of furniture in the Tabernacle. Thirteen verses are dedicated to its construction—more than any other article of furniture.

The Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies, was the spot from where the God of the Covenant communicated with His people. We read in Numbers:

When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony. And he spoke with him (Numbers 7:89 NIV).

It was from the Ark itself which the Lord spoke.

The Work Is Finished According To Pattern

The Bible records that the Tabernacle was constructed exactly to the pattern God had given Moses:

In this way all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished; the Israelites had done everything just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the covering of tanned rams' skins and the covering of fine leather, and the curtain for the screen; the ark of the covenant with its poles and the mercy seat (Exodus 39:32-35 NRSV).

The articles of furniture of the Tabernacle were copies of the same furniture in heaven. The writer to the Hebrews said:

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24 ESV).

When the Tabernacle was dedicated to the Lord Moses placed the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments inside the Ark.⁵ The Ark of the Covenant was then placed in the Tabernacle. This occurred on the first day of the first month of the second year after the children of Israel had departed from the land of Egypt:

The LORD spoke to Moses: “You are to set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, on the first day of the first month. Put the ark of the testimony there, and screen off the ark with the veil. Moses took the testimony and placed [it] in the ark, and attached the poles to the ark. He set the mercy seat on top of the ark” (Exodus 40:1-3,20 HCSB).

When the Ark was placed in the Tabernacle, the poles pressed up against the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. By being pressed against the veil, the priests could see that the Ark was in its proper place without entering.

When the Tabernacle was completed, it was dedicated to the Lord. At the dedication of the Tabernacle the glory of the Lord came to rest over it:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34,35 NIV).

The Ark of the Covenant now resided in its temporary home. It would not reach its permanent home for some four hundred and fifty years!

The Importance Of The Ark Of The Covenant

As we conclude our brief summary of the Tabernacle, we observe that the Ark of the Covenant ranked the highest of all the vessels, standing alone in the Holy of Holies. In the biblical order, before the Tabernacle was even described and commanded to be built, God gave orders to build this most important piece of furniture.⁶

All the rituals of the Tabernacle were conducted with reference to the Ark. Without the Ark of the Covenant, all the other vessels of the Tabernacle and all the service of the priests would have been useless.

The Ark of the Covenant, the most important object in the Tabernacle, was now ready to make its trek to the Promised Land and a permanent resting place.

Endnotes For Chapter 4

1. The name for the structure is tent. The English translators exalted it to the higher sounding “Tabernacle” following the Latin Vulgate *tabernaculum*. The name house and temple were also used for this structure but only when it was in a more settled condition.

It is called “the tent,” which usually refers to its outer covering; the “tent of meeting” where God met His people (Exodus 27:21); the “tent of witness” or testimony because it contained the Ark and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25:16); the dwelling and the dwelling of the Lord (Numbers 16:9) or the dwelling of the Testimony (Exodus 38:21) and the sanctuary or holy place (Exodus 25:8). The Tabernacle is mentioned 139 separate times in the Old Testament. It comes from the Hebrew word “dwell”—*Mishkan*. It is the place God dwells with His people.

2. The Tabernacle with its furniture contains spiritual truths. Jewish sage Abravanel wrote:

Does every detail of the Tabernacle and its furnishings have symbolic meaning or can we accept that God commanded them purely for ornamental and aesthetic reasons? It is difficult to imagine that the two cherubim in the form of babes crowning the Ark or the seven-branched candlestick with its elaborate carvings of almonds, cups and flowers have no specific symbolic significance. . . We have no alternative but to assume they have an allegorical meaning over and above their immediate literal sense. Our Sages, accordingly tried to provide us with insights into their symbolism.

It is important to realize that the study of the Ark and Tabernacle need to be done through the lens of Scripture. C.H. Mackintosh comments about correctly understanding the Tabernacle and its furniture:

Nature can do nothing here. Reason is blind—imagination utterly vain—the most gigantic intellect, instead of being able to interpret the sacred symbols, appears like a bat in the sunshine, blindly dashing itself against the objects which it is utterly unable to discern. We must compel reason and imagination to stand without, while with a chastened heart a single eye, and a spiritual mind, we enter the hallowed precincts and gaze upon the deeply significant furniture. God the Holy Ghost is the only One who can conduct us through the courts of the Lord’s house, and expound to our souls the true meaning of all that there meets our view. To attempt the exposition, by the aid of intellects unsanctified powers, would be infinitely more absurd than to set about the repairs of a watch with a blacksmith’s tongs and hammer. “The pattern of things in heaven” cannot be interpreted by the natural mind, in its most cultivated form. They must all be read in the light of heaven. Earth has no light which could at all develop their beauties. The One who furnished the patterns can alone explain what the patterns mean. The One who furnished the beauteous symbols can alone interpret them (C. H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1862, p. 275).

3. R. Alan Cole remarks that there are three fundamental principles in Exodus 25:1-9 that are eternally valid.

The first (in verse 2) is that giving to God must be voluntary, not forced (2 Cor. 9:7). God's grace will prompt men to give: and man will then give his most costly treasures gladly to God . . . Secondly, it is God's aim and purpose to live in the midst of His people (verse 8): that is the whole reason for making the Tent. Thirdly, obedience in carrying out God's master-plan is essential (verse 9) (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973, p. 189).

4. Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967, p. 328.

5. The tablets would not have been very large. Apparently, they laid side by side inside the Ark and were wrapped in linen, so when the Ark was carried the writing on them would not be rubbed away.

Cassuto remarks on the tablets being inside the Ark.

If the question be asked, why the tables, which comprise the principles of the Covenant and the basic precepts incumbent on the Israelites, were lying in an enclosed place, and were not exhibited before the people, it can easily be answered that there were undoubtedly copies of the Decalogue engraven on stone, or written on parchment or papyrus, available for the people to see, and that it was only the original testimony that was put in the Ark for safe keeping (Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967, p. 331).

Note: The Golden Altar and the Book of the Law:

The Golden Altar of Incense was not in the Holy of Holies. It stood before the entrance to the inner sanctuary. The smoke of the incense was designed to penetrate the veil and permeate the Holy of Holies as it ascended before the Ark. There was an intimate relationship between the Altar of Incense and the Ark. In Israel's later history, the Altar of Incense became more closely associated with the Ark and the Holy of Holies.

Was the Book of the Law placed inside the Ark or in a chest next to it? The words, "by the side of it" seem to refer to next to it rather than inside. Bible scholar Humphrey Prideaux believes it was on the outside for the following reasons:

1st, the same word, *Mitzzad*, is made use of, where it is said that the Philistines sent back the Ark with an offering of Jewels of Gold put in a coffer by the side of it. And there it is certain the word must be understood of the outside, not the inside. 2dly, the Ark was not of capacity enough to hold the volume of the whole Law of Moses with the other things placed therein. 3dly, the end of laying up the original volume of the Law in the Temple was, that it might be reserved there, as the Authentick Copy, by which all others were to be corrected, and set right, and therefore had to answer to this end it must have be placed

so, as that access might be had thereto on all occasions acquiring it, which could not have been done, if it had been put within the Ark, and shut up there by the Cover of the Mercy Seat over it, which was not to be removed. 4thly, when Hilkiah the High Priest in the time of Josiah found the Copy of the Law in the Temple, there is nothing said of the Ark, neither is it there spoken of, as taken from thence, but as found elsewhere in the Temple. And therefore putting all this together it seems plain, that the volume of the Law was not laid within the Ark, but had a particular Coffer, or repository of its own, in which it was placed by the side of it (Humphrey Prideaux, *Old and New Testament Connected, Part 1*, Vol. 1, 10th edition, 1729, pp. 205,206).

6. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* notes:

This [the Ark], taken together with the mercy-seat was the one piece of the tabernacle's furniture especially invested with sacredness and mystery, and it therefore was the first for which precise directions were delivered ("Ark of the Covenant," Dr. William Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, Revised and edited by Ezra Abbot, Vol. 1, 1872, p. 155).

CHAPTER 5

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE ARK?

Was it a box that contained God? Could it have been an instrument of war? How about a container that held a meteorite and not the Ten Commandments?

These are just some of the theories that have been put forward regarding the meaning of Ark of the Covenant and its contents.

We have now arrived at one of the areas of controversy surrounding the Ark—its purpose. Did the Israelites believe God actually lived inside the Ark? Was it some superstitious relic? Was it a weapon that no army could withstand?

Various Theories Of The Ark's Purpose

Theories abound concerning the meaning and purpose of the Ark.¹ Some of the most well-known of these are as follows.

1. A container where the Lord, the God of Israel, dwelt.
2. An idea borrowed from other nations.
3. A “talisman” or “good luck” charm.
4. A device that Moses constructed with advanced scientific knowledge.
5. An ancient war machine.
6. A container for the Ten Commandments as well as a representation of God’s presence.

We will consider each of these suggestions as to what the Ark may have represented.

Option 1 Was It A Container For The Lord?

Some interpreters see the Ark as a container that housed God’s presence. The Lord, they believe, was somehow confined to the Ark.

Why would God order the people to build an Ark where He would “dwell among them?” Does this not prove that they thought that God actually lived inside the Ark and was limited to a certain geographic space?

God Was Not Living In The Ark

The idea that the Lord, the God of the Bible, was confined to the Ark does not fit the facts.

Scripture makes it clear that God is not a material object and cannot be limited to one place:

This is what the Lord says: “The heavens are my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where then is the house you will build for me? Where is the place where I will rest?” (Isaiah 66:1 NET).

When the Ark was placed in Solomon’s Temple, Solomon’s prayer showed that the people did not believe God was limited to one particular area:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! (1 Kings 8:27 NRSV).

Indeed, the Lord existed before the Ark was built. In fact, He is spoken of as the Creator of all things.

For example, we find that God said the following things to Moses when He spoke to him from the burning bush:

The LORD said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” (Exodus 4:11 NIV).

He is the Creator; nobody created Him!

Furthermore, it was the Lord who commanded the Ark to be built! Obviously, He existed before its construction as well as apart from it.

Finally, the Lord continued to exist *after* the Ark disappeared.

The Scripture makes it clear that the God of Israel was not confined to the Ark. The Ark symbolized the presence of God without any attempted physical resemblance.

Option 2 It Was A Borrowed Idea

A common theory about the Ark is that its design and purpose were borrowed from similar structures that were current in the ancient Near East. The Ark of the Covenant, it is contended, looked similar to other “sacred objects” that were in use at that time. Ancient analogies to the Ark have been sought in model temples, tent-shrines, chariots for gods, squared thrones, and even coffins for the gods. Therefore, it is argued there is nothing unique or supernatural about the Ark since it was one of many such objects.

For example, the tomb of King Tutankhamun (King Tut), who lived about the same time as Moses, contained a portable chest similar to the Ark of the Covenant. This container was probably made to house the heavy royal robes.

King Tut's wooden box had four poles for carrying, two at each end. When the chest was stationary, the poles were slid into rings underneath it.

Similar "arks" were supposedly common in Israel's time.

There Are Three Problems With This View

There are three basic problems with the view that Israel's Ark was one of many such "arks" in the ancient world.

First, the references to the ark-like objects in other cultures have only a superficial resemblance. They are not the same structure or pattern as the biblical Ark. A similarity in design does not prove one necessarily "borrowed" from the other.

Second, many of the similar structures were built after the Ark of the Covenant. If any borrowing were done, it was probably from the Ark of the Covenant, not the reverse.

Old Testament authority George Bush observes:

It is to be remarked that similar arks or chests, containing the mysteries of their religions, were common among nearly all the ancient heathen nations, the hint of which was probably taken from the Jews. The Egyptians, for instance, carried in solemn procession a sacred chest, containing the secret things and mysteries of their religion.²

Finally, and by far the most important, the history of the Ark shows that it was not some ancient pagan box devoid of power. Supernatural events took place around the Ark. The idea that the Ark of the Covenant was somehow ordinary, or commonplace, does not fit with, or follow the facts.

Option 3 The Ark Was A Magical Object (Talisman)

The Ark has been viewed as a magical object or talisman, like a "rabbits' foot," or a "good luck" charm. Though the people may have treated the Ark as a good luck charm, they learned that it did not guarantee victory. When Israel attempted to use the Ark as a "rabbits' foot," in a battle with the Philistines, they lost both the battle and the Ark:

So the Philistines fought. Israel was defeated; they all ran home. The slaughter was very great; thirty thousand foot soldiers fell in battle. The ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, were killed (1 Samuel 4:10,11 NET).

The Ark And Islam

Islam holds a superstitious view of the Ark. John Lawson and John M. Wilson note:

The Mohammedans pretend that the Ark was given to Adam ready-made, and that it was handed down from patriarch to patriarch until

the time of Moses; and the portraits of the patriarchs and prophets were engraven upon it; that in times of war a mighty rushing wind came forth from it which discomfited the enemies of Israel, and hence they carried it about with them as a protection in the wanderings from place to place. The followers of the Arabian prophet allege that in addition to the tables of stone, the ark of the covenant contained the shoes which Moses put off at the burning bush on Horeb, the pontifical head-dress which Aaron wore, and a piece of wood with which Moses sweetened the waters of Marah.³

The idea that the Ark had some magical qualities is not taught in Scripture.

Option 4 Was It A Mosaic Deception?

One theory has the Ark as a man-made device constructed by Moses with the skills he learned in Egypt. British author Graham Hancock wondered:

As a magician skilled in Egyptian ‘sacred science’, might not Moses have had at his disposal far more in the way of knowledge and technology than had hitherto been recognized by the archaeologists? And might he not have applied that knowledge and technology to the construction of the Ark of the Covenant?⁴

Moses, with his knowledge of Egyptian science, supposedly built this terrible warlike object. Hancock concludes:

I find myself drawn to the strange passages in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy which described the encounters between God and Moses on Mt. Sinai. Amidst thunder and fire, electrical storms and clouds of smoke, Yahweh supposedly disclosed the blueprint of the Ark of the Covenant to the Hebrew magus and presented him with the stone Tablets of the Law inscribed on the Ten Commandments. Then the Ark itself was built by the artificer Bezaleel who slavishly followed the ‘divine’ plan, almost as though he knew that he was forging some monstrous instrument.

And this, I suspect, is what the Ark really was: a monstrous instrument capable of releasing fearful energies in an uncontrolled and catastrophic manner if it was mishandled or misused in any way—an instrument that was not conceived in the mind of God, as the Bible teaches, but rather in the mind of Moses.⁵

According to Hancock and others, Moses was not a prophet of God but rather a simple con artist. This view assumes that the God of the Old Testament does not exist, but was rather a creation of the desert-dwelling Hebrews. This is contradicted by the evidence that God not only exists, but that He has revealed Himself to us in both the Old and New Testament.

Option 5 An Instrument Of War

The idea that the Ark was some type of war instrument is well-known but the evidence is non-existent. Apart from the use of the Ark at Jericho, it

does not receive mention at any of the other battles in the Book of Joshua. Other Old Testament references to the Ark used in battle are few.

In addition, there is no military purpose which can be found in the Ark's construction—neither in its form nor its contents. It was not shaped like a weapon; it was *never* used as a weapon. The Bible gives no report of lightning, electricity, or any other force emanating from the Ark as it was taken to battle. The importance of the Ark in fighting wars was not because of its design or purpose—rather it was due to its symbolizing the invisible God of Israel. God was the One fighting for Israel, not the Ark. The Ark symbolized His presence.

**Option 6 The Biblical View: A Container For The
Ten Commandments As Well As A
Visible Representation Of The Invisible God**

Though there have been many different attempts to discern the purpose of the Ark, the only one that fits the facts is the biblical explanation.

The Ark was a container for the Ten Commandments, the covenant between God and His people. More than that, it was symbolic of the presence and character of God. He did not exist only there, but He revealed Himself from that sacred object. The Ark represented God's presence in the midst of His people. The Lord told Moses:

And I will meet with you there, and from above the propitiatory lid, from between the cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will command you for the Israelites (Exodus 25:22 NET).

The Power Of The Ark

The Bible does say that there was great power connected to the Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark was brought to the Jordan River, at flood stage, the waters immediately stopped flowing and rolled back to the city of Adam allowing the children of Israel to pass safely into the Promised Land (Joshua 3).

Shortly thereafter, the Ark was carried by priests around the city of Jericho once each day for six straight days and then seven times around on the seventh day. After the seventh time around, the wall collapsed and the victory belonged to Israel (Joshua 6:6-20).

When the Ark was later captured by the Philistines all sorts of terrible evils befell them. A plague caused them to send the Ark back to the children of Israel (1 Samuel 5-6). A number of men perished at Beth Shemesh when the Israelites did not treat the Ark with proper respect.

God's Presence Was Symbolized In The Ark

The power of the Ark lay not in its fallacy of being some magic box. Its power was in the fact that it symbolized God's divine presence.

The Israelites went to battle with the Philistines without the Ark leading them. They were soundly defeated. Thinking that their defeat came about because of the absence of the Ark, they obtained it and went to do battle with the Philistines a second time. Again they were routed and the Ark was captured. God was making the point that it was not the mere presence of the Ark that would win the battle.

Indeed, it was His presence that was needed to win and His presence did not necessarily come with the Ark. Therefore, the idea that the Ark had some magic power, making any army that possessed it invincible, does not square with the facts. God had promised His presence in the Ark as long as the people obeyed Him. When they disobeyed, the glory departed. The Bible says:

She said, “The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God has been captured” (1 Samuel 4:22 NET).

Thus, the power of the Ark went hand in hand with obedience to God.

The Ark Housed The Law Not An Image Of God

The Ark of the Covenant was unique in that it housed the law of God, not some image of Him. The Ten Commandments forbade any image of God to be made. We read about this in the Book of Exodus:

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Exodus 20:4 NRSV).

This commandment extended to Temple vessels and replicas of the sacred furniture.

The Ark of the Covenant was not to be worshiped. Rather worship was to be extended to the invisible God which it symbolized.

The Instruction Was God-Given

We close this section with the emphasis on the supernatural construction of the Ark. The Ark cannot be compared to any pagan object that has ever been made because its origin came from Almighty God Himself. Indeed, the ark was constructed based upon a divine mandate from the one, true, God. Precise instructions were given with respect to its exact size and shape. These instructions were faithfully carried out.

Samuel Ridout writes:

We are told that the Israelites represented a stage in the natural development of the human race in their upward progress. But who taught them to cast away idols? How could they, or Moses, have conceived the thought that God was infinitely great and almighty, but not corporeal? There is but one answer—God was pleased to make

Himself known. And how constantly, patiently, and carefully, did He reiterate that lesson . . .

The ark, then, and the Mercy Seat, with the attendant cherubim, were not idols, but they emphasized the spirituality of that all-glorious Being who fills heaven and earth, and yet had come to dwell among His people and manifest Himself to them.⁶

To those who consider the Ark merely some human-made superstitious object and who reject the God of Israel and His sacred artifact, we offer them the comments of the psalmist:

Why do the nations rage? Why do the people waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the LORD and against his anointed one. “Let us break their chains,” they cry, “and free ourselves from this slavery.” But the one who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them (Psalm 2:1-4 NLT).

The Lord indeed scoffs at those who attempt to make plans against Him and His Anointed One, Jesus.

Endnotes For Chapter 5

1. Marten Woudstra writes.

There is hardly a single type of Old Testament interpretation which has not in some way drawn the ark within its own particular orbit. Thus the ark has been the subject of sane spiritualization and extreme allegorizing. . . . The solemn words of David, spoken at the entry of the ark into the sanctuary, “Arise O Yahweh, into thy restingplace, thou and the ark of thy strength” (Ps. 132:8) cannot be applied to the many studies devoted to the ark in the course of time. The ark has not enjoyed a restingplace but has constantly moved about from one theory to the next (Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 10).

2. George Bush, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, Volume 1, Boston: Henry A. Young & Co., 1841, p. 92. Bush also wrote.

The Trojans also had their sacred chest; and the palladium of the Greeks and Romans was something not very unlike. It is remarkable too, that as the Hebrew Tabernacle and Temple had a holy of holies, in which the ark was deposited, so had the heathen, in the inmost part of their temples . . . which none but the priests might enter . . . Something very similar may be traced among barbarous and savage nations. Thus Tacitus speaking of the nations of Northern Germany, of whom our Saxon ancestors were a branch, says that they generally worshiped Hertham, or Mother Earth (*Terram matrem*); believing her to interpose in the affairs of men, and to visit nations; and that to her, within a grove in a certain island, was consecrated a vehicle covered with a vestment, and which none but the priests were allowed to touch. The same thing has been frequently noticed in the connection with religious systems of other heathen nations, and among the inhabitants of Mexico and the South Sea Islands, very curious analogies with the Mosaic ark have been discovered (Bush, *ibid.*, p. 93).

J. Barton Payne notes.

His presence came and dwelt over the ark (Exodus 25:22) though He remained free to reject those who should prove faithless (Exodus 19:5). For contrary to Canaanitish theology, the testament did not put God “in a box.” Israel in the consolidation period may indeed have succumbed to a belief in the magical efficacy of the ark. (It is mentioned four times in the three verses, 1 Samuel 4:3-5). But to treat it as a “container” of God became in itself nothing short of a violation of the testament concept; and how God reacted to this externalization, they learned to their sorrow. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but Yahweh looketh upon the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Old Testament authority Umberto Cassuto writes:

The conception of the ark as the Lord's footstool enables us to understand why the tablets of the covenant were placed within it, and to realize that the conjectures . . . that inside the ark were not the tables but sacred stones (kinds of fetishes, or idols, and the like), are without foundation. It was the custom in the ancient East to deposit the deeds of a covenant made between human kings in the sanctuaries of the gods, in the footstool of the idols that symbolized the deity, so that the godhead should be a witness to the covenant and see that it was observed. . . his custom makes it clear why the testimony to the covenant made between the Lord and Israel were enshrined in the ark. Among the Israelites there was no image to symbolize the God of Israel, but there was His footstool, and therein the testimony of the covenant was placed and preserved (Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967 p. 331).

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes:

The statement of Moses "Arise O Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered" (Nu. 10:35), is not the command addressed to those who carry the ark to lift it up and thereby elevate Yahweh for the journey, but is a demand made upon Yahweh, in accordance with His promise, to go ahead of Israel as the ark does. According to 1 S. 4:3 the Israelites did not say, "We want to go and get the Lord," but "We want to go and get the ark of the Lord, that He may come among us." They wanted to induce Him to come by getting the ark. This, too, the priests and the soothsayers of the Philistines say: "Do not send away the ark of the God of Israel empty [i.e. without a gift]" (1 S. 6:3), but they do not speak as though they thought Yahweh was Himself confined therein . . .

Ancient Israel was therefore evidently of the conviction that the ark was closely connected with Yahweh, and that something of His power was inherent in the ark; consequently, the feeling prevailed that when near the ark they were in a special way in the presence of the Lord. But this is something different from the opinion that the ark was, in the very literal sense, a seat or dwelling place of Yahweh. Ancient man was not conscious to the extent we are of the difference between the symbolic presence and the literal reality, but that this difference was felt is not a matter of doubt (W. Lotz, M.G. Kyle, C.E. Armerding, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 1, Revised Edition*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, p. 293).

They conclude.

In all the discussion it is foolish to press the aspect of physical presence to great lengths. That Yahweh was present with His people is clear from the texts. But that Yahweh was confined to the ark runs counter to both Hebrew notions about the nonspatial nature of God, and to the explicit statements of Scripture which, dating from the same times, mention God dwelling in many places both within and outside of Canaan (*ibid.*, p. 294).

3. John Lawson and John M. Wilson, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Geography, Biography, Natural History, and General Knowledge*, Vol. 1, Aaron to Egypt, Edinburgh: A Fullarton & Co., 1867, p. 184.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the Ark of the Covenant is a title given to the Virgin Mary to signify her divine motherhood (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert C. Broderick, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976, p. 52).

It has been alleged that the Ark was a specially built transmitter to talk to God. Science fiction writer Erik von Daaniken wrote.

Without actually consulting Exodus, I seem to remember that the Ark was often surrounded by flashing sparks and that Moses made use of this “transmitter” whenever he needed help and advice (Erik von Daaniken, *Chariots of the gods*, pp. 58,59).

He should have consulted Exodus. There are no references in that book or any other in the Old Testament where the Ark is said to have been surrounded by flashing sparks. Furthermore, the Book of Exodus records a number of occasions where God spoke to Moses before the Ark was constructed.

The Bible says the Ark contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Others have assumed something else was inside the Ark such as sacred stones or a piece of a meteor! There is nothing in Scripture that even remotely suggests that the tablets of the Ten Commandments had any secret power or that they had fallen down from outer space. Imagination runs wild when attempting to give a natural explanation for supernatural phenomena. J. Barton Payne writes.

The Mosaic traditions concerning the contents of the ark have been discounted by many. It has been supposed that the ark originally contained a fetish or other sacred stones. But these theories have been refuted by others, cf. R. Kittel, *A History of the Hebrews*, I, London, 1895, p. 238, “There is not a trace of its having resembled the heathen arks in containing an image or Yahweh or a holy stone” (J. Barton Payne, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 1, Merrill C. Tenney General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, p. 306).

4. Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1992, pp. 339,340.

5. Hancock, *ibid.*, p. 304.

6. Samuel Ridout, *Lectures on the Tabernacle*, New York: Loizeaux Publishers, 1914, pp. 268,269.

James Murphy notes.

The contents of this cabinet distinguished it from all heathen chests of a similar kind in which were deposited certain symbols of the powers

of nature which man regarded with superstitious veneration. Here are placed the two tables, on which are traced in plain and literal characters, the great principles of eternal rectitude, not as an object of worship, but as the basis of all moral dealing in the intercourse between God and man (James G. Murphy, *The Book of Exodus*, Boston: W. H. Halliday and Company, 1868, p. 291).

A.R. Fausset writes:

Heathen nations too had their mystic arks (whence *arcaneum* is the word for mystery), but so distinct in use from the Mosaic that the differences are more prominent than the resemblances. The Egyptian arks (on their monuments) were like the Hebrew Ark carried by poles on men's shoulders. Some had too on the cover two winged figures like cherubim; but between these was the material symbol of a deity. And the arks were carried about in procession to make a show before the people. The Ark of the Covenant on the contrary was marked by the absence of any symbol of God. It was never carried in procession. When moved it was carefully covered up from the eyes even of the Levites who bore it (Num. iv. 5,6,19,20) . . . The originality of the Tabernacle furniture and arrangements is more striking than the superficial resemblances which have been traced to heathen usages (A.R. Fausset, *Bible Encyclopaedia and Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, n.d. pp. 50,51).

SECTION 2

THE HISTORY OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

After Mt. Sinai, where did the Ark go? What was its history? We will now follow the travels of the Ark to the Promised Land, from its miraculous entry to the time of its mysterious disappearance.

CHAPTER 6

LEADING THE WAY TO THE PROMISED LAND

The command had been given, the materials gathered, and the sacred Ark had been built. The Ark of the Covenant was now ready to make its mark in history, the final chapter of which is still unwritten.

The history of the Ark of the Covenant parallels the history of the children of Israel. The Ark was *the* sacred object that the Lord used to lead the way to the Promised Land.¹

The Ark Led The Way

Seven weeks after the Tabernacle had been inaugurated the children of Israel left Mt. Sinai as “the people of God.” While the other components of the Tabernacle occupied the central part of the column of march the Ark of the Covenant went before the line of march “to seek out a resting place for them.” The Bible says:

So they traveled from the mountain of the Lord three days’ journey; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord was traveling before them in the three days’ journey, to find a resting place for them. And the cloud of the Lord was on them by day, when they journeyed from the camp. And when the ark journeyed, Moses would say, “Rise up, Lord, and may your enemies be scattered and those who hate you flee before you.” And when it came to rest he would say, “Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel” (Numbers 10:33-36 NET).

During the wanderings of the children of Israel in the desert, the Ark was carried on the shoulders of the priests. The poles were never removed from the Ark.

The Bible gives us no explanation as to why the poles were to remain with the Ark and never to be removed. The poles that were used to carry the altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense were allowed to be removed, but the poles carrying the Ark were never removed.

It is possible that this order was given to make it unnecessary for the Ark itself to be touched, when set down or taken up, by those who bore it on the march.²

The Ark Was Unseen By The People

The Ark was transported in such a way that the people could not see it. It was covered by the veil from the dismantled Tabernacle. Then a curtain of badger skins covered that, and finally a blue cloth³ covered the two. This made it near to impossible for anyone to see the Ark except the priests:

When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it.

Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place (Numbers 4:5,6 NIV).

The Levites Were Responsible For The Ark

The Levites were responsible for putting up and taking down the Tabernacle, and carrying the coverings and furniture when the people wandered in the wilderness:

At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord to stand before the Lord to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day (Deuteronomy 10:8 ESV).

One of the families of the Levites, the Kohathites, were responsible for the Ark. We read about this in the Book of Numbers:

Now the leader of the clan of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. And their responsibility included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the curtain, and all their service (Numbers 3:30,31 NET).

The Kohathites were given the task of lowering the veil and placing it over the Ark along with the hides and cloths. They could not touch the Ark upon pain of death.⁴

This covering was to keep the Ark from being seen by the people as well as to protect it from the elements. The coverings could be touched, but not the things covered.

There Was No Permanent Rest For The Ark

During the time of wandering in the wilderness, the Ark of the Covenant never found a permanent resting place. C.H. Mackintosh writes:

The ark of the covenant was to accompany the people in all their wanderings. It never rested while they were traveling... It moved from place to place in the wilderness. It went before them in the midst of Jordan; it was their grand rallying point in all the wars of Canaan; it was the sure and certain earnest of power wherever it went. No power of the enemy could stand before that which was the well-known expression of the divine presence and power. The ark was to be Israel's companion in travel, in the desert; and "the staves" and "the rings" were the apt expression of its traveling character.⁵

It Was The Center Point Of Camp

When the Israelites would make camp, the Ark and the Tabernacle would be placed in the center of the multitude (Numbers 10:14-27). It was truly central to the worship of the people. Everything in the camp pointed to the Ark. The purpose of entering the court of the Tabernacle was to enter the presence of God Himself.

God was not only present with His people in the Ark of the Covenant, He was also a God who speaks and acts. Before the Ark was constructed, He promised to speak to His people through this sacred object. The first example of this is recorded in the Book of Leviticus:

The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying (Leviticus 1:1 NIV).

God continued to speak to Moses in an audible voice on other occasions.⁶ Later, in the Book of Numbers we read:

And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him (Numbers 7:89 ESV).

The Day Of Atonement

During their wilderness wanderings and beyond, the children of Israel celebrated one sacred day when their sins would be atoned for. This event centered around the Ark of the Covenant.

As we have mentioned, the High Priest could not march into the Holy of Holies anytime he wanted. The Bible says:

The LORD said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:2 NRSV).

Only once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement, was the High Priest allowed to enter the holiest of all. This was the day the Ark achieved its highest sacrificial significance. Before the priest could enter, he had to observe the sacrificial rites and ceremonies outlined in Leviticus 16. Blood had to shed for his sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

On that day the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies three times, first with incense, then with the blood of a bull which atoned for his own sins and those of his house, and finally, he entered with the blood of a goat that atoned for the sins of the people.

The Mercy Seat, on top of the Ark, was the most sacred place in the Sanctuary, being the visible throne of the invisible presence of God. The Mercy Seat was so named because on the Great Day of Atonement the High Priest sprinkled it with the blood of the victims of the substitutionary sacrifice:

Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:15 ESV).

The Great Day of Atonement spoke of a future time when the sins of the people would not merely be covered up but actually taken away.⁷

God's Provision—Manna

While the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness they were supernaturally fed by manna from heaven:

When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat” (Exodus 16:14,15 NIV).

The people were allowed to gather enough for one day. Any that was left over would spoil. On the day before the Sabbath, they were able to gather a double portion to keep them from working on the day of rest.

To remind the people of God's provision, a golden pot of manna was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant.

Aaron's Rod

After God had sent a plague on some of the rebellious people, there were still those who were murmuring against the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron. God then performed a miracle to show the people that it was Aaron whom He had chosen to be the high priest.

God commanded Moses to collect twelve staffs, one from each of the tribes of Israel. Each owner was to write his name on the staff. Aaron's name was written on the rod of Levi. The staffs were to be placed in the Tabernacle before the Ark of the Covenant. God then told Moses:

“Buds will sprout on the staff belonging to the man I choose. Then I will finally put an end to this murmuring and complaining against you.” So Moses gave the instructions to the people of Israel, and each of the twelve tribal leaders, including Aaron, brought Moses a staff. Moses put the staffs in the LORD's presence in the Tabernacle of the Covenant (Numbers 17:5-7 NLT).

The next morning, they found that Aaron's rod⁸ had budded and produced almonds:

When he went into the Tabernacle of the Covenant the next day, he found that Aaron's staff, representing the tribe of Levi, had sprouted, blossomed, and produced almonds (Numbers 17:8 NLT).

The Test Left No Doubt

God's response to the test left no doubt as to its meaning. The Bible records the following:

And the LORD said to Moses: “Place Aaron’s staff permanently before the Ark of the Covenant as a warning to rebels. This should put an end to their complaints against me and prevent any further deaths.” So Moses did as the LORD commanded him (Numbers 17:10,11 NLT).

At some point the rod of Aaron was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant.

Ronald B. Allen makes an appropriate observation:

Aaron’s rod was not returned to him. It was to be a perpetual reminder of the wonder of the night and the choice of God in his priest. Hence it was to remain in the Tabernacle in perpetuity... The interesting thing is that these memorials were put in a place where no one would ordinarily see them. They would be told of them in later generations, but they would not be on public display. None, save the High Priest, would enter the Holy Place, excepting Moses on rare occasions such as this chapter presents. While the text focuses on the role these symbols have in the memory of the people, the placement of these symbols in the seclusion of the shrine indicates that the one who will ever be reminded is the Lord! These holy symbols were ever before him as memorials of his special works with his people. Should anyone of a later age dare to question the unique and holy place of the Aaronic priests in the service of the Lord, this memorial of God’s symbolic choice of Aaron would stand poignantly in opposition to his audacity.⁹

The Ark Goes Before The People

During their wilderness wanderings, the Lord providentially acted through the Ark even without their inquiring:

And on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle of the testimony (Numbers 10:11 NET).

When the cloud was lifted up, this was the signal for the people to advance. The Ark went before them to “seek out a resting place” (Numbers 10:33).

Fighting Without The Ark

On one occasion, the people attempted to fight a battle without the consent of the Lord and His Ark. The Ark remained behind and the people were defeated:

Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah (Numbers 14:44,45 NIV).

When the Israelites attempted to enter the land without the guidance from the Lord, they were slaughtered at the border. The battle was lost because the children of Israel did not consult the Lord, not because they neglected to take along the Ark.

Moses' Speech

After forty years¹⁰ of wandering in the wilderness, the people were positioned to enter the Promised Land. Moses then gave a speech to the multitude which reminded them of their history. He indicated that God had showed them mercy in allowing a second set of tablets to be formed.¹¹ Moses' prayer on behalf of the people, had kept them from experiencing the wrath of God:

At that time the LORD said to me, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest. I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Then you are to put them in the chest.” So I made the ark out of acacia wood and chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. The LORD wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the Ten Commandments he had proclaimed to you on the mountain, out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me. Then I came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the LORD commanded me, and they are there now (Deuteronomy 10:1-5 NIV).¹³

Moses testified that the tablets were still in the Ark at the time of his speech to the people.

Moses' Death

Moses, the man God used to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage and to construct the Ark of the Covenant, was not allowed to enter the Promised Land:¹⁴

So Moses, servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab as the Lord had said. The Israelites buried him in the land of Moab near Beth Peor, but no one knows his burial place to this very day (Deuteronomy 34:5,6 NET).

Though the exact burial place of Moses is still unknown, this location has figured into modern-day searches for the Ark of the Covenant.¹⁵

It Was Time To Enter The Promised Land

The children of Israel had wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They were now perched on the border, about to enter the Promised Land. There was, however, a seemingly impossible obstacle in their way and a great miracle from God would be needed to allow them to enter their land.

Endnotes for Chapter 6

1. Marten Woudstra writes.

To speak about the ark inevitably means to speak about the God whose intimate association with the ark is frequently stated. This lends to the ark-stories a peculiar significance. . . at some time during the history of the Old Testament the notion prevailed that Yahweh (the Lord) had set aside one solemn object for the purpose of being the supreme manifestation of his presence with Israel (Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 13.)

One Jewish legend says:

The Ark gave the signal for breaking camp by soaring high and then swiftly moving before the camp at a distance of three days' march (Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911, Vol. 3, p. 243).

2. One Jewish writer stated why he thought this was so:

The ark is the dwelling place of the Torah, our foundation and glory, and we have to show it the greatest reverence and respect. We are bidden not to remove its poles, since we might be called upon to go forth with the ark in haste, and in the hurry of the moment forget to examine whether the poles are properly secured and, God forbid, the ark might slip from our hold. If the poles are always secured in their place such a thing could never happen, since the ark would always be ready for transportation (Sefer Ha-hinukh).

Umberto Cassuto writes:

The reason for this distinction is, apparently, the fact that the ark was due to be carried not only when the camp as a whole was on the move, but also in connection with solemn processions, like those described in Joshua iii. 3 ff.; vi 4 ff.; and consequently, it was fitting that whatever was necessary to its transportation should always be ready. The poles, were, so to speak, an inseparable part of the ark, which was always intended to be carried (Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967, pp. 321,322).

Old Testament scholar C.F. Keil believed that there were four poles:

It has four carrying poles so that bearers could support it on their shoulders. Each pole slides through two bronze rings attached to the base of the box (C.F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume II, The Pentateuch*, C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1971, p. 167).

3. The blue covering on the Ark stood in contrast to the other articles of furniture which were covered first by a blue, purple, or scarlet cloth and afterward badgers' skins.

4. The Bible is clear on this matter:

When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it . . . And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die (Numbers 4:5,15).

5. C. H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1862, pp. 278,279.

The great Jewish commentator Maimonides wrote the following concerning the transporting of the Ark.

When the ark is moved from place to place it is not moved on a beast or wagon but must be carried on the shoulder. Because David forgot and had it moved on a wagon, the breach was broken against Uzzah. This duty of carrying it on the shoulder is distinctly stated: “for the service of the holy things belonged to them: they bore it upon their shoulders” (Num. 7:9). The porters carried it facing each other, their backs to the outside, their faces inwards, taking care that the poles should not slip out of the rings, since he who removes one of the poles from the rings is liable to the penalty of lashes, as it is stated: “the poles shall remain in the rings of the ark, they shall not be removed therefrom” (Rambam in his code *Klei Ha-Mikdash*, 2, 12-13).

6. William Brown notes.

It is not necessary to suppose that Moses or the High Priest, when consulting Jehovah, entered the Holy of Holies. The probability is, that Moses or the priest inquired of the Lord in the Holy Place, standing, while so engaged, before the golden altar, and there would hear the voice of the Lord coming from between the cherubim (William Brown, *The Tabernacle*, Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Company, Third Edition, 1874, pp. 153,154).

Nadab and Abihu are said to have offered strange fire before the Lord which cost them their life (Leviticus 10). Some feel their sin was going into the Holy of Holies before the Ark.

7. This is developed in Chapter 29.

8. On Aaron's rod that budded George Bush writes:

The original word for “rod” (*matteh*) is for the most part used to denote a staff, stick, walking stick, or wand, rather than a green rod, branch or

bough. It would seem, from Num. 21:18, that the princes of the tribes carried staves in their hands, as a kind of baton, that should serve as a badge of authority. The rods or staves were doubtless official ensigns of the authority with which the heads of the tribes were invested. Hence the Scripture frequently uses the word rod as equivalent to sceptre; and indeed the more modern use of sceptres is derived from this ancient custom. These staves were of course dry, and had probably been for years in use; and that such should blossom and bear fruit again is a moral impossibility (George Bush, *Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Numbers*, Boston: Henry A. Young & Co, 1858, p. 251).

9. Ronald B. Allen, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 2, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, p. 848.

10. The reason it took the people forty years to enter the Promised Land was because of their unbelief. Initially God led them to the border at Kadesh Barnea. Twelve men were sent to spy out the land. Ten of them came back with reports of giants in the land and no tangible evidence that it was a wonderful land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb brought back a positive report along with tangible evidence: grapes, pomegranates and figs. The people believed the ten and complained to Moses that they had been brought to a place of death. As a judgment for their unbelief, God turned them southward, their backs to the Promise Land where they wandered for forty years. Every person twenty years and older died in the wilderness, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. When God initially said to them, "Go into the land," the people refused. Later God told them *not* to go up against the Amalekites. On this occasion they did go up and were soundly defeated.

11. There has been some question whether Moses put the broken set of the Ten Commandments into the Ark of the Covenant. The first set of tablets were most likely destroyed when Moses threw them down. No other mention is ever made of them. John Lawson and John M. Wilson write.

The rabbis allege that the two tables of the law were deposited in the ark, not only those which were entire, but those also which were broken. This opinion they found upon a mistranslation of Deut. x. 2, which they render thus: "And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first table, which thou breakest and hast put in the ark." The last clause is more correctly translated in our version, "thou shalt put" (John Lawson and John M. Wilson, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Geography, Biography, Natural History, and General Knowledge, Vol. 1, Aaron to Egypt*, Edinburgh: A Fullarton & Co., 1867, p. 184).

C.H. Mackintosh writes.

When, therefore, we read of the "ark of the covenant," we are led to believe that it was designed of God to preserve his covenant unbroken, in the midst of an erring people. In it, as we know, the second set of tablets were deposited. As to the first set they were broken in pieces, beneath the mount. . . The ark could not contain within its hallowed inclosure, broken tablets. Man might fail to fulfill his self-chosen vow;

but God's law must be preserved in its divine integrity and perfectness. If God was to set up his throne in the midst of his people, he could only do it in a way worthy of himself. His standard of judgment and government must be perfect (C.H. Mackintosh, *ibid.*, p. 288).

12. "I made" probably refers to the instructions Moses gave to Bezaleel, the artist employed for the work. He probably gave the orders before he ascended Mt. Sinai in order that the Ark would be finished upon his descent. Thus he could deposit the Ten Commandments.

13. Were there two Arks? When Israel was on the march, the Ark "went before" them seeking places to camp. However, the impression left by Scripture is that the Kohathites, who had charge of the Ark and the Tabernacle, were somewhere in the middle of the marching column. When the nation was camped, the Ark was placed at its center. This had led some to believe there were actually two Arks.

The difficulty which this passage offers has prompted Jewish interpreters to speak of two different Arks. The first, housing the broken tables of the law, preceded the people through the wilderness. The other, the depository of the second set of the law tablets, marched with the group. The probable explanation is that rest of the Tabernacle and its furniture were carried at the center, but the Ark was an exception. The object that represented God's presence would lead the way. Others find a second Ark in Deuteronomy 10:1. It is, however, not necessary to argue for two Arks for Deuteronomy 10:1 summarizes the making of one Ark. It does not suggest a second Ark was constructed after the golden calf incident.

14 Moses was not allowed to enter because he disobeyed a commandment of God. God had told him to speak to a rock and water would come forth. Instead Moses struck the rock. This act of disobedience kept him from the Promised Land.

15. See Chapter 23 "Has the Ark Been Found on Mt. Nebo?"

CHAPTER 7

THE WATERS OF JORDAN MIRACULOUSLY PART

At last, the Promised Land! After wandering for forty years in the wilderness, the children of Israel were about to enter the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. A major obstacle, however, stood in the way.

Between them and their dream was the swift current of the river Jordan. As God had previously parted the Red Sea, He would now work another outstanding miracle to bring His people to the land of promise. This miracle would center on the Ark of the Covenant.

There Was A Holy War

Because the land would have to be taken by conquest the people began to prepare for a Holy War. Indeed, God reminded them that the battle they were fighting was holy by drawing their attention to the Ark of the Covenant.

The Ark was not only the outward symbol for the presence of God, it also contained the covenant that God had made with His people. Part of the covenant included ownership of the Promised Land. The Ark represented to all the people that God was going before Israel to lead them to victory.

The Ark would precede the people into the Promised Land. We read in Joshua:

At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people and commanded the people, “As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it” (Joshua 3:2,3 ESV).

Fittingly, the ark would lead the way.

The Mighty Jordan

The Jordan River has an important place in biblical history. Growing wider with each mile, the Jordan begins its sixty mile course near the slopes of Mount Hermon and flows south to the Dead Sea, some 1286 feet below sea level. The slopes on each side of the Jordan are steep and sometimes form huge precipices. At best, it is not an easy river to cross.

The children of Israel arrived during the month of Nisan (March-April), the first month of their year. Ordinarily the river around Jericho is about fifty to sixty yards across, but this was the time of the barley harvest when the river would be twice as wide as normal. The river at flood stage must have presented an ominous sight for the people. As they were waiting at its

bank for three days, they probably wondered how they were going to be able to cross this wide rive. Who would make a way?

Israel Had A New Leader

This was the appropriate occasion for God to raise up Joshua in the sight of the people. It was now his time to be confirmed by God as Israel's new leader. The Bible says:

The LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan’” (Joshua 3:7,8 NRSV).

Joshua had been in the shadow of Moses since the time of the deliverance from Egypt. He would now participate in a similar miracle as the parting of the Red Sea. The Ark would accomplish the same thing as Moses' rod at the Red Sea, miraculously parting the water. Joshua's involvement was more indirect than Moses.

Moses lifted up the rod and the Red Sea parted while Joshua merely gave the orders. Though the Ark had not been built when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, it was now leading the way symbolizing God's power over His enemies.

God Was With Them

The purpose for this miracle was to show Israel that God was with them. He had kept His promise to bring them to this land and now He would drive out their enemies:

Joshua told the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God!” Joshua continued, “This is how you will know the living God is among you and that he will truly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites” (Joshua 3:9,10 NET).

The unusual method that God prescribed would show the people that a miracle was occurring. Joshua commanded:

When the feet of the priests carrying the ark of the Lord, the Ruler of the whole earth, touch the water of the Jordan, the water coming downstream toward you will stop flowing and pile up” (Joshua 3:13 NET).

The priests were to step into the river by faith and then God would part the waters. Here the Ark would lead and be carried by the priests. This same procedure happened on other important occasions.¹

The Ark Was Kept At A Distance

Interestingly, we find that the people were commanded to keep a distance of 2,000 cubits (3,500 feet) behind the Ark. This was at the command of God:²

This command probably served two purposes. The first was to emphasize the necessity of being separate from a holy God. We humans, by nature, cannot enter into His presence because of our sinful nature.

The second purpose was of a practical nature. By being some distance from the Ark, the people could visibly witness the miracle of the waters of Jordan parting. This would clearly testify that God was leading them.

The priests were ordered to cross over with the Ark. The people were not told how they were going to be able to get across the Jordan and its overflowing banks. Obviously, this was going to be a journey of faith. We read the following in Joshua.

After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it” (Joshua 3:2-4 NIV).

This procedure would allow the entire multitude to see the great event that was about to happen. Marten Woudstra notes:

The distance of 2000 cubits was approximately that of the outer bank of the Jordan to the inner bed . . . Thus the people would still be on the outer bank while the feet of the priests touched the water’s edge.³

The Miracle Occurs

As God promised, the waters parted. The Book of Joshua records the event occurring in the following manner:

When the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carried the ark of the covenant ahead of the people. Now the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched the water at its edge and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up [in] a mass that extended as far as Adam, a city next to Zarethan. The water flowing downstream into the Sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea) was completely cut off, and the people crossed opposite Jericho. The priests carrying the ark of the LORD’s covenant stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17 HCSB).

Thus, the Lord, of whom the Ark symbolized, was the One who actually entered the Promised Land first, ahead of Joshua and the people. Donald Madvig writes.

The ark of the covenant is the most prominent feature in these two chapters. The presence of the ark indicates that the crossing of the Jordan was much more than a military maneuver: It was a religious procession. . . When the ark was carried across the Jordan, the Lord was marching to claim his land.⁴

The Water Was Rolled Back

As soon as the priests put their feet into the Jordan the waters were rolled back. This miracle reminded the people of their deliverance from Egypt when the Red Sea parted.

The people crossed the river on dry ground. However, this does not necessarily mean the ground was not moist. Marten H. Woudstra comments:

The Hebrew term for “dry ground” (*barabah*) does not require that the riverbed be powdery dry but simply means it was no longer covered with water. This indicates terra firma as contrasted with the flooding river (cf. 4:18, where the term “dry ground” is used to distinguish the bank from the riverbed)⁵

The water drained off below and the river bottom was dry as the people walked across. Not only did the water stop flowing, it went all the way back to a town called Adam, some fifteen miles to the north! Adam is identified with ed Damieh about twenty miles from the Dead Sea. Since Israel crossed the Jordan opposite Jericho (Joshua 3:16) about five miles from the Dead Sea, they were about fifteen miles from Adam.

How Did God Do It?

At Adam, the Jordan flows through clay banks forty feet high. In the past, rockslides have occurred near Adam temporarily stopping the Jordan. The suggestion is often made that God used a landslide to stop the river from flowing. Although this is possible, the account suggests that the waters separated immediately in front of the priests.

The parting of the waters of the Jordan was a miracle. It happened at the precise time the Ark was placed in the river and the riverbed continued to be dry until the entire procession made its way into the Promised Land. Some have tried to give a natural explanation by citing an earthquake that happened on December 8, 1267. That earthquake caused the banks of the Jordan to collapse and the river was dammed up for ten hours. A similar event occurred on July 11, 1927, that stopped the river for twenty-one hours. Neither of these stoppages occurred during flood season.

A close examination of the text will reveal that this crossing was a supernatural event due to the following circumstances.

1. The Event Was Predicted

First, the incident occurred as predicted. God had promised Joshua that this event would show His power to their enemies.

2. The Timing Was Supernatural

The timing of the event was exact. As soon as the priests stepped into the water, the Jordan parted.

3. The River Was At Flood Stage

To add to the miraculous character of the event, it occurred when the river was at flood stage.

4. The Bottom Was Dry

The bottom of the river was dry enough for all the people to walk across.

5. There Was A Long Duration

The wall of water lasted the entire time it took the children of Israel to cross the dry river.

6. The Water Returned

Immediately after the people entered the Promised Land and the priests came out of the river, the water returned. Again the timing was perfect. Donald Madvig comments on the miraculous nature of the event:

If an earthquake was responsible for stopping the Jordan River, it was still a miracle. The discovery of secondary causes only serves to explain how God did what he did, and only God's intervention can account for the miraculous timing. This must have been a remarkable example of what H.L. Ellison . . . calls, "the supernatural use of the natural."⁶

The result of this miracle, led by the Ark of the Covenant, was that God was glorified among all the people.⁷ In addition, Joshua was lifted up as their new leader. The nation Israel was encouraged to possess the land of promise, and the inhabitants of the land of Canaan became fearful at the power of the Lord.

A Memorial Was Created

After the crossing of the Jordan, two piles of stones were erected as memorials. One was where the Ark stood on the east edge of the river the other on the west side of Gilgal. This was to be a witness for generations to come of this miracle. We read the following:

Someday your children will ask, "Why are these rocks here?" Then you can tell them how the water stopped flowing when the chest was being

carried across the river. These rocks will always remind our people of what happened here today (Joshua 4:6,7 CEV).

This episode was a continuation of the battle of the gods, begun in Egypt. The god of the Canaanites was named Baal. Supposedly Baal was the god of nature. The fact that the Lord lead Israel into the Promised Land by superseding the laws of nature demonstrated that He was the true and living God. Baal was powerless in the presence of the Lord. The Bible makes it clear that the God of Israel is the true God of nature.

Joshua assured the people that the living God would prove His presence among them and drive out the Canaanites. The God of Israel, whom the Ark of the Covenant symbolized, is spoken of as “the Lord of all the earth.”⁸

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan (Joshua 3:11 NKJV).

Once this mighty miracle occurred, the Passover was celebrated (Joshua 4:19-5:10). The next day the manna ceased. Scripture says:

The manna stopped appearing the day they ate some of the produce of the land; the Israelites never ate manna again (Joshua 5:12 NET).

The crossing of the Jordan into Canaan was the beginning of the fulfillment of promises that God had made to Abraham. Thus it was appropriate that the Ark,⁹ the symbol of the covenant, led the way. We read of God’s promise in Genesis:

He [the Lord] took him outside and said, “Gaze into the sky and count the stars—if you are able to count them!” Then he said to him, “So will your descendants be.” That day the Lord made a covenant with Abram: “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites” (Genesis 15:5,18,19 NET).

As God had promised Abraham, his descendants would mightily increase. Moses had earlier reminded them:

Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky (Deuteronomy 10:22 NIV).

As always, God’s promises come true.

The Conquest Begins

Israel was now committed to fight against the inhabitants of Canaan. This included overcoming well-protected cities and armies with chariots. There was no going back. The first city to be conquered was the fortified city of Jericho. The Ark of the Covenant would again figure prominently in this battle.

Endnotes for Chapter 7

1. J. Barton Payne writes:

On important occasions, such as the entrance into Canaan, the Ark might be carried by the priests (Josh. 3:3; 4:10; cf. Deut. 31:9; 1 Kings 8:3) or as a joint undertaking by priests and Levites (2 Sam. 15:24; 1 Chron. 15:11,12) (J. Barton Payne, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Merrill Tenney General editor, Volume 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, p. 308).

2. Donald Madvig notes the emphasis given on staying away from the Ark.

In Hebrew the warning to stay far away from the ark comes first and gives greater emphasis to the sacredness of the ark. The same order in English would be confusing. It would seem to say that they would know the way to go by keeping away from the ark rather than by following it (Donald Madvig, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein General editor, Volume 3, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992, p. 267, note 4).

3. Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981, p. 81.

The distance of 2,000 cubits (about five eighths of a mile) was later used to mark off an allowable Sabbath day's journey (cf. Acts 1:12). This was fixed by Jewish rabbis on the basis of Exodus 16:29 and Numbers 35:5.

4. Madvig, *ibid.*, p. 265.

5. Woudstra, *ibid.*, p. 81.

6. Madvig, *ibid.*, p. 272.

7. Marten Woudstra writes:

Until the very end of the account, due stress is given to ark and priests (vv. 3,8,13). The ark, the supreme symbol of God's indwelling, is viewed as directing silently the whole proceeding as the priests stood firm on dry ground. The narrator's chief concern with this chapter has been to focus attention upon the stupendous miracle, wrought under the watchful eye of the Lord, whose ark led the way into the waters and then stood in the river bed while the whole nation had finished crossing over the Jordan (Woudstra, *ibid.*, p. 88).

8. Zechariah speaks of a future time when Israel is established in her kingdom after all of her enemies have been judged. In referring to the Lord, he uses the same title we find here in Joshua "Lord of all the earth."

Then he said to me, "They represent the two anointed ones who assist the Lord of all the earth...He replied, "These are the four spirits of

heaven who stand before the Lord of all the earth. They are going out to do his work" (Zechariah 4:14; 6:5 NLT).

9. Marten Woudstra makes an appropriate comment on the entire episode.

The ark's prominence should be noted, though this ought not to be considered in terms of magic. There is a certain way in which it is not the ark but the faith of those who carry and follow it that will bring about the miracle. The stories in 1 Samuel 4ff. show clearly that a superstitious belief in the ark's potency does not bring about the desired end (Woudstra, *ibid.*, p. 86).

CHAPTER 8

CONQUERING A CITY GOD'S WAY: JERICHO

The God who reveals Himself in Scripture does things His own way. His ideas and thoughts are not the same as we human beings. The prophet Isaiah records the Lord as saying:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8,9 NKJV).

This statement was never truer, than when Joshua received the battle plan from the Lord to take the city of Jericho.

Once the children of Israel entered the land God had promised, they practiced the neglected rite of circumcision. Then they were ready to fulfill the promises of God and conquer the land. The first battle would be against the city of Jericho.

The City Of Jericho

Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world, situated about seventeen miles northeast of Jerusalem. In Joshua's day, Jericho was by no means the largest city of Canaan, but it was located in a strategic area. It lay a few miles west of the Jordan River, where most nomads and travelers crossed to enter Canaan.

Jericho was a fortified city—a city with walls constructed to repel enemy attack. Excavations have uncovered ruins that prove it was already an ancient city at the time Joshua arrived. Many fortified cities had walls up to twenty feet thick and over twenty-five feet high. If standing atop them, one could see for miles. The inhabitants of Jericho were constantly on guard, watching for the enemy.

Jericho was a strong city, able to defend itself against a large army. However, strength of stone or brick was not strong enough to stop the army of the Lord.

The Battle Plan Against Jericho

The battle fought against Jericho employed one of the oddest strategies ever used to fight a battle. Joshua told the men of war:

Your entire army is to march around the city once a day for six days (Joshua 6:3 NLT).

The seventh day the strategy would be different:

Seven priests will walk ahead of the Ark, each carrying a ram's horn. On the seventh day you are to march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the horns. When you hear the priests give one long blast on the horns, have all the people give a mighty shout. Then the walls of the city will collapse, and the people can charge straight into the city (Joshua 6:4,5 NLT).

The battle plan, therefore, consisted of the people, led by the Ark of the Covenant, marching once around the city for six straight days. On the seventh day they were to march around seven times and then give a shout after hearing the sound of the trumpet. The walls, then, were going to fall down.

Since the people had just experienced the miracle of the parting of the Jordan, it was probably easier for them to accept this odd way of conquering a fortified city.

No Details Are Given As To How They Marched

We are not given any specific details as to the line of march. Nothing is told of the number of people marching or the length of the column. Donald Madvig writes:

No details are given as to how the march was conducted (i.e., how many marched abreast or how long the column was). Jericho occupied only about five or six acres of land. Even though the Israelites must have maintained sufficient distance from the city to be safely beyond the range of bow and arrow, it is possible that the head of the column had arrived back at the camp before the last of the rear guard left.¹

The children of Israel marched around the city of Jericho a total of thirteen times with the Ark leading the way. At the head of the procession were priests with trumpets, followed by the Ark, and then the Israelite men of war.

Throughout each one of these marches the men were not allowed to utter one word. One can only imagine the confusion this caused for the inhabitants of Jericho as they watched this silent procession march around their city.

And The Walls Come Tumbling Down

On the seventh day they marched around the city seven times, blew a trumpet and as predicted, the walls of the city fell down:

When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city (Joshua 6:20 NIV).

The city of Jericho had been conquered by the unusual battle tactics of the God of Israel.

Why Did The Walls Of Jericho Fall Down?

Critics of the Bible have raised objections to the biblical account as recorded in Joshua. Rejecting the supernatural explanation found in Scripture, these individuals have attempted to give alternative explanations as to what the Bible says occurred. There have been a variety of non-supernatural explanations offered as to why the wall fell down at the precise moment that the priests blew the trumpets and the people shouted.

One popular suggestion is that an earthquake occurred at that precise moment. Others have alleged that the marchers served to distract the citizens of Jericho from other Israelites who were digging under the city walls. It has also been alleged that vibrations from the people caused the walls to collapse. All the marching around supposedly caused the walls to weaken and fall down.

It Was A Miracle

Whatever the explanation, it is clear that the fall of Jericho was a miracle. That it was supernatural is attested to by the fact that the entire wall fell down, except for one portion—the house of Rahab, a woman who hid Israel's spies. The New Testament commented on the event in this manner:

It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho seven days, and the walls came crashing down (Hebrews 11:30 NLT).

The blast from the trumpets and the shout of the people is not what brought the walls down—it was the miraculous power of God.

The Evidence Says This Actually Happened

Recent archaeological evidence has substantiated the biblical account of the destruction of the city of Jericho by Joshua. After evaluating all the facts, scholar Bryant Wood writes:

Was there a destruction at the hands of the Israelites? The correlation between the archaeological evidence and the Biblical narrative is substantial.

The city was strongly fortified (Joshua 2:5,7,15,6:5,20).

The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Joshua 2:6, 3:15, 5:10).

The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Joshua 6:1).

The siege was short (Joshua 6:15).

The walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake (Joshua 6:20).

The city was not plundered (Joshua 6:17,18).

The city was burned (Joshua 6:24).²

Joshua's Prophecy

After the destruction of Jericho, Joshua pronounced a curse upon the city:

At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates” (Joshua 6:26 NIV).

Though the site of the city was later occupied for brief periods, the prohibition against building the city was not violated until the time of Ahab, 500 years later:

Hiel the Bethelite attempted to rebuild the city’s wall. This act cost the lives of his two sons Abiram and Segub.³ The exact site where the ancient city stood has not been rebuilt to this day.

God’s Power Is What Brought Down The Walls

Jericho, the fortified city of Canaan, was conquered by the miraculous power of God. Led by the Ark of the Covenant, the city was taken with a battle plan that clearly showed the superiority of the God of Israel. The conquest of the Promised Land had begun.

Endnotes for Chapter 8

1. Donald Madvig, Joshua, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 3, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, p. 280.

John Rea observes:

On that day they compassed the city seven times. One can easily walk around the nine-acre mound in fifteen or twenty minutes (John Rea, Joshua, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison Editors, Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, p. 213).

2. Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April, 1990, p. 57.

3. The verse reads:

During Ahab's reign, Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho. Abiram, his firstborn son, died when he laid the foundation; Segub, his youngest son, died when he erected its gates, just as the Lord had warned through Joshua son of Nun (1 Kings 16:34 NET).

CHAPTER 9

BATTLING FOR THE PROMISED LAND

We recall that God had promised Abraham that the entire land of Canaan would belong to his descendants. Jericho was the first city of the Promised Land to be conquered. After Jericho was destroyed, Joshua set his sights on the smaller city of Ai. With the success at Jericho, it seemed that victory at Ai would be a simple matter. This, however, would not be the case.

The People Went Fighting Without The Lord

If Joshua thought that having the Ark of the Covenant would be an automatic guarantee for victory in battle, he would soon learn differently. The Bible describes what happened as follows:

Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai. Then they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Not all the people need go up; about two or three thousand men should go up and attack Ai. Since they are so few, do not make the whole people toil up there” (Joshua 7:2,3 NRSV).

The victory at Jericho was not won because of the superior fighting ability of Israel but because of the power of the Lord. Unfortunately, the overconfident people went to fight the battle with Ai without consulting Him. Scripture says:

So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai (Joshua 7:4 NKJV).

The army was defeated at Ai. The main reason for the defeat was that one of the Israelites, a man named Achan, took some of the booty from the destroyed city of Jericho. God had commanded that Jericho be utterly destroyed with no spoils taken. The Israelites had to be judged for their disobedience. After the loss at Ai, Joshua and the leaders fell before the Ark:

Joshua and the leaders of Israel tore their clothing in dismay, threw dust on their heads, and bowed down facing the Ark of the LORD until evening (Joshua 7:6 NLT).

Ai was eventually conquered, but a valuable lesson was learned—mere possession of the Ark did not guarantee victory.

We must note that nowhere is it recorded that the Ark of the Covenant was involved in either battle with Ai. Marten Woudstra observes:

The God who gives the victory at Jericho permits defeat at Ai. It is not the absence or presence of the ark which causes the defeat. . . It is

obvious therefore, that the narrator had no intention to suggest that the ark's role had been somewhat magical in character at the time of Jordan's crossing and the conquest of Jericho. . . Any doubt as to the true nature of the ark is quickly dispelled.¹

The Ark Was Not A War Machine

We have seen that the Ark is often viewed as some type of war object. The Book of Joshua, however, speaks against this view as Marten Woudstra notes:

The evidence for this alleged use of the ark in the book of Joshua is virtually non-existent. Barring the extensive use of the ark at the fall of Jericho, a most exceptional and miraculous occasion, the ark does not receive mention at any of the other battles in Joshua. It is doubtful whether it was carried along to Ai. One must infer from the relevant passages that the initial battle did not cause Joshua to go along with the armed band. This would be an indication that the ark also stayed in the camp. It was before the ark, which had remained in the camp, that Joshua prostrated himself.³

As long as Canaan remained unconquered, and the people were still an army, the Tabernacle was moved from place to place wherever the people of Israel at the time were camped. It rested finally in the place where the Lord had chosen.

The Movement Of The Ark During The Conquest Of Canaan

From the Book of Joshua, we can plot the various places where the Ark was taken during this time period. We can make the following observations:

Gilgal

The ark seemingly remained at the place where the Israelites set up camp once they entered into the Promised Land—Gilgal. We are told that they actually celebrated a Passover at Gilgal when they first entered the land:

On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover (Joshua 5:10 NIV).

It seems the Ark was kept at Gilgal for a number of years.

The Ark Is Placed Between Mt. Ebal And Mt. Gerizim

After the victory at Ai, the children of Israel built an altar to the Lord at Mt. Ebal in the area of Shechem—in the heart of the Promised Land. The purpose of the altar was to commemorate the victories of Jericho and Ai. The Ark was brought to that event.

In addition to the victory celebration, the covenant was renewed between God and His people. The Ark of the Covenant was the central focus at this

assembly. The people were divided into two groups with the ark in the middle. Scripture explain it this way:

Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal. He followed the instructions that Moses the LORD's servant had written in the Book of the Law: "Make me an altar from stones that are uncut and have not been shaped with iron tools." Then on the altar they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. And as the Israelites watched, Joshua copied the law of Moses onto the stones of the altar. Then all the Israelites— foreigners and citizens alike—along with the leaders, officers, and judges, were divided into two groups. One group stood at the foot of Mount Gerizim, the other at the foot of Mount Ebal. Each group faced the other, and between them stood the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the LORD's covenant. This was all done according to the instructions Moses, the servant of the LORD, had given for blessing the people of Israel. Joshua then read to them all the blessings and curses Moses had written in the Book of the Law. Every command Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among the Israelites (Joshua 8:30-35 NLT).

Here the ark is placed somewhere between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. There is no indication that the Ark was ever permanently at this location. It seems that it was brought there only for the renewing of the covenant.

The Ark Settles In Shiloh

Once the people settled into the land the Ark went to Shiloh,⁴ approximately twenty miles from Jerusalem. First, an altar was built:

But on that day Joshua made them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to continue to this day, in the place that he should choose (Joshua 9:27 NRSV).

Eventually, the Tabernacle was set up. We read about it later in Joshua:

Then the whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them (Joshua 18:1 NRSV).

There it stayed for nearly four hundred years.

The Ark Temporarily Was Removed To Shechem

It seems that the ark was temporarily removed from Shiloh to Shechem so the nation could recommit themselves to the covenants or agreements which God had first made with Abraham and then later with Moses:

Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem and summoned Israel's elders, leaders, judges, and officers, and they presented themselves before God. On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them.

Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD (Joshua 24:1,25,26 HCSB).

After this recommitment to the covenants, the Ark was returned to Shiloh.

The Tabernacle At Shiloh

The Tabernacle at Shiloh must have been like the one constructed by Moses at Mount Sinai. However, some permanent features developed. This special sanctuary was known as the “House” or “Temple” of the Lord:

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD (1 Samuel 1:9 NRSV).

The word translated “temple” in this particular verse is the Hebrew word *bekal*, meaning “palace,” or “temple.”

The Ark was now placed in this permanent house of the Lord. The Bible says:

Whenever Hannah went up to the Lord’s house, Peninnah would upset her so that she would weep and refuse to eat. Finally her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep and not eat? Why are you so sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?” On one occasion in Shiloh, after they had finished eating and drinking, Hannah got up. (Now at the time Eli the priest was sitting in his chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s temple (1 Samuel 1:7-9 NET).

Shiloh had the only recognized altar in Israel where the people would go for the yearly feasts. We read the following in the Book of Judges:

But look, there is the annual festival of the LORD in Shiloh, to the north of Bethel, and east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, and to the south of Lebonah (Judges 21:19 NIV).

The reason why Shiloh was chosen is not stated. Part of the reason may be because of the central location that it had, as well as the fact that it belonged to the powerful tribe of Ephraim, Joshua’s tribe. Shiloh was a focal point for the children of Israel during the entire period of the Judges.⁵

The Days Of The Judges

We discover that for a three-hundred-year period after the time of Joshua, the references to the Ark are rare. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes:

Just where the ark was during the period of the judges is still a matter of some uncertainty.⁶

It Was A Dark Time For Israel

The period of the Judges was a dark time in Israel's history. The last verse of the Book of Judges comments on that time:

In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25 NLT).

As we have noted, the Ark was not carried into every battle that the children of Israel fought. At a later period, the Ark was temporarily moved south from Shiloh to Bethel on the Benjaminite border during the war with Gibeah. We have the record of the High Priest Phineas receiving counsel from God concerning the civil war with Benjamin.⁷ We read the following in the Book of Judges:

And the Israelites went up seeking direction from the LORD. (In those days the Ark of the Covenant of God was in Bethel, and Phinehas son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron was the priest.) The Israelites asked the LORD, "Should we fight against our relatives from Benjamin again or should we stop?" The LORD said, "Go! Tomorrow I will give you victory over them" (Judges 20:27,28 NLT).

Apart from this one event, the Bible is silent about the Ark during the time of the Judges.

Conclusion

For several hundred years after the battle of Jericho, references to the Ark are few. It is assumed the Ark traveled with the Tabernacle and came to rest in Shiloh⁸, where it stood for a period of four hundred years.

We now come to an incident where the Ark is again brought out to battle, and this time with disastrous results.

Endnotes For Chapter 9

1. Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 56. He observes:

It is not clear from the narrative whether the ark remained behind in the camp, or whether it was taken along to the battle. In Josh. 7:6 Joshua is seen prostrating himself in front of the ark, but there is no indication whether the ark had accompanied the warriors. It seems plausible to assume that it had not (p. 56, note 1).

2. The custom of inscribing law codes on stone is ancient, practiced by the Sumerians and the Babylonians. The code of Hammurabi in 1700 B.C. is such an example. The act of copying the law obeyed an earlier command of Moses (Deuteronomy 27:2-8). We are not told specifically what “the law” contained. It may have been the Ten Commandments and other laws. It may have been the Book of Deuteronomy.

3. Woudstra, *ibid.*, p. 119.

4. Jeremiah 7:12 records God’s presence had been in Shiloh:

But go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.

5. The word often used to describe these religious shrines is *amphictyony*. It comes from the Greek word meaning “those that dwell around” or neighbors. In ancient Greece, amphictyony referred to a confederation of states that were established around a religious center, such as Delphi. In the ancient world it was a common religious practice to have a focal point or shrine. These include the oracle at Delphi; the Etruscan shrine in Italy; the temple of the moon-god Sin at Haran.

6. W. Lotz, M.G. Kyle, C.E. Armerding, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 1, Revised Edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, p. 292.

7. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes.

A brief reference in Jgs. 2:1 to a movement of the “angel of the Lord” from Gilgal to Bochim (LXX adds “unto Bethel”) has given rise to the idea that . . . [the ark was] in Bethel during the entire period. This, so the argument goes is confirmed by the ark’s appearance in Bethel at the close of the period of the Judges (Jgs. 20:18, 26-28), and the lack of mention of Shiloh in Jgs. 20. Such arguments are not entirely convincing when it is noted that Judges does, like Joshua, place the religious center . . . in Shiloh (18:31) . . . the ark could well have been resident in Shiloh but simply moved to Bethel for convenience at the battle, although 20:27 seems to indicate a period of the general residence of the ark in that place. In view of the otherwise unbroken testimony to the ark’s presence in Shiloh (excepting only the LXX of Jgs. 2:1) it seems best to explain the Bethel reference by some means

as suggested above (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, *ibid.*, p. 292).

Marten Woudstra writes:

With regard to the ark's sojourn at Bethel we note the following. Although the ark was for this occasion removed from its customary place, it did not accompany the Israelites into battle. This is clear from the fact that the camp was in Mizpah, whereas the ark was at Bethel. This is another argument against the theory of the ark's habitual use as a palladium of battle (Woudstra, *ibid.*, p. 128).

8. In July 2013, Israeli archaeologists announced that they may have found the location as to where the Tabernacle stood in Shiloh.

CHAPTER 10

THE ARK IS LOST TO THE PHILISTINES

Human beings are a superstitious lot. We put our trust in good luck charms such as “rabbits’ feet,” “crosses,” or “lucky numbers,” thinking it will give us some advantage over others. Many people believe physical objects have some untapped power lying within them. The children of Israel were no different. They attempted to use the Ark of the Covenant as their “rabbit’s foot,” to gain victory in a battle. The Lord, however, would not allow them to achieve success in this manner.

The time of this battle was at the end of the days of the Judges. The High Priest at that time was a man named Eli. He had two worthless sons who were performing the priestly duties. Judgment was about to begin in the house of the Lord.

The Ark was still housed in the Tabernacle at Shiloh. We read the following in the First Book of Samuel:

There was a man from Ramathaim Zuphim, from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah. He was the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. Year after year this man would go up from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh. It was there that the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, served as the Lord’s priests and the lamp of God had not yet been extinguished. Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord as well; the ark of God was also there (1 Samuel 1:1,3; 3:3 NET).

Though it was a time of spiritual darkness, one light did shine forth—a man named Samuel.

The Man Of God: Samuel

The Bible records that a woman named Hannah prayed constantly to have a child. She told the Lord that if He would give her a child, she promised to dedicate the child to Him. That prayer was answered in the birth of Samuel.

Samuel’s life was dedicated to God’s service. When he was a young man he often would sleep in the Tabernacle at Shiloh where the Ark was located. The Bible records an episode where the Lord spoke to Samuel while he was sleeping in the Tabernacle:

One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am” (1 Samuel 3:2-4 NIV).

Assuming that it was Eli who had called him, Samuel came to the old priest to find out what he wanted. Eli told Samuel that he had not called him. The episode was repeated again with the same results. The third time when Samuel heard the voice and approached Eli, the priest realized it was the Lord speaking to Samuel. Eli then told the young man:

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place (1 Samuel 3:9 NRSV).

GOD WAS NOT INSIDE OF THE ARK

This account illustrates that the people did not think that God lived inside of the Ark. When Eli realized that God was speaking to Samuel, he did not tell the young man to address the Ark, he told him merely to answer the Lord. Though they were sleeping in the same building as the Ark of the Covenant nowhere in this account do they identify the Ark with the voice speaking to Samuel.

When the Lord called Samuel a third time, the young man responded. Samuel was then told by the Lord that a mighty event was going to occur that would shake up all of Israel. The Bible records what occurred in this manner:

Then the LORD said to Samuel, “I am going to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears it ring” (1 Samuel 3:11 God’s Word).

The incident would be something the people would not have thought of in their worst nightmare—the loss of the Ark of the Covenant.

There Was False Trust In The Ark

In the days of Samuel, the event in question occurred. Israel mistakenly put their trust in the Ark, rather than the Lord of whom the Ark symbolized. They learned a lesson that the Ark itself was no guarantee of victory. The result was the physical death of the High Priest Eli and his two sons, as well as the loss of the Ark. In addition, the glory of the Lord departed from Israel. These events happened in a war with the Philistines.

The Philistines had been Israel’s major enemy during the last period of the Judges. They were the “Sea people” coming originally from Crete, or some other part of the Aegean Sea.

They lived in five major towns on the southern coast of Israel. Technologically advanced, they were pioneers in the use of iron.

Israel Attacks The Philistines And Is Defeated

In this first battle, the nation of Israel attacked the Philistines and was defeated. We read about this in First Samuel:

The Philistines organized their troops to meet Israel in battle. As the battle spread, the Philistines defeated Israel and killed about 4,000 soldiers in the field (1 Samuel 4:2 God's Word).

It was a crushing defeat for Israel.

The Ark Is Wrongly Used As A Good Luck Charm

After this loss in battle, the people decided to take the Ark with them for the next encounter. This also is recorded in First Samuel:

When the troops came back to the camp, the leaders of Israel asked, “Why has the LORD used the Philistines to defeat us today? Let’s get the ark of the LORD’s promise from Shiloh so that he may be with us and save us from our enemies” (1 Samuel 4:3 God’s Word).

Though the Ark did symbolize God’s presence and His promises, Israel was victorious only when the people were led by Him. Ronald Youngblood comments:

The elders doubtless remembered the account of Joshua’s victory over Jericho, in which the ark was a highly visible symbol of divine help and strength (Josh. 6:2-20; cf. also Num. 10:35). It would accompany Israel’s army on at least one other occasion in the future as well (2 Samuel 11:11). What the elders failed to understand, however, was that the ark was neither an infallible talisman nor a military palladium that would insure victory. If God willed defeat for his people, a thousand arks would not bring success . . . The elders understood clearly that if God was not “with” them, defeat was inevitable (Num. 14:42; Deut. 1:42). They mistakenly assumed, however, that wherever the ark was, the Lord was.¹

The people went to get the Ark for the next skirmish:

So the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God (1 Samuel 4:4 NRSV).

The Arrival Of The Ark In Israel

When the Ark arrived at the camp there was much fanfare. We read in Samuel:

When the ark of the covenant of the Lord arrived at the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the ground shook (1 Samuel 4:5 NET).

The noise that was made attracted the attention of the Philistines:

“What’s going on?” the Philistines asked. “What’s all the shouting about in the Hebrew camp?” When they were told it was because the Ark of the LORD had arrived (1 Samuel 4:6 NLT).

Once the Philistines realized the source of all the commotion they became afraid:

Then they were frightened and said, “A god has come into their camp.” They also said, “Oh no! Nothing like this has ever happened before. We’re in trouble now! Who can save us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every kind of plague in the desert. Be strong, Philistines, and act like men, or else you will serve the Hebrews as they served you. Act like men and fight” (1 Samuel 4:7-9 God’s Word).

The Philistines also had the pagan idea of equating God with the Ark. They too assumed that the Ark was going to guarantee victory for Israel for they were well aware of what happened 300 years earlier when God had brought His people out of Egypt.

THE ARK WOULD NOT SAVE THEM

Yet on this day, the Ark would not save the children of Israel. The Philistines won the battle and the Ark was captured:

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died (1 Samuel 4:10,11 NKJV).

This episode would put to rest any idea that God was confined to the Ark. J. Barton Payne writes:

The pagan theory of having God “in a box,” as if the presence would automatically guarantee salvation (1 Sam. 4:3,7), was dispelled once and for all when the Philistines captured the Ark at the . . . battle of Ebenezer.²

The People Are Told The Ark Is Lost

A messenger was sent back to the camp to deliver the bad news about the battle and the Ark. The ark was captured and the sons of the high priest were dead. Scripture says:

And the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, were slain. A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line, and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head (1 Samuel 4:12,13 RSV).

The message reached the High Priest Eli that the Ark had been lost. The Bible records his response as follows:

Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?” The man hurried over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and whose

eyes were set so that he could not see. He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.” Eli asked, “What happened, my son?” The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.” When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years (1 Samuel 4:14-18 NIV).

More than the loss of the battle, or the death of his sons, when Eli heard the news of the Ark’s capture, he fell back and died.

The Glory Has Departed From Israel

The combination of bad news, the Ark’s capture, and the death of the High Priest Eli and his sons sent the pregnant wife of Phineas into labor:

His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phineas, was pregnant and close to giving birth. When she heard that the ark of God was captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she doubled over and gave birth. But her labor pains were too much for her. As she was dying, the women who were there with her said, “Don’t be afraid! You have given birth to a son!” But she did not reply or pay any attention (1 Samuel 4:19,20 NET).

The child was then given a befitting name. The story continues:

She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel,” referring to the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, “The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God has been captured” (1 Samuel 4:21,22 NET).

When the Ark of the Covenant was taken, the Tabernacle lost its glory, never again to receive it.³ The children of Israel were left without the Ark, without priests, and without a successor to the priesthood. Their foolish gesture in taking the Ark to battle cost them a terrible price.

The Philistines now had the Ark. Yet, they too would discover that the mere possession of this sacred object was no formula for success. They were about to personally experience the power of the Lord, the God of Israel.

Endnotes for Chapter 10

1. Ronald Youngblood, 1,2 Samuel, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 3, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, p. 595.
2. J. Barton Payne, “Ark of the Covenant,” The *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 1, Merill Tenney General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, p. 309.

Marten Woudstra notes.

There is no indication of the exact reason which, in the opinion of the elders, may have brought on defeat. What should be noted, however, is that the defeat is attributed to Yahweh, even though the emblem of his presence had not yet been carried into the field. This fact may certainly be cited as proof that the narrative knows nothing of a mere identification of Yahweh with the cultic emblem. Quite apart from the presence or absence of the ark, the elders are led to think of Yahweh as the ultimate cause of the discomfiture (Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 42).

3. When this sanctuary was destroyed as a result of the first battle of Ebenezer, the sacrifices ceased at Shiloh. The prophet Samuel treated Shiloh as an abandoned shrine and sacrificed instead at Mizpeh (1 Samuel 7:9) at Ramah (1 Samuel 9:12; 10:3) and at Gilgal (1 Samuel 10:8; 11:15).

This gives the impression that the Tabernacle again became a movable sanctuary. The psalmist wrote.

Then he abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh, the Tabernacle where he had lived among the people (Psalm 78:60).

CHAPTER 11

THE ARK BECOMES A PROBLEM FOR THE PHILISTINES

Victory at last! The Lord, the God of Israel, seemingly had been defeated by the Philistines and their god Dagon. Possession of the holy Ark symbolized their superiority over Israel and its God. At least, this is what the Philistines thought. They would soon learn otherwise.

The Philistines did not destroy the Ark because they understood its importance. To them, it was an objective symbol of their victory over Israel and its God, and was to be displayed for their people to see. The Ark, however, remained in the Philistine country for only a short time. The Bible says:

The ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months (1 Samuel 6:1 NRSV).

The stay was not a happy one for the people of Philistia. They found that Israel's holy object was not going to be a prized possession for them.

Dagon: The god Of The Philistines

When the Philistines conquered the earlier inhabitants of the land of Canaan, they also acquired several of their deities. One such god was a corn deity named Dagon.¹ Dagon was ranked very high among the gods as the father of Baal. As a god of the Philistines, Dagon was a rival to the Lord.

Dagon, however, proved not very powerful against the God of Israel. At Gaza, Samson pulled the temple of Dagon to the ground, killing himself and 3,000 Philistines (Judges 16:23-30).

With this dismal history against Israel, the Philistines rejoiced in capturing the Ark. The Ark then was placed before Dagon in his temple:

When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they carried it from Ebenezer to Ashdod; then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon (1 Samuel 5:1,2 RSV).

The Philistines treated the Ark like it was a trophy of *their* great victory. They brought it to Ashdod, some fifty miles southwest of Shiloh laying it at the feet of Dagon. This act indicated that the God of Israel was subject to Dagon. Though this was a house of worship to the Philistines, it was an abomination to the Lord.

The Philistines did not realize that it was not Dagon who defeated Israel or captured the Ark. Indeed, this was the Lord's doing. Though the presence of the Lord was not confined to the Ark, He did not abandon it when it was in the hands of the Philistines:

But when the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the LORD! So they set the idol up again (1 Samuel 5:3 NLT).

Dagon had fallen on its face before the Lord. The Philistines assumed some accident had occurred and placed their god back on its pedestal:

But the next morning the same thing happened—the idol had fallen face down before the Ark of the LORD again. This time his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left intact (1 Samuel 5:4 NLT).

Now Dagon was prostrate before the Ark with its head and hands broken. Only the torso was left. The Philistines realized that this was more than an accident. Without a head Dagon could not think for them, see them, or hear their prayers. Having no hands, it could not work for them. Severed heads and hands were considered battlefield trophies in the ancient world. Naturally, the Philistines were very upset by these circumstances:

That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who enters the temple of Dagon will step on its threshold (1 Samuel 5:5 NLT).

The Philistines would not enter their temple because of fear. They realized their god had no power over the Ark of the Lord.

The Problems Suffered Because Of The Ark

The destruction of Dagon was not the only problem the Philistines suffered because of the Ark. Scripture says:

The LORD's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors. When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god" (1 Samuel 5:6,7 NIV).

The nature of this plague is uncertain. It seems to have consisted of growths, particularly in the rectal area. It could have been a hemorrhoid-like condition. The mention of mice has caused some commentators to speculate it was the bubonic plague, an epidemic which is spread by rodents. One of the characteristics of this disease is swollen lymph glands in the groin area.

The Philistines were now at a loss to know what to do with the Ark:

So they assembled all the leaders of the Philistines and asked, "What should we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" They replied, "The ark of the God of Israel should be moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel (1 Samuel 5:8 NET).

The Ark Comes To Gath

When the Philistines sent the Ark to Gath, twelve miles to the southeast, a similar disaster happened. Scripture puts it this way:

But when the Ark arrived at Gath, the LORD began afflicting its people, young and old, with a plague of tumors, and there was a great panic (1 Samuel 5:9 NLT).

The Ark Moves To Ekron

The Ark then moved to Ekron with its reputation preceding it:

So they sent the Ark of God to the city of Ekron, but when the people of Ekron saw it coming they cried out, “They are bringing the Ark of the God of Israel here to kill us, too!” (1 Samuel 5:10 NLT).

The people of Ekron wanted nothing to do with the Ark:

So the people summoned the rulers again and begged them, “Please send the Ark of the God of Israel back to its own country, or it will kill us all.” For the plague from God had already begun, and great fear was sweeping across the city. Those who didn’t die were afflicted with tumors; and there was weeping everywhere (1 Samuel 5:11,12 NLT).

The plague from the Ark caused a deadly destruction. The Philistines victory trophy had caused them nothing but trouble. They decided the Ark must go back to Israel.

Having no God-ordained priesthood to return the Ark, the Philistines placed it upon a cart.

A Fleece Is Placed

Knowing that they had received divine judgment, the Philistines decided to send the Ark back to Israel with symbolic gifts. The gifts were a representation of what they sought deliverance from. Therefore, they fashioned five golden mice (or rats) and five golden images of their tumors. The rodents were probably chosen because they were destroying their fields. The Philistines also sent a chest containing articles of gold.

The Philistines put the Ark to a final test. Two milk cows, which were mothers with young, were chosen to transport the Ark back to Israel. If the cows turned their back on their young, then the people would know that it was the Lord who afflicted them. If the animals did the natural thing and returned to their young, then it would signify that the Lord was not involved in their suffering.

The Bible records that the cows went straight toward Israel without turning to the left or right. There was no doubt that the Lord had judged the idolatrous Philistines.

There Are Lessons Learned From These Events

Ronald Youngblood aptly summarizes the lessons these chapters teach us:

The lesson of chapters 4 and 5 is clear: Neither Israelites nor Philistines—not even Dagon himself—can control or resist the will of the sovereign Lord, whose Presence, though enthroned between the cherubim surmounting the ark of the covenant, is not limited by that location and therefore cannot be manipulated by the whim of whoever happens to be in possession of it at any particular time.²

The Ark of the Covenant had been nothing short of a catastrophe in a land where it did not belong.³ The Philistines learned, to their great pain, that the Lord, the God of Israel, was superior over all the so-called gods of the nations. After sending the Ark from city to city they wanted nothing more to do with it. It was time for the Ark to come back home.

Endnotes for Chapter 11

1. Ronald Youngblood comments.

The older etymology of dagon from dag, “fish”—assuming that Dagon was a fish-god or that he was the god of a maritime people—has now been almost universally abandoned in favor of a derivation from dagan “grain.” Ugaritic epic literature claims that Dagon was the father of Baal, the storm-god of fertility, a paternity compatible with his role as a grain god. From early times he was worshiped by the Semitic peoples of the Levant. Numerous towns are named after him including Beth Dagon in Judah (Josh. 15:41) and Beth Dagon in Asher (Josh. 19:27), neither of which has been located (Ronald Youngblood, *1,2 Samuel, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 3, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, pp. 601,602, note 2).

2. Youngblood, *ibid.*, p. 601.

3. Marten H. Woudstra comments about the different qualities of the Ark:

In the book of Joshua, so the argument goes, the ark was a rather solemn object, carried about in great silence. But in its heyday the ark seems to have been of a different kind. It was the representation of the warrior god. It was mortally dangerous. Not only that, it also had certain unpredictable features and behaved rather impishly...

In response it should be noted that some of these supposed differences may be due to a difference in the circumstances under which the ark functioned... The story of the ark’s sojourn among the Philistines... does indeed possess certain humorous features. But is this out of keeping with the true nature of the ark? Is not the ark the emblem of Him who sitteth in the heavens and who shall laugh at his adversaries? (Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 117).

CHAPTER 12

BACK COMES THE ARK TO ISRAEL

Homeward bound. It was time for the Ark of the Covenant to come back to the land and the people to which it belonged. After a short stint with the Philistines, with disastrous results, the holy object was sent back to Israel to the city of Beth Shemesh, about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem.

It arrived during the time of the wheat harvest (June). The excited people decided to chop up the wood of the cart that carried the Ark, and sacrifice the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. A large rock in the field of a man named Joshua of Beth Shemesh became the temporary resting place of the Ark. The Bible records what occurred in the following manner:

The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there near a large rock. The people of the city chopped up the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Levites removed the ark of the Lord, along with the box containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. That day the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the Lord (1 Samuel 6:14,15 HCSB).

Trifling With The Ark

The celebration over the Ark's return soon turned to tragedy. Many people were killed at Beth Shemesh for trifling with the Ark:¹

The descendants of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the people of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the LORD; and he killed seventy men of them. The people mourned because the LORD had made a great slaughter among the people (1 Samuel 6:19 NRSV).

The people were killed for desecrating the Ark. By opening it up and looking inside, they broke the commandment of God. Only the priests were allowed to handle the Ark and even they were not allowed to open it and gaze at its contents. As we have seen, God gave strict orders on the disposition of the Ark. We read the following in the Book of Numbers:

Whenever the camp is about to move on, Aaron and his sons are to go in, take down the screening veil, and cover the ark of the testimony with it. Aaron and his sons are to finish covering the holy objects and all their equipment whenever the camp is to move on. The Kohathites will come and carry them, but they are not to touch the holy objects or they will die. These are the transportation duties of the Kohathites regarding the tent of meeting (Numbers 4:5,15 HCSB).

The people were not even allowed to watch the holy items being covered. The Bible commands:

The Kohathites are not to go in and look at the holy objects, even for a moment, or they will die (Numbers 4:20 HCSB).

We are not told the reason why the people of Beth Shemesh looked into the Ark. Whether it was mere curiosity, or a desire for its safety, we do not know. Israel had morally declined during this period and this episode with the Ark is a further example of their lack of spirituality. The Ark of the Covenant was holy. Indeed, it was not to be trifled with.²

The Ark Is Returned Without Effort

Moreover, the Ark had been returned to Israel without any effort of the people to retrieve it. God's presence with the Ark had again been demonstrated. He compelled the cows that were hitched to the new wagon to abandon their own calves in order to drag it to Beth Shemesh. He then put to death those who looked into it. For those who may think God was unfair for this harsh judgment, Marten Woudstra puts the matter into perspective:

In our evaluation of this story the fact should not be overlooked that the ark in this particular context has just manifested its extreme power and holiness in the country of the Philistines. The latter had been confronted with the majesty of the God whose ark this was. Although grudgingly, they had learned to treat the ark with circumspection and awe, witness also the gifts that were sent along with its return. In vivid contrast to this show of reverential fear on the part of the Philistines stand the conduct of the Beth-shemites. Whether these were fully aware of what had transpired in the Philistine cities of the plain, we cannot tell. Beth-shemesh was situated in the proximity of Philistia. Some reliable information of the terrifying events that took place there may have been transmitted onto them.³

We should keep these things in mind when we consider the sudden death of the people of Beth Shemesh. They were without excuse.

The Ark of the Covenant would now remain in the nation of Israel until the time of its disappearance from history.

The Ark Moves To Kirjath Jearim

After the death of the men of Beth Shemesh, the Ark of the Covenant was moved to the house of Abinadab in the city of Kirjath Jearim.⁴ Kirjath Jearim lay some nine miles northeast of Beth Shemesh, in the direction of Shiloh. The fact that Shiloh was in ruins explains why the Ark did not return there. At Kirjath Jearim, Abinadab's son cared for the Ark while it remained at the house:

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the LORD. It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD (1 Samuel 7:1,2 NIV).

There was no attempt to restore the Tabernacle during this period.⁵

Has Confirming Evidence Of This Been Found?

This biblical account of the Ark's capture by the Philistines and return to Israel may have some present-day confirmation. There is the possibility that the oldest reference to the Ark of the Covenant, outside of the Old Testament, has just recently been discovered.⁶

The Ark Is Neglected By Saul

The reign of Saul came after the rulership of Samuel. Saul was the first king of Israel. It seems that during his rule, the Ark of the Covenant was generally neglected. Later in Israel's history we read the following words:

Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us; for we did not turn to it in the days of Saul (1 Chronicles 13:3 NRSV).

The Ark had been neglected for some time.

Saul Brings The Ark Into Battle

King Saul seems to have brought the Ark with him prior to one of his campaigns, the battle of Michmash:⁷

And Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here" (for at that time the ark of God was with the children of Israel) (1 Samuel 14:18 NKJV).

This is the only reference we have to the Ark during Saul's reign.

From the time the Ark was taken by the Philistines, through the time of Saul, no lasting place was found for the holy object.⁸

The Ark was now about to make a journey to a permanent resting place, the city of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, another tragic episode was about to occur.

Endnotes for Chapter 12

1. The number of men who died at Beth Shemesh is listed as 50,070. Yet this figure does not seem to be possible. Ronald Youngblood writes.

The . . . reading 50,070 is attested in all the major ancient versions and is therefore textually secure. The number is far too large, however, to have constituted only “some” of the men at Beth Shemesh; at the same time the death of “seventy would hardly be a heavy blow,” especially in light of 4:10 (where “thirty thousand” men died in a “slaughter” that was very great . . . A suggested solution is to change . . . “He struck down among the people seventy men [and] fifty thousand men” to read . . . He struck down the people for seven days, men for five days, a thousand men . . . The number slain at Beth Shemesh becomes a “thousand” rather than “seventy” or “50,070” (Ronald Youngblood, *1,2 Samuel, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 3, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, p. 606, note 19).

2. The *New Jerusalem Bible* as well as the *New English Bible* implies that the men were killed because they had not rejoiced when they saw the Ark:

Of the people of Beth-Shemesh the sons of Jeconiah had not rejoiced when they saw the ark of Yahweh, and Yahweh struck down seventy of them. The people mourned because Yahweh had struck them so fiercely (1 Samuel 6:19 NJB)

But the sons of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the rest of the men of Beth-Shemesh when they welcomed the Ark of the Lord, and he struck down seventy of them. The people mourned because the Lord struck them so heavy a blow (1 Samuel 6:19, NEB).

This translation, however, is not to be preferred.

3. Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965, p. 51.

4. Kirjath Jearim was built over a large hill. Jerusalem, eight miles away, can be seen in the distance. Today, the church of the Ark of the Covenant stands over the traditional site of the house of Abinadab.

5. At some point after this event, the Tabernacle was moved to Gibeon where it is mentioned in connection with Zadok’s high priestly ministry.

Zadok the priest and his fellow priests served before the Lord’s tabernacle at the worship center in Gibeon, regularly offering burnt sacrifices to the Lord on the altar for burnt sacrifice, morning and evening, according to what is prescribed in the law of the Lord which he charged Israel to observe (1 Chronicles 16:39,40 NET).

6. Ronald Youngblood relates how an ostraca (pottery or bone fragment) was deciphered.

In the late 1970's an ostraca containing a five-line inscription was recovered from an Early Iron Age grain silo in the ruins of Izbeth Sarteh. The fifth line was soon identified as an alphabet, but the first four lines remained undeciphered until recently. According to William H. Shea, they read as follows: "Unto the field we came, (unto) Aphek from Shiloh. The Kittim took (it [the ark of the covenant] and) came to Azor, (to) Dagon lord of Ashdod, (and to) Gath. (It returned to) Kirath Jearim. The companion of the foot soldiers, Hophni, came to tell the elders, "A horse has come (and) upon (it was my) brother for us to bury." (The "Izbeth Sarteh Ostraca," Andrews University Seminary Studies 28, 1 [1990]: 62). Shea (p. 81) observes that eleven of the key words of the inscription appear in the parallel account in the capture of the ark in chapters 4-6: "Aphek" (4:1), "field" (4:2), "elders" (4:3), "Shiloh" (4:3-4), "Hophni" (4:4,11,17), "foot soldiers" (4:10), "take/capture" (4:11ff.), "tell" (4:13), "Ashdod" (5:1-7), "Gath" (5:8), "Kiriath Jearim" (written Jearin Kiriah); (6:21). If Shea's reading holds up under further analysis, the Izbeth Sarteh ostraca contains the earliest known extrabiblical reference to an OT event (the capture of the ark by the Philistines) and an OT person (Hophni) (cf. William H. Shea, *Ancient Ostraca Records Ark's Wanderings*, Ministry [1991]: 14). (Ronald Youngblood, *ibid.*, pp. 596,597).

If this discovery holds it would indeed be exciting. The oldest confirmation of an Old Testament account would be that of the Ark's capture and return. However, this identification has been challenged.

7. The Septuagint reads "ephod" in place of "Ark" in 1 Samuel 14:18.

8. *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* notes:

It sojourned among several probably Levitical families (1 Sam. vii. 1; 2 Sam. vi. 3,11; 1 Chr. xiii. 13, xv. 24,25) in the border villages of Eastern Judah (Dr. William Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, Revised and edited by Ezra Abbot, Vol. 1, 1872, p. 156).

CHAPTER 13

THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION: JERUSALEM

The first king of Israel, Saul, neglected the Ark of the Covenant while he ruled. The next king of Israel, however, was a man after God's own heart. Arguably, he would become Israel's most famous king. His name was David.

After a seven-year reign over his own tribe of Judah, David became king over a united Israel. Soon after this event he captured the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. David then proceeded to make Jerusalem his political capital (2 Samuel 5:6-10).

Shortly thereafter, he brought within its walls the Ark of the Covenant thereby making Jerusalem the religious center of his realm as well. Until David's time, Jerusalem did not belong to any of the tribes of Israel.

The Ark Is Brought To Jerusalem

David brought the Ark to Jerusalem around 1000 B.C. A tragic instance involving a man named Uzzah occurred along the way. The Bible describes it this way:

But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark of God. Then the LORD's anger blazed out against Uzzah for doing this, and God struck him dead beside the Ark of God. David was angry because the LORD's anger had blazed out against Uzzah. He named that place Perez-uzzah (which means "outbreak against Uzzah"). It is still called that today (2 Samuel 6:6-8 NLT).

This event further illustrated that the Ark was sacred, not to be treated lightly or irreverently. The Bible is very clear concerning the manner in which the Ark was to be transported:

Then David said, "Only the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord chose them to carry the ark of the Lord and to serve before him perpetually" (1 Chronicles 15:2 NET).

The fault was David's. He had attempted to transport the Ark in the same manner as the Philistines had, and not according to the manner that God had prescribed. The Philistines were seemingly excused for their ignorance on transporting the Ark, the same did not hold true for those who knew better.

God had clearly instructed that poles should be placed in the rings attached to the Ark and that they were never to be removed. This would allow it to be carried by the priests on their shoulders. The Philistines had to put the Ark on a new cart because this was their only means of transporting it. Had

the children of Israel carried the Ark in the way in which God had prescribed, then it never would have tottered.

In addition, Uzzah was a descendant of Abinadab, who previously had custody of the Ark. He obviously knew better than to touch it. Though well-intentioned, his action cost him his life.

The Uzzah incident interrupted the happy procession into Jerusalem. His impulsive gesture to save the Ark was a direct violation of the law. He did not die because of some pagan taboo connected with the Ark, as some commentators have claimed. Old Testament authority J. Barton Payne writes:

Those who seek to explain Scripture on the basis of comparative religion have attributed much of the . . . material found in the Old Testament to the primitive concept of taboo. It is asserted that “holy” objects were once thought to contain “other, separate” spirits in themselves and were therefore to be left alone. Such superstition is unworthy of Scripture. It is true that certain holy objects were required to be kept separate and that contact with them could mean death, as when Uzzah touched the ark. But Uzzah died because God struck him, not because of an intrinsic taboo.¹

The Ark Resides At The House Of Obed Edom

The Ark stopped short of Jerusalem resting at the house of a Levite named Obed-Edom for three months. Obed-Edom and his house received a blessing while the Ark remained there:

The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household (2 Samuel 6:11 NRSV).

King David then brought the Ark to Jerusalem in the manner in which God had prescribed—on the shoulders of the priests. It was then placed in a “tent” or “booth” that had been built on Mt. Zion:²

So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God (1 Chronicles 16:1 NKJV).

This was the first time in history that the Ark of the Covenant had come to Jerusalem.

The Ark Is Brought Out

Once the Ark had been brought to Jerusalem, the Bible states that it was removed on only one occasion. This was during the rebellion of Absalom, David’s son. Without David’s consent, the Ark had been taken out of Jerusalem by his well-meaning supporters:

Abiathar and Zadok and the Levites took the Ark of the Covenant of God and set it down beside the road. Then they offered sacrifices there until everyone had passed by. David instructed Zadok to take the Ark of God back into the city. “If the LORD sees fit,” David said, “he will bring me back to see the Ark and the Tabernacle again. But if he is through with me, then let him do what seems best to him.” Then the king told Zadok the priest, “Look, here is my plan. You and Abiathar should return quietly to the city with your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan. I will stop at the shallows of the Jordan River and wait there for a message from you. Let me know what happens in Jerusalem before I disappear into the wilderness.” So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to the city and stayed there (2 Samuel 15:24-29 NLT).

David refused to treat the Ark as a “good luck charm” or a “war machine.” He would not bring it with him to battle. His trust would be in God alone.

A House For The Lord Is Planned

Throughout its entire existence, the Ark dwelt in a portable sanctuary. King David recognized the need of a permanent house for the Ark:

The king settled into his palace, for the Lord gave him relief from all his enemies on all sides. The king said to Nathan the prophet, “Look! I am living in a palace made from cedar, while the ark of God sits in the middle of a tent” (2 Samuel 7:1,2 NET).

God honored David for his desire to build a more lasting structure to house the Ark. But David was told by the Lord that he could not build it because he was a man of war. David then gathered the materials and made the preparations, but the actual building would have to be left to another.³

He told the people what was in his heart. The Bible says:

Then King David rose to his feet and said: “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had planned to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God; and I made preparations for building. But God said to me, ‘You shall not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood’ (1 Chronicles 28:2,3 NRSV).

The building of a permanent house for the Ark was never carried out during David’s lifetime. This honor would fall to his son Solomon.⁴ To house the Ark, he constructed one of the most magnificent structures in the ancient world—the Temple of Jerusalem.

Endnotes for Chapter 13

1. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962, p. 123.

J. Barton Payne also notes:

Certain great Psalms seem to have been composed for the occasion and for its subsequent celebration (Pss. 24:7-10; 132:8). No hint, however, exists of any annual Babylonian style “enthronement festival” for Yahweh: sentiments such as God has gone up with a shout (Ps 47:5) express rather His reign over all the earth (J. Barton Payne, “Ark of the Covenant,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 1, Merill Tenney General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, p. 310).

2. Once the Ark was brought to Jerusalem the Tabernacle began to lose its significance. It retained only the old altar of burnt offerings.

The tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses made in the desert, and the altar of burnt offering were at the high place in Gibeon, but David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was terrified of the sword of the Lord’s angel (1 Chronicles 21:29 HCSB).

For a while the double service went on as Zadok the High Priest officiated at Gibeon.

Zadok the priest and his fellow priests served before the Lord’s tabernacle at the worship center in Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39 NET).

The divided worship continued all the days of David. When Solomon ascended to the throne, he recognized the sanctity of both places. He worshiped before the Ark:

Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He went to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant, and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he held a feast for all his servants (1 Kings 3:15 HCSB).

Yet Solomon went down to Gibeon to worship at the Tabernacle.

Solomon and the entire assembly went to the worship center in Gibeon, for the tent where they met God was located there, which Moses the Lord’s servant had made in the wilderness. (Now David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to the place he had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 1:3,4 NET).

Because the Tabernacle may have caused a division among the people, Solomon moved it with all its holy vessels to Jerusalem.

Then they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up (1 Kings 8:4 NKJV).

A.R. Fausset writes.

The altar of burnt offering where the sacrifices were offered continued separate from it at Gibeon, “The great high place.” (1 Kings iii. 4) (in the tabernacle of the Ark on Zion the service was song and praise alone) until the two were reunited in the temple of Solomon (A.R. Fausset, *Bible Encyclopaedia and Dictionary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d., p. 50).

3. King David left behind a great legacy in the history of Israel as Jewish author Max Dimont notes:

Though David was a warrior king, his claim to fame among Jews rests on three achievements totally unconnected with war. He made Jerusalem a symbol, an ideal, and a holy place: first, by making Jerusalem the political capital of Palestine; second, by earmarking the Temple for that city; and third, by enshrining the Ark in Jerusalem (Max Dimont, *Jews, God, and History*, New York: Signet Books, 1962, p. 49).

4. Solomon, like his father, realized the holiness of the Ark. He moved his pagan wife, daughter of Pharaoh, away from the area of the Ark.

Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, “My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the LORD has entered are holy” (2 Chronicles 8:11 NIV).

CHAPTER 14

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE: A PERMANENT HOME FOR THE ARK

One of the greatest building projects in ancient history was the golden Temple at Jerusalem. Once built, its fame spread to the ends of the earth. This building stood as a testimony to the true and living God.

The Bible records that King Solomon built the Temple on Mt. Moriah:

Then Solomon began to build the Lord's temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to his father David, at the site David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chronicles 3:1 HCSB).

The temple was constructed on the place which the Lord had chosen.

There Was A Great Celebration

The dedication of the Temple was part of a great celebration attended by elders, tribal heads, leaders of clans, and all the assembly of Israel:

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the people of Israel, in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion (2 Chronicles 5:2 NRSV).

The focal point of the dedication of the Temple was the placing of the Ark of the Covenant in its permanent home. The Ark had remained in a tent David had built upon Mt. Zion, located in the southeast portion of Jerusalem just south of the Temple:

David built houses for himself in the City of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it (1 Chronicles 15:1 NKJV).

The moment had arrived for the Ark to come to its ultimate resting place in the Temple. The Bible describes it this way:

All the men of Israel assembled before the king during the festival in the seventh month. When all Israel's elders had arrived, the Levites lifted the ark. The priests and Levites carried the ark, the tent where God appeared to his people, and all the holy items in the tent (2 Chronicles 5:3-5 NET).

King Solomon followed in the footsteps of his father David by sacrificing a large number of animals in honor of the Ark:

Now King Solomon and all the Israelites who had assembled with him went on ahead of the ark and sacrificed more sheep and cattle than could be counted or numbered (2 Chronicles 5:6 NET).

The time chosen for this event was the Feast of Tabernacles (September-October). The year was approximately 959 B.C.

The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and covered the ark and its carrying poles. These poles were so long that their ends, extending from the ark, could be seen from in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today (2 Chronicles 5:7-9 NIV).

After forty years of traveling in the wilderness, and hundreds of years in the Promised Land, the Ark finally came to rest at the Temple in Jerusalem.¹

A Cloud Appears In The Temple

During the dedication ceremony, a cloud filled the Temple:

The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God (2 Chronicles 5:13,14 NIV).

God had made His presence known to Moses in a similar way in the Tabernacle. His glory now filled the Temple.

Solomon's Prayer Acknowledged God Was Not In The Ark

It is important to note that Solomon realized that God was not confined either to the Temple or the Ark. During his prayer of dedication, he said:

But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! (2 Chronicles 6:18 NRSV).

Solomon also repeated the wilderness prayer of Moses:

And now, O LORD God, arise and enter this resting place of yours, where your magnificent Ark has been placed. May your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and may your saints rejoice in your goodness (2 Chronicles 6:41 NLT).

The Ark now rested in the Temple with only the poles visible. The Bible says:

The poles were so long their ends extending out from the ark were visible from in front of the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen from beyond that point. They have remained there to this very day (2 Chronicles 5:9 NET).

Only The Tablets Remain In The Ark

It seems that the contents of the Ark had changed. By the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 6:19), or at least by the time of Solomon, only the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments were in the Ark. Aaron's rod and the golden pot of manna were no longer there:

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt (1 Kings 8:9 NRSV).

The writer to the Hebrews, in discussing the Tabernacle, says that the Ark had contained Aaron's rod and a jar of manna:

In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant (Hebrews 9:4 NRSV).

The Old Testament, however, does not mention these items as being in the Ark. We are told these items were initially placed in front of the Ark, not inside of it:

And the LORD said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die (Numbers 17:10 NKJV).

There has been much speculation why this is so. Some people believe these other two objects may have been added later than the time of Solomon. It is also possible that they had been lost by Solomon's time. A removal of the articles may have occurred during the seven months when the Ark was in the land of the Philistines.

Whatever the case may be, they were not found inside the Ark at Solomon's dedication. All that was left in the Ark of the Covenant was the Ten Commandments.

Two Giant Carved Cherubim Are Placed In The Holy Of Holies

A new feature was added to the inside of the Holy of Holies: two giant cherubim² carved out of cedar wood and overlaid with gold. Their wings met in the middle of the Holy of Holies in a protecting arch. From tip to tip they measured about twenty feet. Underneath these wings dwelt the Ark as well as the Shekinah glory:

Then he put the cherubim inside the inner temple. Since their wings were spread out, the first one's wing touched [one] wall while the second cherub's wing touched the other wall, and in the middle of the temple their wings were touching wing to wing. He also overlaid the cherubim with gold (1 Kings 6:27 HCSB).

This must have been an impressive sight!

The Temple Was Unique

The Temple of Jerusalem differed from other temples in the ancient Middle East in that it had no idols. The Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies was its treasure. Jewish author Chaim Potok writes:

This we do know: the Solomonic temple was devoid of images. Israelites were called upon to offer sacrifices to their all-powerful and invisible God, who had covenanted with their ancestors in Canaan and at Sinai, and whose promise to the patriarchs had been clearly fulfilled—as evidenced by the empire of the united monarchy and the glittering splendor of Solomon's new Jerusalem. They were to offer their sacrifices in Jerusalem in times of famine, drought, war; for sins; during festivals. The temple of Solomon was a religious and political undertaking that deepened the relationship between the city of David and the people of Israel.³

There Was No More Fighting With The Ark

After the Ark was placed in the inner sanctuary of the Temple, called the Holy of Holies, the practice of carrying it into battle forever ceased. From this time onward, the historical references concerning the Ark of the Covenant are few.⁴

Endnotes for Chapter 14

1. C. H. Mackintosh writes.

It [the Ark] was not always to be a traveler. “The afflictions of David,” as well as the wars of Israel, were to have an end. The prayer was yet to be breathed and answered, “Arise O Lord, into thy rest: thou and the ark of thy strength” (Ps. cxxxii. 8). This most sublime petition had its partial accomplishment in the. . . days of Solomon, when “the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. . .”

When the moment arrived in which. . . the wanderings and wars of Israel were over, when the. . . house was completed . . . then the record of wilderness need and wilderness failure were unnoticed, and nothing remained save that which constituted the eternal foundation of the throne of the God of Israel, and all the earth (C.H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, New York: 1873, pp. 279-281).

2. The figures of the cherubim were used for decorative purposes: (1) they were embroidered on the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies and the curtains of the Tabernacle; (2) they were carved on all the inner and outer walls (1 Kings 6:29), the doors of the inner and outer sanctuary (1 Kings 6:32,35), and the panels of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7:29,36); and (3) carved on the walls and doors of the Temple envisioned by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 41:18-20,25).

3. Chaim Potok, *Wanderings*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, p. 114.

4. A brief history of the Ark, up to this point, is succinctly given by a seventeenth century Bible commentary:

As soon as Solomon had finished all the buildings of the Temple, and the utensils and furniture thereof, he resolved solemnly to dedicate and consecrate the same, and to bring up the Ark from the city of David, to place it therein. It will not be amiss to observe the several removals of the Ark of God; so famous in Scripture. The Tabernacle and the Ark being first made by Moses in the desert, were afterwards by Joshua set up at Shiloh, the 7th year after that the Israelites had passed through Jordan. This Shiloh was a city in the Tribe of Ephraim, and seems to have been the same with Salem, where Melchisedeck reigned, and near to which John baptized. In this place the Ark continued 328 years, till the time that the Israelites carried it into their camp against the Philistines, who took it and sent it back. . . Upon its return into the Holy Land, it was placed in the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim, where it continued 70 years, and then translated from thence to the House of Obed-Edom, where it abode only three months; at the end of which David transported it to Zion, which was the Citadel of Jerusalem. It seems likely also that at the same time, the Tabernacle, which had continued all this while at Shiloh, was set up in Gibeon, a city in the Tribe of Judah (*The History of the Old and New Testament*, Second Edition Corrected, London: 1699, p. 140).

CHAPTER 15

THE ARK IS MYSTERIOUSLY RETURNED TO THE TEMPLE

Solomon's magnificent Temple in Jerusalem brought Israel fame throughout the entire world. All, however, was not well. Even before Solomon's death, idolatry began to increase among the people. Time after time God had sent prophets to Jerusalem to warn the people of upcoming judgment, but their words fell on deaf ears.

Our story now moves forward some 350 years to a crucial time in Israel's history. Shortly after the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: north and south. The ten northern tribes, called Israel, had their center of worship in Samaria. Constantly in idolatry, they were taken captive by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.

The Ark And The Temple Are Neglected

The two southern tribes, known as Judah, had Jerusalem as their capital. Though they experienced times of spiritual revival, idolatry was rampant. The people had neglected the Temple and the Ark. The judgment would soon be coming.

During this dark period, there were glimpses of light. One of them occurred in the reign of Josiah (621 B.C.)

The Book Of The Law Is Found

The Book of the Law¹ had been lost through neglect of the holy things. It was found during the time of Josiah:

While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the LORD given through Moses (2 Chronicles 34:14 NRSV).

With the discovery and reading of the Book of the Law, King Josiah realized that Judah had ignored the commandments of the Lord. He ordered the Temple repaired and the renewed celebration of Passover.

In the 18th year of King Josiah, the Temple was repaired, and the Passover was celebrated. The priests and Levites were commanded to fulfill their duties for the occasion. Josiah then ordered that the Ark of the Covenant was to be placed in the Temple:

He told the Levites, who instructed all Israel about things consecrated to the Lord, "Place the holy ark in the temple which King Solomon son of David of Israel built. Don't carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel! (2 Chronicles 35:3 NET).

Interestingly, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, says that the Levites obeyed the command of the king and placed the Ark back into the Temple:

And he said to the Levites, who were powerful in all Israel, that they should be sanctified to the Lord, and they placed the holy ark in the house that Solomon son of David, the king of Israel, had built. And the king said, “You are not to carry anything on your shoulders. Now then, minister to the Lord, your God, and to his people Israel” (2 Chronicles 35:3 English Translation Of The Septuagint)

This mysterious command of Josiah is the last historical reference to the Ark of the Covenant.²

The Ark Had Been Removed

Josiah ordered the Ark placed back into the Temple. The Scriptures do not tell us when and by whom it had been removed. There has been much speculation as to when it was taken and where it was placed while outside of the Temple.

The Ark may have been removed during the reign of Manasseh, one of the worst kings in Judah's history. We read the following in Second Chronicles:

He [Manasseh] took the carved image he had made and put it in God's temple, of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, “In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever” (2 Chronicles 33:7 NIV).

The reign of Amon is another time the Ark could have been removed. The Bible says:

He [Amon] did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon worshiped and offered sacrifices to all the idols Manasseh had made (2 Chronicles 33:22 NIV).

Some feel that the Ark had been removed to keep it from being desecrated. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says:

In the dark days of Manasseh and Amon, the ark seems to have been removed by faithful Levites and carried away elsewhere for its protection.³

If the Ark had been previously removed, then it is surprising that nothing is said about it in Scripture. We are not told whether it was a helpful priest who removed it to keep it from being profaned or an idolatrous king to make room for his pagan idols.

Was It To Make Repairs?

There may be a simple explanation as to why the Ark was moved out of the Temple. It is possible that the Ark had been temporarily removed

during the time Josiah was making repairs on the Temple. When the repairs were finished, the Ark was ordered returned.

We agree with the assessment of the *Speakers Commentary* that it is not possible to know why the Ark had been removed:

It is impossible to say whether it had been cast out by Amon to make room for the idolatrous emblems with which he seems to have defiled the temple (2 Kings xii. 46) or had been temporarily removed by Josiah when he effected the necessary repairs.⁴

Whatever the case may be,⁵ the Scripture records the command of Josiah to place the Ark back in the Temple. Once the Ark was mysteriously returned to the Temple, it was no longer heard from. Its fate remains an enigma to this day.

Endnotes for Chapter 15

1. We have already seen (Endnotes for Chapter 2) that there are various interpretations of what was contained in the Book of the Law (Book of the Covenant).

J. Barton Payne comments.

At this point in the year 622, Hilkiah found the “Book of the Law.” It is later called the “Book of the Covenant.” (v. 30) . . . It contains the curses (Deut. 28) and it alone calls for a central sanctuary and was stored at the temple usually by the side of the ark (Deut. 31:25,26) . . . The book, however, seems to have been misplaced during the apostate administrations of the previous kings, Manasseh and Amon, under whom the ark had been moved about (2 Chron. 35:3) (J. Barton Payne, 1,2 Chronicles, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 4, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, p. 551).

There is a possible connection between the recovery of this lost book and the returning of the Ark to the Holy of Holies. Scripture tells us that the “Book of the Law” was later placed by the side of the Ark. We read the following in Deuteronomy.

Take this scroll of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God. It will be there as a witness against you, (Deuteronomy 31:26 NET).

2. One Bible commentary says the following.

In replacing it, the Levites had evidently carried it upon their shoulders, deeming that still to be the duty which the law imposed on them. But Josiah reminded them of the change of circumstances when, as the service of God was now performed in a fixed and permanent temple, they were not required to be bearers of the Ark any longer, and, being released from the service, they should address themselves with the greater alacrity to the discharge of other functions (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and David Brown, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, n.d. p 285).

3. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, p. 418.

Calmet's Bible Dictionary says:

The priests, unable to endure this profanation removed the ark and carried it from place to place to preserve it from the pollution and impiety of these princes. Josiah commanded them to bring it back to the sanctuary and forbade them to carry it, as they had hitherto done into the country (*Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, Vol. I, with Biblical fragments by the late Charles Taylor, London: Eighth edition, 1844, p. 190).

4. Cited by *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, edited by Charles John Ellicott, Vol. 3, 1 Kings-Esther, n.d., p.

5. John Peter Lange notes another theory. He wrote

Quite arbitrary is the hypothesis of some ancients that the ark was, in the days of the idolatrous kings, sometimes carried round the country as a means of strengthening the faith of the people, and Josiah now forbids this custom in the present words (John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, Volume 7, p. 272).

CHAPTER 16

THE FIRST TEMPLE IS DESTROYED: THE ARK IS GONE

Though the golden Ark of the Covenant had been placed back into the Holy of Holies during the reign of King Josiah, the days of the First Temple were numbered. Less than twenty years after the Ark was returned, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, began one of three separate sieges on the city of Jerusalem.¹

The First Temple Is Destroyed

During the third siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. the armies of king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed both the city and its magnificent Temple. The Bible records that Nebuchadnezzar took the golden vessels with him to Babylon:

And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels (2 Chronicles 36:18,19 ESV).

What is not specifically mentioned is the Ark of the Covenant. For some unstated reason its fate is not recorded.

Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image

Some years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the pillage of the Temple, the Bible speaks of Nebuchadnezzar making a huge golden image of himself and then demanding that the people worship it. The Bible says:

King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon (Daniel 3:1 NRSV).

Where did he get such an amount of gold? Is it possible that he used some of the golden vessels from the Temple to make this image? May it have included the Ark of the Covenant?² History is silent on this matter.

The Handwriting On The Wall

Another episode during this period involved the Temple vessels. Belshazzar, who ruled years after Nebuchadnezzar, made a great feast in Babylon. During the feast, Belshazzar ordered that the holy vessels be brought to him:

Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the

temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them (Daniel 5:2,3 ESV).

Belshazzar mocked the God of Israel by praising the gods of gold and silver. His blasphemy of the holy vessels could not go unpunished. It was in this context that the famous incident of the handwriting on the wall occurred:

Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace, next to the lampstand. The king was watching the hand as it wrote. Then the king's face turned pale, and his thoughts terrified him. His limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together (Daniel 5:5,6 NRSV).

The old prophet Daniel was called in to interpret the message. He said to Belshazzar:

Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways (Daniel 5:23 NIV).

The great city of Babylon fell that night and the blasphemous King Belshazzar was slain. The Babylonian kingdom, which had conquered Jerusalem, had itself been conquered by the Medes and the Persians. The holy vessels that had been taken from the Temple were now in their hands, and the fate of the Ark was still unknown.

Endnotes for Chapter 16

1. On the first siege Nebuchadnezzar took only the minor utensils. It was not until his third siege that he took all the vessels. Before the final siege, false prophets were telling the people that the Temple would not be destroyed. God's prophet, Jeremiah, spoke to the contrary (Jeremiah 27:18-22).
2. Though the theory has been advocated that Nebuchadnezzar used the gold from the Ark to build an idol of himself there is no evidence of this. As a trophy of war, the Ark would more likely be kept intact.

Humphrey Prideaux writes.

Nebuchadnezzar did put all the sacred vessels, which he carried from Jerusalem, into the House of his god at Babylon, that is unto the house or temple of Bel. For that is the name of the great god of the Babylonians. He is supposed to have been the same with Nimrod, and to have been called Bel from his dominion, and Nimrod from his rebellion. For both Bel or Baal, which is the same name, signifieth Lord (Humphrey Prideaux, *Old and New Testament Connected*, Part 1, Vol. 1, 10th edition, 1729, p. 142).

CHAPTER 17

THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD: NO ARK

Rightly, the city of Jerusalem had been judged for its idolatry. The Lord, however, is rich in mercy. Judgment is His strange work. The magnificent Temple, built by Solomon, had been destroyed and the people were in exile. Yet this would only be temporary. The people were soon returned to their land and a Second Temple was constructed.

The People Return To The Land

Seventy years after their expulsion, the people returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. The Temple restoration was their major focus of attention.

Hundreds of years earlier, the Prophet Isaiah had predicted that King Cyrus would give the command to restore the Temple:

When I say of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd,’ he will certainly do as I say. He will command that Jerusalem be rebuilt and that the Temple be restored (Isaiah 44:28 NLT).

Jeremiah made a similar prophecy.¹ The Chronicler ends his account with the fulfillment of this prophecy:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up’” (2 Chronicles 36:22,23 ESV).

In the same manner, the Book of Ezra begins with this prophecy's fulfillment.²

The Rebuilding Begins

In 538 B.C. Cyrus declared that the return was for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple. Those who returned from the Exile were to be aided by the Jews remaining behind, as well as their Gentile neighbors. The Temple vessels taken for booty by Nebuchadnezzar were delivered to the treasurer for return to Jerusalem. A list of the Temple treasures is recorded:

Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. Cyrus king of Persia

had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This was the inventory: gold dishes 30 silver dishes 1,000 silver pans 29 gold bowls 30 matching silver bowls 410 other articles 1,000 In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along when the exiles came up from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7-11 NIV).

As we see, there is a detailed list of the articles returned. Conspicuous by their absence are the sacred vessels of the Temple: the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Showbread, the Altar of Incense, and the Ark of the Covenant. All of them had disappeared.

The Articles Are Rebuilt

Upon the royal decree, all the articles that were taken by Nebuchadnezzar were returned. We read about this in the Book of Ezra:

Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God (Ezra 6:5 NRSV).

All those holy articles which were not returned were ordered rebuilt.³ The one particular article that was not rebuilt was the Ark of the Covenant.

The Temple Is Rebuilt Without The Ark

The Second Temple was completed about 515 B.C. It was a smaller version of the original one built by Solomon.⁴ The term “Second Temple” actually refers to two different structures. Later, this Second Temple was expanded by Herod the Great.

About 20 B.C. Herod convened a national assembly announcing his plan to construct a new Temple. In his speech Herod explained how the Temple then standing lacked the sixty cubits of height that Solomon’s Temple had. With the blessings of Rome, Herod would correct this situation.

He solved the space problem by doubling the size of the Temple Mount, building huge retaining walls that towered ninety feet above ground level.⁵ The old Temple continued to be in regular use during the preparation for the new one. The daily sacrifices continued there during the time of Herod’s rebuilding.

There Was No Ark In The Second Temple

During the time of the Second Temple (515 B.C to A.D. 70) the Ark was not present. This is confirmed by various sources.

Antiochus Did Not Find The Ark

For example, in 167 B.C. the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes entered Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple. He removed the Table of Showbread, the Golden Altar, the Golden Lampstand and other costly things. When he entered the Holy of Holies, he found it vacant. The account is recorded for us in First Maccabees:

After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance (1 Maccabees 1:20-24 NRSV)

He did not find or take the Ark of the Covenant.

The Temple Was Cleansed By Judas Maccabaeus

Judas Maccabaeus restored the Temple three years later. He built a new altar and made new hallowed vessels:

Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple (1 Maccabees 4:47-50, NRSV)

In this entire account of the Temple's desecration and subsequent restoration, there is no mention of the Ark.

Pompey Did Not See The Ark

First century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, recorded that the Roman general Pompey also found the Holy of Holies empty when he entered in 63 B.C.⁶ Nathan Ausbel notes:

Pompey was the first Roman who subdued the Jews. By right of conquest he entered their temple. It is a fact well known, that he found no image, no statue, no symbolical representation of the Deity: the whole presented a naked dome; the sanctuary was unadorned and simple. By Pompey's orders the walls of the city were levelled to the ground, but the temple was left entire.⁷

Josephus records that in his day, shortly after the time of Christ, the Ark was still missing. He wrote that the Ark was lost during the entire time of the Second Temple.⁸

Five Things Were Missing In The Second Temple

The Jews agreed that there were five things that had been in the First Temple which were not in the Second: (1) The Ark of the Covenant (2) the Holy Spirit of Prophecy (3) the Urim and Thummim, (4) the Sacred Fire, and (5) the Shekinah Glory.

The Ark Was Represented By The Foundation Stone

The Second Temple did not contain the Ark of the Covenant, but it was represented by a stone protruding some three fingers high off the ground. This was called “the stone of foundation.”⁹ The foundation stone is the place where the Ark would have stood, had it existed. On this stone, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the Great Day of Atonement. The blood had formerly been sprinkled on the Mercy Seat during the days of the Tabernacle and the First Temple.

The Ark And The Life Of Jesus

When Jesus of Nazareth came into the world, the nation of Israel was under the yoke of Rome. The Temple in Jerusalem was functioning, but without the Ark of the Covenant. The Holy of Holies was still without its only piece of furniture. Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote:

Wherever a Roman, a Greek or an Asiatic might wander, he could take gods with him, or find rites kindred to his own. It was far otherwise with the Jew. He had only one Temple, that in Jerusalem; only one God, Him who had once throned there between the Cherubim, and who was still King over Zion. The Temple was the only place where a God-appointed, pure priesthood could offer acceptable sacrifices, whether for forgiveness of sin, or for fellowship with God.

Here, in the impenetrable gloom of the inner-most sanctuary, which the High Priest alone might enter once a year—for most solemn expiation, had stood the Ark, the leader of the people into the land of Promise, and the footstool on which the Shechinah had rested.¹⁰

Jesus may have spoken of the glory having once been in the Temple. The King James Version translates Matthew 23:21 as follows:

He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who dwelt in it (Matthew 23:21 KJV).

By using the past tense, Jesus implied that God had forsaken the Temple. However, there is some question as to how this verse should be translated.¹¹

There Was No Glory

The Bible states that God no longer manifested His visible presence there. Around 600 B.C. the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory leave the Temple and depart by the way of the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem:

And the glory of the LORD ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city (Ezekiel 11:23 NRSV).

The Destruction Of The Second Temple

Titus the Roman destroyed the Second Temple in A.D. 70. The holy vessels of the Temple were taken by Titus and brought to Rome. First century writer, and eyewitness to these events, Flavius Josephus, described them being paraded through the streets of Rome:

Most of the spoils were heaped up indiscriminately; but more prominent than all the rest were those captured in the Temple at Jerusalem. They consisted of a golden table weighing many talents, and a candelabrum also made of gold, but different in pattern from those we use in ordinary life. Its central shaft was fixed to a base, and from it extended slender branches arranged like the prongs of a trident, while a wrought lamp was attached to the end of each branch; these numbered seven, indicating the sanctity of that number to the Jews. After these—and last of all the spoils—was carried a copy of the Jewish Law. Then followed a large group carrying images of Victory, all fashioned of ivory and gold. Behind them Vespasian drove first, with Titus behind him while Domitian rode alongside in magnificent apparel and mounted on a horse that was itself a site worth seeing.¹²

The Ark is nowhere to be found among the items taken from the Second Temple by the Romans. Its fate remained unrecorded.

Endnotes for Chapter 17

1. Jeremiah predicted:

This whole area will become a desolate wasteland. These nations will be subject to the king of Babylon for seventy years. But when the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation for their sins. I will make the land of Babylon an everlasting ruin. I, the Lord, affirm it (Jeremiah 25:11,12 NET).

2. The Book of Ezra records the fulfillment:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The Lord put it into the mind of King Cyrus to issue a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom and to put it in writing (Ezra 1:1 HCSB).

3. The Book of Ezra notes the King's command:

The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you are responsible for providing, you may provide out of the king's treasury (Ezra 7:19,20 NRSV).

4. Many who saw the smaller Second Temple wept.

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy (Ezra 3:12 NRSV).

Humphrey Prideaux writes.

And therefore had nothing else of the first Temple been wanting in the second but the Ark only this also would have been reason enough for the old men to have wept, when they remembered the first temple (Humphrey Prideaux, *Old and New Testament Connected*, Part 1, Vol. 1, 10th edition, 1729, p. 201).

Laetsch notes:

The very fact that the returning exiles no longer possessed the Ark, was to be to them a lesson teaching them that the complete dissolution of the Old Covenant was approaching (Theo. Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, St. Louis: Concordia Press, 1952, p. 56).

5. The only part of Herod's Temple that remains today is the western retaining wall, known as the "Western Wall" or the "Wailing Wall."

6. Josephus wrote.

Pompey went into it, and not a few of those that were with him also saw all that which was unlawful for any other men to see but only for the High Priest. There were in the Temple the Golden Table, the Holy Candlestick, and other pouring vessels, and a great quantity of spices; and besides these were among the treasure two thousand talents of sacred money; yet did Pompey touch nothing of all this on account of his regard to religion (Josephus, *Antiquities*: 14:4:4).

Cicero confirmed this.

When he [Pompey] was conqueror, and had taken Jerusalem, did not touch any thing belonging to the temple (Cicero, *Oration for Flaccus*).

7. Nathan Ausbel, *Pictorial History of the Jews*, New York: Crown Books, 1953, p. 55.

8. Josephus stated.

But the inmost part of the Temple was twenty cubits. This was separated from the outer part by a veil. In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*: 5:5:5).

9. The *Mishnah* says.

After the Ark was taken away, a stone remained there from the time of the Early Prophets, and it was called 'Shetiyah'. It was higher than the ground by three fingerbreadths (Yoma 5:2).

Leibel Reznick writes.

The rock was first uncovered by King David and the Prophet Samuel (Sota 48b). Some say the rock was in the very center of the Holy of Holies (Tosfos Yom Tov); others say it was near the western wall of the Holy of Holies (Rambam, Bais HaB'chirah 4), and still others maintain that it was near the curtains separating the Kodesh (Holy Place) and the Holy of Holies (Tosfos, Baba Basra 25a) (Leibel Reznick, *The Holy Temple Revisited*, Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1990, p. 134).

The Gemara of Jerusalem (chap. 1) and that of Babylon both acknowledge that the Ark of the Covenant was lacking in the Second Temple. Jewish sage Abarbanel, (comments on Daniel 9) says it will be restored by the Messiah. Ezra, Nehemiah, Maccabees, and Josephus do not mention it as being in the Second Temple.

There are those, however, who believe the Ark was in the Second Temple.

But 40 years after this, at the time of the Dedication of the Temple, Solomon placed the Ark and the Brazen Altar there, where they continued 424 years, at which time Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and burnt the Temple; which being foreseen by Jeremiah the Prophet,

he took care to convey the Ark to Mount Pisgah, where he was assured by God that it should remain unknown till the return of the Children of Israel from the Babylonish Captivity; which makes it more probable, that the said Ark was afterwards placed in the Second Temple, which was begun by Cyrus, and finished by Darius, Kings of Persia (*The History of the Old and New Testament*, Second Edition Corrected, London: 1699, p. 140).

George Bush writes to the contrary.

Others say that it was indeed taken away by the Chaldeans (Babylonians), but was afterwards restored, and occupied its place in the second Temple; but the Talmud and some of the Jewish writers confess, that the want of the ark was one of the points in which the second Temple was inferior to that of Solomon; to which we may add that neither Ezra, Nehemiah, the Maccabees, nor Josephus, mention the ark as extant in the second Temple, and the last authority expressly says there was nothing in the sanctuary when the Temple was taken by Titus. It certainly does not appear in the Arch erected at Rome in honor of that conqueror, and in which the spoils of the Temple are displayed; although some writers have attempted to identify it with the table of shewbread which is there represented (George Bush, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, Volume 1, Boston: Henry A. Young & Co., 1841, p. 91).

10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d. p. 7.

11. Some versions do not render Jesus' statement as past tense but rather present tense. For example, the New International Version reads.

And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it (NIV)

The difference between these translations is due to the form of the participle (a verbal adjective) found in this verse. Some Greek manuscripts have this participle in the present tense while others have in it the aorist, or undefined, tense. The King James translators, accepting the aorist tense as the correct reading, translated it as something that was true in the past (i.e. the Lord dwelt in it).

12. Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*: 5:5:5

It is not exaggeration to say that the Fall of Jerusalem is the most significant national event in the history of the world. The fact that the Lord Himself connected it with His own passion is sufficient to establish its supreme importance (John ii.19). The destruction of the Temple was indeed involved in His death. That which had been in the past the shrine of the Presence of God among His people was necessarily doomed to final desolation when "the more perfect Tabernacle" had been faithlessly and fatally violated (William Knight, *The Ark of Titus*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1896, p. 9).

CHAPTER 18

FROM THE SECOND TEMPLE UNTIL TODAY: THE ARK REMAINS LOST

With the Second Temple destroyed and the Jews scattered throughout the world, the city of Jerusalem was no longer the center for Jewish worship. Without a Temple, a High Priest, and a system of sacrifice, the Jews had to worship the Lord through other means. The loss of the Temple gave rise to the prominence of the synagogue.

The Rise Of The Synagogue

After the Babylonian captivity in 539 B.C., a great number of synagogues sprang up. The term synagogue denotes a Jewish house of worship. The origin of the synagogues is unclear but many scholars feel that they originated during the Babylonian captivity. This was a time when the exiled Jews who had been forcibly removed from their Temple gathered in groups to read the Scriptures.

The New Testament Times

Jesus taught in various synagogues throughout Galilee. The Apostle Paul preached in synagogues in Damascus and refers to synagogues in every city he visited in Asia Minor.

The synagogues were widely used in New Testament times, but the central place of worship was still the Temple in Jerusalem—while it remained standing.

The Synagogue Became The Central Institution

With the destruction of the Second Temple, and the end to the state of Israel, the people scattered worldwide. The Temple and the synagogue previously existed side by side in complementary roles. After A.D. 70 the synagogue became the central institution of Judaism and prayer became the central form of worship as there was now no sacrificial system.

Synagogues were the only place of worship since Jerusalem had been lost to non-Jews. Abba Eban observes:

By the fifth century the entire Roman world had become formally Christian, and no other faith was tolerated. Christianity was now the “Establishment.” while the unconverted Jews remained the eternal dissidents, the perpetual minority. But from these five centuries they had carried away a new mobility and a new flexibility for their ideas and culture. These ideas and culture were no longer tied down to an Ark of the Covenant or to a Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews could now move forward in any direction, wherever books of the Bible and of the Talmud could be found.¹

The Synagogue Ark

The synagogues contained a chest or closet where the scrolls of the Torah and other sacred books were kept. The chest was known as the “Ark of the Torah.” It was placed in an area shut off by a curtain from the rest of the building. The synagogue Torah arks, unlike the Ark of the Covenant, looked like a miniature building. They served as a symbolic representation of the former Temple in Jerusalem and of the Ark of the Covenant.

The Torah Ark is still a major architectural element in the synagogue, traditionally built into the eastern wall of the synagogue facing Jerusalem.

A Lost Synagogue Ark Found

In the summer of 1981, an ancient synagogue ark was discovered by archaeologists Eric and Carol Myers. The discovery made in Nabratein in the upper Galilee caused a temporary worldwide sensation. Many confused their ancient synagogue ark with the original Ark of the Covenant. Of their experience they wrote:

We will probably never stop asking ourselves why it was in the summer of 1981, rather than 1979 or 1983, that we uncovered a magnificent stone fragment from a lost synagogue ark. Had our discovery occurred in some other year, the world at large would probably never have noticed. But because—by what strange coincidence we do not know—our ark fragment was unearthed during the summer of “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” it attracted front-page media attention and we—comfortably accustomed to the life of obscure archaeologists—suddenly became minor international celebrities. . .

Too often the media tried to make the false connection between the Ark of the Covenant and the ancient synagogue ark we found. Some of the hundreds of newspaper articles even tried to give the impression that we found the Ark of the Covenant itself.²

The Myers’ emphasized the importance of the synagogue ark:

It is now clear that our forebearers regarded their houses of worship and their communities. . . as the successors of the Temple of Jerusalem . . . The shrines they erected in their synagogues were conceived in the knowledge that they were to be the successors to the Biblical Ark of the Covenant. The Biblical Ark was the receptacle of the Covenant, which symbolized God’s presence; the Torah Shrine of post-Temple days was the receptacle of the scrolls, God’s word preserved in Scripture. We did not find the original ark, but we did find one of its unique spiritual successors.³

Depictions of synagogue arks have also been found. At Capernaum there was a small mural found showing a small columned structure, flanked by lions. A mosaic of a synagogue ark has also been found in Beth Alpha near Beth Shean, south of the Sea of Galilee.⁴

Worship Today Is Without The Temple Or The Ark

Today Jewish worship is still conducted in the synagogue since there has not been a Temple in Jerusalem for over 1,900 years. The Orthodox services themselves have changed little in 2,000 years. To this day, the synagogue is the central religious, social and educational institution in Judaism.

In most synagogues today, the ark is still placed in the wall of the building that is facing Jerusalem. It is usually positioned in such a way that it is visible from every part of the room. Congregations rise when this portion of the wall is opened, as it is considered symbolic of the Holy of Holies. The present synagogue arks are made of various materials including marble and carved wood. Some are highly ornamented.

The synagogue ark reminds the Jewish people of their past glory when the Ark of the Covenant stood in the Holy of Holies—first in the Tabernacle, and then in the Temple. Today, in its place, they have only representations of Israel's most sacred object for the Ark of the Covenant, the chest which held the Ten Commandments, has mysteriously vanished.

The Mystery Of The Ark's Disappearance

The Ark of the Covenant has unexplainably disappeared from the pages of the Bible and history. Richard Friedman writes:

There is no report that the Ark was carried away destroyed or hidden. There is not even any comment such as "And then the Ark disappeared and we do not know what happened to it" or "And no one knows where it is to this day." The most important object in the world, in the biblical view, simply ceases to be in the story.⁵

The Ark has been lost. Where did it go? Chaim Potok writes.

No mention is made of the sacred ark, which had been in the temple since the days of Solomon. The humiliation of its loss may have been so painful it could not be shaped in words. We never hear of it again.⁶

From the time of Josiah, until the present-day, the Ark of the Covenant has disappeared from the face of the earth. Will it ever appear again? This question is the focus of the rest of this book.

Endnotes for Chapter 18

1. Abba Eban, *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*, New York: Summit Books, 1984, p. 94.

Religion writer John Noss gives further insight into the synagogue.

The synagogues were controlled, in matters of doctrine and polity, by the scribes and Pharisees, but the local administration was in the hands of a council of elders, one of whom was elected the ruler of the synagogue and had charge of the religious services. He would be in a position to invite Jesus to speak in the synagogue. Another officer, the chazzan or attendant, was the synagogue's librarian, having in his care the rolls of the scriptures which were in the "ark" (John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, Fourth edition, New York: Macmillan Company, 1969, p. 434 note).

2. Eric M. Myers and Carol L. Myers, "Finders of a Real Lost" Ark, *Biblical Archaeological Review*, November/December 1981, pp. 25,26.

3. Eric M. Myers and Carol L. Myers, *ibid.*, p. 26. The Myers also note.

The pediment of the Holy Ark which we found in 1981, however, is the first and only part of a Torah Shrine to have survived from high antiquity. It is a kind of missing link. It dates from the third century A.D. a millennium and a half after the Ark of the Covenant (the original prototype) and a millennium before any extant medieval example. . . . The entire Torah Shrine is called the "Holy Ark" or Aron Ha-Qodesh. This term only appears once in the Bible (in 2 Chronicles 35:3), but it has been used for the past 2,000 years to denominate the synagogue ark, symbolic descendent of the Ark of the Covenant (Myers, *ibid.*, p. 29).

4. The Myers comment on the Beth Alpha mosaic.

The mosaic floor from the synagogue at Beth Alpha contains many of the same elements as the Nabratein Ark: pitched roof, pair of lions on either side of the Ark, a shell motif in the center of the ark pediment, and an eternal lamp hanging from the roof peak (Myers, *ibid.*, p. 32).

The remains of a synagogue from the time of Ptolemy III (246-221 B.C.) has been found outside Alexandria. The Damascus museum contains the remains of a synagogue from about A.D. 200 removed from Dura-Europos in the middle of the Euphrates. It has murals depicting the Ark and also has a likeness of a Torah shrine.

5. Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote The Bible?* London: Jonathan Cape, 1988, p. 156.

6. Chaim Potok, *Wanderings*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, p. 145.

Section 3

**Arkeology:
In Search Of The Lost Ark**

The question we will now consider concerns what happened to the Ark of the Covenant. Was it lost? Has it been hidden? Has it been taken captive? What are the chances that it will ever be found? What about reports that it has been discovered?

We will now consider these and other important questions in the remainder of the book as we begin our search for the Lost Ark.

Introduction To Section 3

WAS THE ARK TAKEN BY FOREIGN INVADERS?

Was the Ark of the Covenant taken by foreign invaders? In our quest to discover what happened to the lost Ark, we will concentrate first on those nations who invaded Israel and took away certain holy vessels from the Temple. Three times this happened to Solomon's Temple as scholar Menahem Haran notes:

There is evidence of foreign kings penetrating the Solomonic temple at various periods. There were three such invaders (Pharaoh Shishak [Egypt] 1 Kgs. 14:26), Jehoash of Israel (2 Kgs. 14:14), and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. . . Small wonder, therefore that some scholars have linked the disappearance of the Ark and the cherubim with one of these invasions, in particular with one of the first two.

We add a fourth nation to the list—Rome. When the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans, they also took some of the holy vessels and brought them to Rome.

Each of these four nations, at various times, plundered the Temple in Jerusalem and took out certain Temple vessels. We will now consider the possibility that one of these foreign invaders took with them the Ark of the Covenant.

CHAPTER 19

DID THE EGYPTIANS STEAL THE ARK?

One suggested nation that may have taken the Ark of the Covenant is Egypt. This is the view that was portrayed in the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” Indiana Jones suggested that the Ark was removed by Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt in 926 B.C. and brought to the city of Tanis where a sandstorm, lasting an entire year, buried the city. The plot of the movie concerns the discovery of Tanis and the finding of the lost Ark. This idea made for the most exciting movie one could imagine to see with the forces of good, embodied in the person of Indiana Jones, fighting the forces of evil, represented by the Nazis.

A Possible Theory

There are those who genuinely hold the view that Pharaoh Shishak took the Ark. We read the following:

The historic importance of the Ark ceased after Temple times. One view is that when Pharaoh Shishak carried off Rehoboam, King of Judah, into Egypt, he also took along the Ark as a trophy of war. From that time on it disappeared from Jewish life.¹

The Temple Was Plundered

The historical background to this event can be summarized as follows. King Solomon had been dead only five years when the Temple and its sacred items were plundered. The nation had been divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Judah was the weaker of the two.

In the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's successor, Pharaoh Shishak (Sheshonk I) of Egypt invaded Israel and Judah. Shishak was the ruler of the 22nd Dynasty (ca. 945-924 B.C.).

The Bible gives the account of Shishak's siege in the following manner:

Because they were unfaithful to the LORD, King Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem in the fifth year of King Rehoboam's reign. He came with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and a countless army of foot soldiers, including Libyans, Sukkites, and Ethiopians. Shishak conquered Judah's fortified cities and then advanced to attack Jerusalem. The prophet Shemaiah then met with Rehoboam and Judah's leaders, who had all fled to Jerusalem because of Shishak. Shemaiah told them, “This is what the LORD says: You have abandoned me, so I am abandoning you to Shishak” (2 Chronicles 12:2-5 NLT).

The people, sensing God's judgment, humbled themselves:

The king and the leaders of Israel humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is right in doing this to us!” When the LORD saw their change of heart, he gave this message to Shemaiah: “Since the people have humbled themselves, I will not completely destroy them and will soon give them some relief. I will not use Shishak to pour out my anger on Jerusalem. But they will become his subjects, so that they can learn how much better it is to serve me than to serve earthly rulers.” So King Shishak of Egypt came to Jerusalem and took away all the treasures of the Temple of the LORD and of the royal palace, including all of Solomon's gold shields (2 Chronicles 12:6-9 NLT).

Returning to Egypt, Shishak built a temple to his god Amon (Amun) at Karnak. Shishak's own record of his campaign is inscribed on the south wall of this great Temple. The record included a list of the walled cities of Judah as well as images of the captured Israelites that were taken back to Egypt as slaves. He is described as presenting 156 cities of Palestine to his god Amon.

Shishak's gold masked mummy was found in Tanis in 1939² in a sarcophagus (burial vault) of silver encased in solid gold (possibly some of Solomon's gold which he had taken from Jerusalem).

Did He Take The Ark?

The possibility that the Egyptians stole the Ark of the Covenant is, however, highly unlikely when the facts are examined. It is true Pharaoh Shishak came up against Jerusalem:

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made (1 Kings 14:25,26 NIV).

It is mentioned that he took away all the valuable articles in the Temple, however, no one article is specifically detailed. We read in 2 Chronicles 13:11 that the Golden Lampstand, the Menorah, as well as the Table of Showbread were still being used in the Temple after the invasion:

They offer to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt offerings and fragrant incense, set out the rows of bread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand so that its lamps may burn every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have abandoned him (2 Chronicles 13:11 NRSV).

This mention of the Lampstand and the Table of Showbread occurred shortly *after* the invasion of Shishak, giving inference that he did *not* get all of the valuable artifacts connected with the Temple. The Menorah weighed over fifty pounds³ and was made of pure gold. The Bible describes it this way:

Then he made the lampstand, again using pure, hammered gold. Its base, center stem, lamp cups, blossoms, and buds were all of one piece. The entire lampstand, along with its accessories, was made from seventy-five pounds of pure gold (Exodus 37:17,24 NLT).

As the Menorah would have been an obvious prize, this seems to indicate that Shishak did not get any of the vessels that were in the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies.

As we will see in our next chapter, what Shishak actually took were only the holy vessels in the Temple treasury, not in the Temple proper.

The Ark Existed Later

As we have already mentioned, the Scripture attests to the fact that the Ark was still in existence at the time of Josiah (about 620 B.C.), hundreds of years after Shishak's invasion.

We read of this in Second Chronicles:

He said to the Levites who taught all Israel the holy things of the Lord, "Put the holy ark in the temple built by Solomon son of David king of Israel. Since you do not have to carry it on your shoulders, now serve Yahweh your God and His people Israel (2 Chronicles 35:3 HCSB).

This being the case, the theory that Shishak took the Ark to Egypt in 926 B.C. seems to be ruled out by the Scriptures.

Hezekiah

Some have alleged that the Ark was removed to Egypt during the reign of King Hezekiah (around 700 B.C.). While Hezekiah was ruling in Judah, the Assyrian army was advancing toward Jerusalem destroying cities on the way. Many of the inhabitants of these toppled cities took refuge in Jerusalem.

Fearing for his safety and that of the city of Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent messengers to the Assyrian king asking him to forgive their rebellion. The Assyrian King Sennacherib demanded 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold from Hezekiah. The Scripture tells us that Hezekiah removed the golden ornaments of the Temple to meet the demand. This, however, was not enough. When Sennacherib received the payment, he wanted more. The Assyrian army was then dispatched to Jerusalem.

Hezekiah hoped that the Lord would somehow intervene. The prophet Isaiah assured him that Assyria would not conquer them.

Isaiah's prediction came true. The Assyrians heard that the Egyptian army was advancing on them. They left Jerusalem and hurried south to do battle.

Did He Pay The Assyrians With The Ark?

Some have suggested that the Ark of the Covenant was among the items of gold that Hezekiah paid to the Assyrians. This would have placed the Ark in the hands of the Assyrians. With the defeat of Assyria by Egypt, the Ark, it is contended, went back to Egypt with the conquering army.

It Is Not Stated

It is not stated, however, in the Scripture that Hezekiah gave the Ark to the Assyrians. It was only the golden ornaments of the temple that were used to pay the tribute. Furthermore, there is no record of the Ark ever having been in Egypt. Hence, this theory does not seem to have any plausibility of being true.

Add to this the reference of the Ark still being in existence during the time of Josiah, the Egyptian connection falls flat.

We need to find a better answer as to what happened to the Ark of the Covenant.

Endnotes for Chapter 19

1. Nathan Ausbel, *Pictorial History of the Jews*, New York: Crown Books, 1953, p. 34.
2. The movie Raiders of the Lost Ark was set in the same time frame as this discovery.
3. A talent of gold weighed about 75 pounds.

Concerning Shishak's march on Jerusalem, C.J. Ball notes.

There is no notice of any sack of Jerusalem, nor as in later cases, of any destruction of the Temple, or even plunder of its decorations. The record seems to imply surrender to those cities and its treasures. The idea sometimes advanced, that, like the capture of Rome by the Gauls, the invasion of Shishak destroyed all ancient monuments and archives, has therefore no historical support from this passage; and with it many conclusions derived from it . . . must pass away (C. J. Ball, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, edited by Charles John Ellicott, Vol. 3, 1 Kings-Esther, n.d., p. 70).

James Montgomery adds.

It is generally recognized for the other cities which Shishak "took", that it was rather their tribute he received; so Jerusalem was not actually taken, but the king would have paid a sumptuous indemnity in specie and objects d'art, like the gold shields (J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Kings*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951, p. 270).

Therefore, the idea of the Ark in Tanis, the theme of Raiders of the Lost Ark, does not have much merit.

CHAPTER 20

DID JEHOASH TAKE THE ARK TO ISRAEL?

When King Solomon built the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem that housed the Ark of the Covenant, the nation was prospering. The wisdom and wealth of Solomon was known to the ends of the earth. Though he was blessed by God, Solomon acted foolishly in his later years by marrying foreign wives. These wives brought their pagan gods with them to Jerusalem. Altars were built to these gods within sight of the Temple. God would not allow this sin to go unpunished.

The Kingdom Was Divided

As already mentioned, a few short years after Solomon's death, the kingdom was divided between north and south. Although Israel and Judah were once united, from time to time they had cause to war with each other. The Bible records that on one such occasion the "Temple vessels" were taken. The account is given to us in both Kings and Chronicles:

Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh. Then Jehoash went to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate—a section about six hundred feet long. He took all the gold and silver and all the articles found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace. He also took hostages and returned to Samaria (2 Kings 14:13,14 NIV).

We also read:

He took all the gold, silver, all the utensils that were found with Obed-edom in God's temple, the treasures of the king's palace, and the hostages. Then he returned to Samaria (2 Chronicles 25:24 HCSB).

There have been those who have suggested that the Ark of the Covenant was among those Temple vessels taken by Jehoash (Joash), King of Israel. The Ark, it is contended, was then brought back to Samaria and nothing further was ever heard of it. L. Elliot Binns writes:

Various suggestions have been put forward to account for the disappearance of the ark. It may have perished in some invasion. Perhaps it was taken to Jerusalem by Joash, King of Israel, in 785 B.C. when he carried off the temple treasures (2 K. xiv. 14). He may have felt, as Cheyne suggests (Enc. Bib. 306), that he was reclaiming "the long-lost treasure of the Ephraimitish sanctuary at Shiloh." If this suggestion is a sound one, and on the face of it there is nothing against it beyond the failure of the Biblical writers actually to mention it, it may be that the ark finally disappeared with the destruction of Shiloh referred to in vii. 12. The possession of the ark by the Southern Kingdom may have been a sore point with the men of Israel.¹

There are three basic problems with the theory that Jehoash took the Ark when he plundered the Temple.

First, there is no reference in Scripture that the Ark was taken during this siege by Jehoash. It seems incredible that the Bible would not mention the capture of the Ark, particularly when it was Israel, the northern kingdom, fighting Judah, the southern kingdom. Since the Scripture had earlier recorded the Ark's capture between Israel and the Philistines (1 Samuel 6), we would assume it would have also documented another capture—if it had occurred. The fact that the Scripture does not mention the Ark among the vessels taken gives weight to the argument that it was not taken at that time.

The Temple Treasury Was Raided

Second, this raiding of the Temple did not seem to reach the Holy of Holies. It is possible that the items were taken from the Temple treasury, and not from the Temple proper.² Scholar Menahem Haran notes that there were other vessels connected with the Temple that were deemed holy:

Vessels were kept in the Jerusalem temple not only in the court and in the sanctums, but also in the temple treasuries. These treasuries were always mentioned cojointly with the kings house' and seem to be similar in nature. The vessels in the temple treasuries were also deemed holy, though they were certainly less sacred than those housed in the temple sanctums. . . . Shishak and Jehoash did not even enter the temples outer sanctum, certainly not the inner one. . . The invasions of Shishak and Jehoash have, therefore, nothing to do with the temple sanctums, and it would be entirely inaccurate to associate them with the disappearance of the ark and the cherubim. These invaders did no more than what the kings of Judah sometimes ventured to do themselves.³

If Haran's argument is valid, then the Ark would not have been the object of Israel's plunder.

The Ark Existed Later

Finally, we have the statement in 2 Chronicles 35:3, mentioned previously, that the Ark had been returned to the Temple during the time of Josiah. This event occurred hundreds of years after the Ark was supposedly taken by Jehoash, never to be heard of again.⁴

Though the plundering of the Temple by Jehoash has been thought to include the Ark of the Covenant, the evidence for this is lacking.

Endnotes for Chapter 20

1. L. Elliott Binns, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, London, Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1919, p. 35.

2. C. J. Ball notes.

This expression seems to hint there was not much treasure to carry off (C. J. Ball, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, edited by Charles John Ellicott, Vol. 3, 1 Kings-Esther, n.d., p. 447).

3. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 285.

The Judean Kings were in the habit of filling and emptying their treasure houses. King David dedicated much of the spoil he obtained to the Lord (2 Samuel 8:7,12). These items, including gold, silver, and bronze vessels, were put in the Temple treasury by Solomon.

When all the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of the LORD’s temple (1 Kings 7:51 NIV).

Most of the treasure that was placed in the Temple came from gifts from the Kings of Judah. From their spoils of war, as well as from other sources, the kings of Judah kept the treasury full.

As discussed in the last chapter, the Temple treasury was emptied by Pharaoh Shishak. Later Kings of Judah, Abijam and Asa made up some of the loss and replenished the treasury.

He brought into the house of the LORD the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts—silver, gold, and utensils (1 Kings 15:15 NRSV).

Unfortunately, Asa emptied the treasure house to pay King Ben Hadad of Damascus. The Temple was then again filled with gifts from other kings of Judah including Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah.

4. One could argue that Jehoash did take the Ark at that time and that it was brought back to Jerusalem some years later with the Bible recording neither the capture nor the return. This supposition seems highly unlikely.

CHAPTER 21

DID THE BABYLONIANS TAKE THE ARK?

Since the last biblical mention of the Ark was shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, it is possible that the Ark was carried off to Babylon. Indeed, this is one of the popular theories as to what happened to this sacred object.

The story of the Babylonians and the Temple treasures goes back some one hundred years before Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed.

The Treasures Are Shown To The Babylonians

The southern kingdom of Judah was forced to pay tribute to Babylon. and King Hezekiah made a tragic mistake by showing Merodach Baladan, the ambassador from Babylon, the Temple's treasures. The Bible explains what happened:

Hezekiah welcomed the Babylonian envoys and showed them everything in his treasure-houses—the silver, the gold, the spices, and the aromatic oils. He also took them to see his armory and showed them all his other treasures—everything! There was nothing in his palace or kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked him, “What did those men want? Where were they from?” Hezekiah replied, “They came from the distant land of Babylon.” “What did they see in your palace?” asked Isaiah. “They saw everything,” Hezekiah replied. “I showed them everything I own—all my treasures.” Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Listen to this message from the LORD Almighty: The time is coming when everything you have—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD” (Isaiah 39:2-6 NLT).

This prophecy indicates that nothing shall be left in the Temple. The precious vessels shall be taken to Babylon. This being the case, it is possible that the Ark was taken to Babylon along with the other treasures from the Temple when the Temple was destroyed. Nineteenth century scholar, George Bush writes:

It seems that the ark, with the other precious things of the Temple, became the spoil of Nebuchadnezzar, and was taken to Babylon; and it does not appear that it was restored at the end of the captivity, or that any new one was made.¹

After the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah were taken to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, put some of their treasures in his temple.

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god (Daniel 1:2 NIV).

It is interesting to note that Daniel tells us that Nebuchadnezzar only took some of the vessels with him. This may infer that the Ark was not among the sacred vessels taken to Babylon.

There Is No Mention Of The Ark

Neither Daniel nor any of the prophets that lived during the period of the Babylonian Captivity mentioned the Ark of the Covenant being taken by Nebuchadnezzar.

The Old Testament, as well as first century writer Flavius Josephus, informs us that *all* the vessels taken to Babylon were returned to Jerusalem before the Second Temple was completed.

The Testimony Of 2 Esdras

The apocryphal book of 2 Esdras does mention the Ark being taken to Babylon.² It records the people lamenting at the plunder of the holy vessels, including the Ark:

You see how our sanctuary has been laid waste our altar demolished, and our temple destroyed. Our harps are unstrung, our hymns silenced, our shouts of joy cut short; the light of the sacred lamp is out, and the ark of our covenant has been taken as spoil (2 Esdras 10:21,22).

Since 2 Esdras was written some 600 years after the destruction of the Temple, the historical accuracy of this reference is doubted. There is no other record of the Ark being brought to Babylon. It is not listed in the items taken nor in the items returned. Though Nebuchadnezzar's armies could have carried the Ark there, it is strange that nothing from biblical or Babylonian sources records this. Some of the later Jewish writers believed the Ark went to Babylon as Menahem Haran notes:

Talmudic sages also held that the ark was taken along into the Babylonian exile but this... was based on nothing more than midrashic inferences.³

Some scholars believe Nebuchadnezzar only took the vessels of the outer court. Writing about Nebuchadnezzar, Menahem Haran states:

It seems, however that he [Nebuchadnezzar] was the first to penetrate the Temple, that is, to enter the outer sanctum. Of him alone it is said that he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon, king of Israel had made in the Temple. Thus the vessels of the treasures were taken by him as they were while those of the Temple underwent deformation, their precious metals only serving as war booty. . . It seems likely that he took only the vessels of the Temple court.⁴

Conclusion

There is no solid historical evidence that the Ark was ever taken to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The biblical writers living at that time, Daniel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, do not mention it. Neither do the books of Kings and Chronicles. Babylonian history is also silent as to the fate of the Ark. There is no known claim in Babylonian chronicles of the capture or destruction of the Ark. We only have the testimony of the apocryphal book of 2 Esdras which was written long after the fact.

Though some of the later Jewish interpreters thought the Ark was captured by the Babylonians, there is no documentation of this. Thus there is not much evidence that the Ark was taken to Babylon.

Endnotes for Chapter 21

1. George Bush, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, Volume 1, Boston: Henry A. Young & Co., 1841, p. 91.

2. Esdras was written at the end of the 1st century A.D. Scholar M.A. Knibb writes.

This is a Jewish apocalypse, probably composed in Hebrew and dating from toward the end of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-90) . . . The mention of the Ark is an historical allusion appropriate to the supposed setting of 2 Esdras 3-14 in the sixth century B.C., not to its actual setting at the end of the first century A.D. The Ark was apparently destroyed at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., if not earlier, and in any event, nothing is known of it after this date . . .

In the case of the vessels, however, the author was probably thinking of their seizure by Titus in his own day (M.A. Knibb, *The First And Second Books of Esdras*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1979, pp. 76,222,223).

3. Menahem Haran *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 285.

4. Haran, *ibid.*, p. 285.

Edwin Yamauchi wrote.

Conquerors customarily carried off the statues of the gods of conquered cities. The Hittites took the statue of Marduk when they conquered the city of Babylon. The Philistines took the ark of the Jews and placed it in the temple of Dagon (1 Sam. 5:2). As the Jews did not have a statue of the Lord, Nebuchadnezzar carried off the temple goods instead. The Hebrew of 2 Kings 24:13 indicates that he cut up the vessels of gold, no doubt the larger ones, to facilitate their transportation (cf. 2 Kings 25:13; Jer. 52:17) (Edwin Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Volume 4, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, p. 604).

CHAPTER 22

WAS THE ARK TAKEN BY THE ROMANS?

Did the Romans take the Ark of the Covenant when they destroyed the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? Though there are those who contend the Ark was in the Second Temple, convincing evidence is lacking. We can make the following observations.

The Procession In Rome

After the Second Temple was destroyed, the victorious Romans paraded their spoils before their people. Flavius Josephus described a procession of hundreds of Jewish prisoners as they marched through Rome. He mentioned the vast wealth from Jerusalem that was deposited in Rome's Temple of Peace. This includes the Golden Table where the Bread of Presence was kept, the Menorah—the golden seven-branched Lampstand, trumpets and cups, as well as scrolls of the law. These vessels were constructed during the time of the cleansing of the Temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 B.C. Less than 250 years after their construction, they were taken into captivity.

This procession was memorialized in stone on the famous Arch of Titus. What is missing from the Arch of Titus, and from Josephus' description of the procession, is the Ark of the Covenant.

The Arch Of Titus

The Arch of Titus was built in honor of Titus Vespasian, conqueror of Jerusalem and later Emperor of Rome. Erected after his death, the Arch of Titus commemorated this great victory.¹

Though some writers have claimed the Arch of Titus depicted the Ark, scholar William Knight says they were mistaken:

Nothing is said of the Ark of the Covenant, which Pitiscus and others say was carried in the procession; probably mistaking this Table for the Ark, as has been done by many writers. For Jewish authorities are generally agreed that there was no Ark in the second Temple. Josephus says there was nothing at all in the Holy of Holies in his time. Pompey, upon entering, found it utterly empty: a circumstance which Lucan is supposed to refer to, when, in speaking of Judea's subjection to his hero, he calls her the worshipper of an unknown God.²

Was Another Ark Made?

There have been those who have suggested that after the original Ark of the Covenant was lost around the time of the Babylonian Captivity, another Ark was made and placed in the Second Temple. The Ark, as we have seen,

was lost as well as all the sacred vessels—the golden Lampstand, the Table of Showbread and the Altar of Incense.

We know that all of these items (except the Ark) were rebuilt for the Second Temple. If the Jews had built another golden Lampstand, another Table of Showbread, and another Altar of Incense, then why did they not build another Ark of the Covenant? This suggestion comes from two of the most learned scholars of the seventeenth century, John Lightfoot and Humphrey Prideaux. Prideaux wrote:

For in the second Temple there was also an Ark made of the same shape and dimensions, with the first and put in the same place. But though it was substituted in its stead. . . yet it had none of its Prerogative or Honours conferred upon it. For there were no Tables of the Law, no Aaron's Rod, no pot of Manna in it, no appearance of the Divine Glory over it, no Oracles given from it.³

According to Prideaux, this second “ark” would have been empty of any of the original contents and would have not been surrounded by the divine glory of God.

Was The Ark Necessary For Worship?

Though the Jewish writers living at the time of the Second Temple deny the Ark was present, Prideaux reckoned that the Ark was necessary for their worship:

That there was any Ark in the second Temple, many of the Jewish writers do deny, and say that the whole service on the great day of Expiation was performed in the second Temple, not before the Ark but before the stone, on which the Ark stood in the first Temple. But since on their building of the second Temple they found it necessary for the carrying on of their worship in it to make a new Altar of Incense, a new Shew-bread Table, and a new Candlestick, instead of those which the Babylonians had destroyed, though none of them could have been consecrated, as in the first Temple, there is reason to believe, that they made a new Ark also.⁴

He argues that they must have made a new Ark since all the other furniture in the Temple revolved around the Ark in the Holy of Holies. Without the Ark, all the other furnishings were meaningless. Prideaux writes.

Since the Holy of Holies, and the Veil that was drawn before it, were wholly for the sake of the Ark, what need had there been of these in the second Temple, if there had not been the other also?⁵

This position has not won many converts. Some have suggested that there may have been some type of receptacle for the Law in the Holy of Holies.

John Lawson and John M Wilson write:

It is not unlikely that there may have been in the second temple, as is found still in all Jewish synagogues, an ark or coffer in which is kept a copy of the Hebrew scriptures in the form of an ancient roll. One great presumption against the existence of an ark of the covenant in the second temple is the striking fact that, in the representation of the temple furniture which is sculpted on the triumphal arch of Titus, still to be seen at Rome, there is no figure of an ark.⁶

Prideaux, on the one hand, admitted that the Arch of Titus *did not* depict the Ark. He believed the Table carved on the Arch was the Table of Showbread, not the Ark:

It plainly appears to have been the Shew-Bread Table, especially from the two cups on top of it. For two such cups filled with Frankincense were always put upon the Shew-bread Table, but never upon the Ark.⁷

On the other hand, he believed the Arch of Titus did give silent testimony to the Ark's existence. His reasoning was as follows:

The Testimony Of Josephus

Josephus, who was present during the procession, testified of three objects being carried by the Romans, first, there was the Table of Showbread, second, the Golden Lampstand, and third, the Law. The first two items are depicted on the Arch in the same order, the last item is not found on the Arch, possibly because they ran out of room.

Also depicted on the Arch are three title boards. The purpose of the title boards was to describe for the watching multitudes what the objects were and where they were taken from. There is a title board before the Table of Showbread; there is a second title board before the golden Lampstand. There is a third title board depicted but there the Arch ends and we do not know what this third one was explaining. Flavius Josephus called it the Law.

Prideaux reckoned it was not some ordinary copy of the Law, of which there were many, but rather a sacred copy of the Law, that had been kept in the Temple. Prideaux concluded that the only container that could house such a sacred copy of the Law was the Ark of the Covenant. Hence a replica of the Ark must have existed during the time of the Second Temple. Just what happened to this "copy" of the Ark, we are not told.

William Knight, however, shows that the third object on the Arch was known at one time:

There is one [title board] above the Table, another near the Candlestick, and a third, which must have indicated the Book of the Law; which, however, is no longer visible. Villapanda thinks that the Book was omitted, as a less imposing object than the other spoils. Prideaux suggests that it was not inserted for want of sufficient space to introduce it, together with the coffer in which it was kept. Dr. Cardwell seems to think the book was nothing more than a tablet of gold, or of some other metal, inscribed with some portions of the

Divine Law; of which, he says, there were many in the Temple, and one more important than the rest, which had the Ten Commandments engraved upon it. None of these conjectures is satisfactory. . . Biondo or Blondus [who lived in early part of the 15th century]. . . for many years the popes secretary tells us in his work *De Roma Triumphantia*, that the Book of the Jewish Law was extant in his time amongst the marble sculptures on the Arch, together with the golden Table and Candlestick: and it is a curious circumstance which may account in some measure for the doubts and conjectures above, that in the later editions of Biondo's work this notice of the sculptured spoils is wanting.⁸

Prideaux's logic does not fit with the known facts. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* comments in this manner.

Prideaux's argument that there must have been an ark in the second Temple is of no weight against express testimony, such as that of Josephus. . . and Tacitus. . . confirmed by the Rabbins, who state that a sacred stone called by them a stone of drinking, stood in its stead; as well as by the marked silence of those apocryphal books which enumerate the rest of the principal furniture of the sanctuary as present.⁹

Conclusion

The idea that the Ark was in the Second Temple and then later taken to Rome does not have any solid historical basis. Neither does the idea of a second Ark having been constructed. All the reliable records that come down to us say the Ark was not to be found in the Second Temple. Its disappearance occurred before the Second Temple was constructed. We, then, must look elsewhere for the final destination of this sacred object.

Endnotes for Chapter 22

1. The arch of Titus was erected after the death of Titus Vespasian, conqueror of Jerusalem who later became emperor of Rome. William Knight writes.

As to the precise date of the erection of the Arch of Titus we have no information. But if not the first it was one of the earliest of those twenty arches with which Rome was once adorned. . . it was the practice of Romans in very early times to erect arches to commemorate their victories. . . The Arch of Titus is said to have had originally two inscriptions. . . one of these inscriptions is still legible . . . From this inscription it appears that the arch was erected to Titus by the Senate and the people, but that it was not erected till after he became emperor. . . nor was it erected till after his death (William Knight, *The Arch of Titus*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1896, pp. 64,65).

Knight also notes.

The sculptures on the other side of the Arch represent the spoils which were taken from the Temple. They are borne aloft by Roman soldiers, not by Jewish captives, as some writers represent them; for they are crowned with laurel, and they have in their hands the short and pointless spears that had been given them when they started (Knight, *ibid.*, p. 84).

2. William Knight, *ibid.*, p. 84.

3. Humphrey Prideaux, *Old and New Testament Connected*, Part 1, Vol. 1, 10th edition, 1729, p. 207.

4. Prideaux, *ibid.*, p. 208.

5. Prideaux, *ibid.*, p. 209.

6. John Lawson and John M. Wilson, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Geography, Biography, Natural History, and General Knowledge*, Vol. 1, Aaron to Egypt, Edinburgh: A Fullarton & Co., 1867, p. 184.

7. Prideaux, *ibid.*, p. 209.

8. Knight, *ibid.*, pp. 85,86.

9. Dr. William Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, Revised and edited by Ezra Abbot, Vol. 1, 1872, p. 156).

HAS THE ARK BEEN FOUND?

We have reviewed four possible destinations of the Ark and found none of them very convincing. The idea that some foreign invader whisked the Ark away has no solid historical basis.

If the Ark was not taken away by a foreign power, then what are the other possibilities that we face? The Ark could have been removed from the Holy of Holies by friendly hands who did not want to see it become the war spoils of some unfriendly nation.

Along this line, many theories have arisen as to what happened to the Ark of the Covenant. Three popular ones include: hidden by Jeremiah on Mt. Nebo in Jordan, taken away to Ethiopia by Solomon's son Menelik, or hidden in some secret place beneath the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. All of these have a long tradition of being the hiding place of the Ark.

Furthermore, since 1981, there have been claims that the Ark has actually been discovered in each of these spots! Each of these claims have, in turn, received international attention.

We are now going to look at each of these possible resting places for the Ark and determine which, if any, could lay claim to its possible whereabouts.

CHAPTER 23

HAS THE ARK BEEN FOUND ON MOUNT NEBO?

In 1981, the world was entertained with the extraordinarily successful adventure film, “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” Several months after the film’s release, and while the Ark of the Covenant was still on the minds of millions of people, news came out that an American, Tom Crotser, had found the lost Ark in the country of Jordan. Worldwide attention was given to this claim. With seemingly perfect timing, the Ark, which had been missing for over 2,500 years, was discovered soon after the film’s release. The excitement over the Ark’s discovery, however, died down rather quickly when serious questions arose as to whether Tom Crotser had actually found the long lost Ark.

The story of the Ark being hidden in this area of the world takes us back to the time before the Ark was lost.

An Ancient Tradition Of The Hiding Place Of The Ark

There is an ancient tradition that the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the prophet Jeremiah, and hidden in a cave in Moab. Knowing the Babylonians were about to destroy both the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, Jeremiah, it is said, hid the Ark to keep it from being captured. In the Apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees we read the following:

One finds in the records that the prophet Jeremiah ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned, and that the prophet, after giving them the law, instructed those who were being deported not to forget the commandments of the Lord, or to be led astray in their thoughts on seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornment. And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts. It was also in the same document that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. Jeremiah came and found a cave-dwelling, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense; then he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: “The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated” (2 Maccabees 2:1-8 NRSV).

This account in 2 Maccabees claims to have been drawn from previous documents. According to this reference, Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant in a place that will remain secret until the “last days.” In this

reference the Tabernacle, the Ark and the Altar of Sacrifice are classed together. We do know that Jeremiah was taken to Tanis in Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem by a remnant of the Jews (Jeremiah 42:1-43:7). It is possible, therefore, that he hid the Ark in a cave along the way.

But the source of this report, 2 Maccabees, contains some legendary material and quite possibly the story of the Ark is in that category as well.¹ While 1 Maccabees is a very reliable source of historical information, 2 Maccabees contains many questionable elements. This alone makes the report suspect. It is, however, an ancient description of what happened to the Ark and hence it cannot be ignored.

The Burial Place Of Moses

The Mount Nebo area, or Mt. Pisgah, where the Ark is supposed to have been hidden, was the burial place of Moses:²

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which faces Jericho, and the LORD showed him all the land: Gilead as far as Dan, all of Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev, and the region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. The LORD then said to him, “This is the land I promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you will not cross into it.” So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab facing Beth-peor, and no one to this day knows where his grave is (Deuteronomy 34:1-6 HCSB).

The exact burial place of Moses has never been found and is subject to much debate.

Modern-Day Searches In The Nebo Region

The account recorded in 2 Maccabees has, over the years, led people to explore the Mt. Nebo region. This mountain is located in present-day Jordan, some thirty-five miles southwest of Amman. Mt. Nebo is in the Abarim Mountains, a range which runs in a general north and south direction about ten miles east of the most northern part of the Dead Sea. Mt. Nebo rises to about 4,000 feet above the Dead Sea making it about 2,700 feet above sea level.

The tradition of searching on Mt. Nebo goes back, at least, to the beginning of the twentieth century. Enter a colorful character by the name of A. F. Futterer. Futterer, dubbed the “Golden Ark explorer,” was somewhat of an eccentric. He looked for the Ark in the Mt. Nebo region in the 1920’s. Futterer recorded his reasoning for looking for the Ark in that area:

I acquainted myself with the Ark’s complete history. In the year 1594 B.C.E. Moses made the Golden Ark at Mt. Sinai. . . 981 years later Prophet Jeremiah hid it near the tomb of Moses on Mt. Nebo (about

613 B.C.E.). Both Moses and Jeremiah were Levites, the only tribe of people allowed by God to handle God's sacred Ark. . . . During this period of 981 years the wanderings of the Ark covered approximately 700 miles of territory in twelve prolonged stopping places... beginning in the center of the Arabian deserts (Petra) and finishing upon old Mt. Nebo from whence the Ark has never been taken since Jeremiah hid it. In fact, Jeremiah prophesied that it would remain there until God gather His People Israel back into Palestine, which gathering began quite recently since the world war when Lord Allenby took Jerusalem from the Turk in 1917. This gave me my first inspiration to go to Palestine and search for the Ark, though I have had it in my mind for twenty-five years.³

Why Buried At Mt. Nebo?

Futterer believed there were good reasons why Jeremiah hid the Ark where he did:

Jeremiah, being a Levite prophet, foresaw the disaster coming to the Jews and to Jerusalem (the destruction) and to the sacred vessels of the Temple, therefore he most naturally and sacredly hid them from the coming Babylonians. Jeremiah knew the entire Ark's history and knew well all about Levite Moses who had made it and he knew where Moses was (the old Ark maker and law giver), and for the Ark's sake, Jeremiah was told by God to climb the same mountain where Moses climbed up and saw the promised land and died and there God said to bury the Ark which Jeremiah did by selecting a cave as near as possible to the place where Moses was buried or perhaps in the same cave.⁴

Futterer's two-year search led him to believe he had discovered the cave that held the Ark of the Covenant along with the golden Lampstand (Menorah), the golden Table of Showbread, and the actual tent of the Tabernacle. Futterer reckoned if he did find the Ark, he could not move it. He felt it necessary that only a member of the tribe of Levi should carry the Ark as ordered in the Bible.

In his book, *Palestine Speaks*, written in 1931, Futterer wrote of his experience of tracking down the Ark in the Holy Land:

I believe that the Golden Ark of the Covenant, the world's greatest and most valuable antique relic of all history, has been trailed to its lair (in my two years recent research work in the Holyland)—trailed to its last hiding place on Mt. Nebo where Jeremiah hid it about 2544 years ago. In verification of this I offer both the historical and as well as prophetic data.

I have collected convincing evidence enough to make it hard not to believe that the Ark will return to old Jerusalem. The return of the Ark would stagger the world; may change the belief of millions of people of all nations for the better; be the greatest blow skeptics ever received; and perhaps be the greatest modern proof of the authenticity of Holy Writ. The tablets of Sinai written 3535 years ago, now in the Ark, may bring to this whole world a feeling akin to Belshazzar, King of Babylon,

on the night when he too saw God's "Handwriting" upon the walls of that famous city before its consummation, which made the King and all his nobles tremble with fear when that terrible warning: "Thou are weighed in the balances and found wanting" stared them in the face.⁵

Feeling he had discovered the Ark's location, Futterer attempted to solicit funds for a return trip to Mt. Nebo. The magazine *Biblical Archaeological Review* wrote:

In a pamphlet Futterer published in 1927 he reports squeezing into a cave leading to a long vault or corridor with "hieroglyphics" on the walls. At the end of the corridor he found two locked doors. Futterer took note of the "hieroglyphics" and when he returned to Jerusalem, "a Hebrew scholar" deciphered his "hieroglyphic" signs "numerically." The numerical value of the signs (apparently, they were interpreted as Hebrew letters which also have numerical values) totaled 1927, according to Futterer. He interpreted this to mean he would discover the Ark of the Covenant in 1927. After uncovering the Ark, he planned "to build a Tourist Resort here out of these already prepared stones of old ruins." Futterer's pamphlet solicited funds for his project: "What will you give to see the lost Ark restored to Jerusalem?" he asked. "Will you help us materially?"⁶

It is also reported that the deciphered markings read "Herein lies the Golden Ark of the Covenant." Attempts by Futterer to return to his discovered cave were thwarted by the British government. He was granted a permit by the government to search the area but his permit was given with the understanding that he would not attempt any archaeological digs. Futterer died without finding the Ark of the Covenant, but his search on Mt. Nebo would not be the last.

Tom Crotser

The quest of Futterer to find the Ark in the mountains of Jordan was continued by an American named Tom Crotser. Tom Crotser had been looking for the Ark of the Covenant for some sixteen years, initially focusing his search in Syria. Based upon information he had found in several old manuscripts, he believed Hyropolis, in northern Syria, was one possible location. After reading, however, from the 2 Maccabees, *Palestine Speaks*, and the writings of explorer Peter the Iberian, Crotser concluded the Ark was in Jordan.

Tom Crotser directed the "Institute for the Restitution of All Things." The Institute interpreted the "restitution of all things" as referring to five particular objects that must be discovered before Christ's return. They claim to have previously found the first four: the City of Adam, the stone Cain used to kill Abel, the Tower of Babel, and Noah's Ark. The only missing thing that remained for them to discover was the Ark of the Covenant.

The Quest For The Ark

Believing he knew approximately where the Ark was located, Crotser tracked down a student of the late Futterer, a retired minister named Clinton Locy. Locy was the keeper of Futterer's papers. Crotser obtained from Locy a sketch of the area that Futterer had made where he found the inscription concerning the Ark. According to Futterer, this inscription was discovered on a secret passageway, blocked by a cement wall, which Futterer did not attempt to remove.

The 1981 Trip

Armed with the sketch, Crotser and three associates went to Jordan in 1981 to find the lost Ark. First, the group had to pay a visit to the Franciscan monastery on top of Mount Nebo because the property on the mountain belongs to them. A permit to photograph, but not to dig, was granted by the director of the monastery. They also obtained a permit to photograph from the military commander.

Crotser and his three companions stayed four days, spending nights in sleeping bags, while investigating the area and taking pictures. On Mt. Pisgah, they found an opening to a cave that seemingly matched the one in Futterer's sketch.

Was The Ark Found?

On October 31, 1981, at 2:00 a.m., Crotser and his group returned to the cave. They removed a tin sheet which was covering the opening and then traveled some six hundred feet in a narrow passageway which was about four to six feet wide and seven feet high. Two walls had to be broken inside the passageway to allow the explorers to continue.

Reaching the end of the passageway they came to a third wall. They cut an opening in that wall and found themselves in a small chamber, about seven feet by seven feet. Inside this chamber they shined their flashlights upon a gold colored object which they believe was the Ark of the Covenant. Lying next to the object were poles that Crotser said matched the biblical description of the ones which were used to carry the Ark.

Photographs Of The “Lost Ark”

Not wishing to touch the “ark” because of its holy character, the group took some 200 photographs. They did, however, measure the object. Its size was sixty-two inches long, thirty-seven inches high and thirty-seven inches wide. They did not attempt to remove it from its restingplace because they did not want to get in trouble with the Jordanian authorities. Furthermore, it would have been impossible to carry the object back through the tunnel because of the lack of room in the passageway. With photographs in hand, Crotser would now tell the outside world of his discovery of the Ark.

Unhappily, Crotser could not get either the Jordanian or Israeli authorities interested in his find. The story was reported in the *Jerusalem Post* on November 22, 1981, but not given much credence.

Upon returning to Kansas, Crotser gave his story to a local UPI reporter named Darrell Day. The next day, the story of the discovery of the Ark of the Covenant went out over the main news wire of UPI to newspapers all over the United States. Crotser immediately received worldwide attention as the man who found the lost Ark.

Scholars Say No

Because of the publicity Crotser received, the magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review* sent Dr. Siegfried Horn to interview Tom Crotser concerning his claim that he had found the Ark. Horn, a highly respected archaeologist, had spent sixteen years excavating some four miles northeast of Mt. Nebo. *Biblical Archaeology Review* reported the following of what transpired:

Horn was asked to go to Winfield by a group who knew of his scholarly reputation and standing, and who wanted a respected authority to examine Crotser's claims. Horn, confident that Crotser had not found the Ark of the Covenant, nevertheless agreed to go not only because of the intense interest aroused by the UPI story but also because Horn felt that the best way to handle such claims was to examine the evidence and then report what artifacts Crotser had erroneously identified as the Ark of the Covenant.⁷

Whether or not Crotser had found the lost Ark, it is unfortunate that Horn prejudged his claims before he had examined the photographs.

Horn did go to Winfield, Kansas, to visit Crotser. After explaining the details of his journey, Crotser showed Horn the slides he had taken. They further convinced Horn that Crotser had not found the Ark.

All but two of Crotser's two hundred color slides had turned out very badly. *Biblical Archaeology Review* reported the following:

Of the two that registered images, one is fuzzy but does depict a chamber with a yellow box in the center. The other slide is quite good, according to Horn, and gives a front view of the box. . . . The front of the box appeared to be covered with a sheet of bronze, containing a pattern of small holes. Around the edges and down the middle are metal strips with a diamond pattern. Although Horn is not certain, the diamond and triangular-shaped pattern may have been punched out of the strips. In any event, the strips are lighter yellow than the underlying metal sheet. The regularity of the patterns indicated to Horn that the metal was machine worked.

In the upper right hand corner of the face of the box was a nail with a modern looking head.

Horn concluded: "I do not know what the object is, but the pictures convinced me that it was not an ancient artifact but of modern

fabrication with machine produced decorative strips and underlying metal sheet.⁸

Horn was then to proceed to Mt. Nebo to identify what Crotser had discovered. The trip, however, was canceled. It seems that publicity surrounding Crotser's illegal digging on the mountain caused Jordanian authorities to cancel excavation permits for 1982. *Biblical Archaeology Review* reported:

One of the major reasons for withdrawing the 1982 excavation permit . . . was the illegal excavation, subsequently highly publicized, of a group of Americans—Tom Crotser and his associates—looking for the Ark of the Covenant. Several reliable sources, including a professor of archaeology at the University of Jordan, have confirmed that Crotser's expedition was a key element in the Jordanian decision. It is difficult for Americans to understand the Jordanian governments decision. There seems to be little relationship between the crime and the punishment. It is well-known, however that the Jordanians do not want any Biblical discoveries made in Jordan. This policy became even firmer in the summer of 1982 after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.⁹

The group was also rejected a permit to dig in 1983. To this day, no one knows for certain what Tom Crotser found in that cave in Jordan.

Does This Add To The Credibility?

Some feel that this adds to the credibility of Tom Crotser's findings. Bible teacher Anish Shorosh writes the following.

Why would the popular Biblical Archaeological Review magazine take four pages of its May-June issue, 1983 to question the discovery of the Ark if there is nothing to it? The article was written with no direct involvement between the magazine's staff and Crotser. He told me that no one came to see him except Dr. Siegfried Horn, a Seventh Day Adventist professor who never even mentioned the magazine as his sponsor for the interview. Moreover, Dr. Horn was even misquoted by the magazine. A very unscientific approach to the subject was most obvious . . . What more evidence does one want than seeing the picture of the very object the four explorers found in the cave?¹⁰

Biblical Archaeology Review noted:

Anyone assessing Tom Crotser's claim that he has found the original Ark of the Covenant in all its gilded glory must surely exercise caution in light of Crotser's additional claims to have previously located the Tower of Babel, Noah's Ark, the City of Adam, and the great stone of Abel, where the son of Adam was killed.¹¹

The assessment of scholars to Crotser's find has been universal—they don't believe he found the Ark of the Covenant.

It Was A Different Looking Ark

One problem with the “ark” Crotser found is that it did not look like anyone’s conception of the sacred object. What it did have, which no one expected, were “front sliding doors.” What it did not have, was the Mercy Seat and the cherubim. Crotser did report seeing gauze-covered packages in the corner tied with leather thongs. Though he and his group did not open the packages, Crotser speculated the cherubim may have been inside.

Crotser also suggested that the Ark may have been altered over the years. Bible teacher Anish Shorosh, who viewed Crotser’s photographs, wrote:

As to the design, it kind of looked different from what anyone pictured in his mind. Personally, I did not expect what I saw of the design. To say it is modern and possibly sheet metal is to call Tutankhamun’s mask a fake because it looks so new and colorful.¹²

Bringing The Ark Back

Undaunted by scholarly rejection, Crotser reckoned there was only one man in the world which had the power to bring the Ark from Jordan to Jerusalem—Jewish financier David Rothchild. Rothchild, Crotser believed, was the only person who could finance the delivery of the Ark from Jordan to Israel. Crotser stated he would not publicly release the photographs until David Rothchild responded. Rothchild, however, never did respond and the photographs were never released.

The Building Of A Museum

Crotser set up a small museum in Winfield, Kansas where he displayed a picture of the Ark. Dr. Anish Shorosh described Crotser’s museum:

The central object in the small museum is the papier-mache cave with a window. When you bend down to look inside the window the picture of the golden Ark is seen in a spectacular manner. Since the cave-like exhibit is dark and the slide projected from the back of the screen which you are looking at is bright, the golden box seems to glow. It is a marvelous sight indeed. No nails can be seen anywhere in the box as the Biblical Archaeology Review Magazine reported. The flashlight from the camera, when the picture was taken, does show the reflection of several dots which can be construed as tips of modern nails. However, subsequent slides which Mr. Crotser graciously showed us dispelled any doubts that the golden box was all gold.¹³

Christ’s Second Coming Calculated By Crotser

In 1982, Crotser spoke of his calculations of the soon coming of Christ. He believed he knew exactly when this would take place:

Their purpose [Crotser and his associates] in these excavations and searches is to unveil five objects which they believe must be discovered before Christ returns in the fall of 1988. Those objects are the city of

Adam, Stone of Abel, Ten Commandment tablets, Ark of the Covenant, and the tower of Babel. The group maintains that Noah's Ark is also an important discovery.

They claim it is very complicated to explain their scientific calculations for Christ's return. "However, we feel as the time grows nearer, we'll know more, just as it was in Noah's day. He knew 120 years before the Great Flood, but just seven days before the Lord told him to get his family into the Ark. And as the time drew nearer, he knew precisely when it would transpire."¹⁴

Crotser's "scientific calculations" of Christ returning in 1988, like so many others, have proved to be wrong. Crotser and his museum are no longer in Winfield, Kansas.¹⁵

Crotser Was Believed By Some

A number of people believed Crotser's report to be true. Shorosh writes:

The pictures flashed in the cave did not all come out, nevertheless, I personally saw enough of the slides to believe that what those four men beheld in the cave was definitely the fantastic Golden Ark of the Lord. . . The exciting discovery of the Ark of the Covenant on Mount Nebo in Jordan is by and large a fact which time will reveal to be true. A controversy or even a war may erupt between Jordan and Israel over the ownership of the Ark very soon if someone does not remove the sacred vessel.¹⁶

Shorosh saw the rejection of Crotser's find as a cover up. He wrote:

Logically, one would have to conclude that the find is trustworthy, based upon the reaction of the government of Jordan to the rumor. The Jordanian Prime Minister's office, mind you, not the Department of Antiquities, ordered all archaeological excavations halted from the time the rumor started. Why? Apparently, Jordanian authorities are convinced that the Ark is really on Mount Nebo in Jordan. However, they are justifiably fearful of losing it because Israel would certainly attempt to reclaim it at any cost.¹⁷

The magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review*, however, took a dim view of Crotser's find:

In the meantime, we still cannot report what it was Tom Crotser photographed at 2:00 a.m. on the night of October 31, 1981. As soon as we find out, we'll let you know. But rest assured, it was not the Ark of the Covenant.¹⁸

We do not know if the account in 2 Maccabees of Jeremiah's hiding the Ark is historically valid. One may ask, "If Jeremiah had hidden the Ark on Mt. Nebo, then why wasn't it restored and used in the Second Temple?" There is no record of anyone looking for it in ancient times. Those who believe Jeremiah hid the Ark usually say the site was so well-hidden, that

no one could find it. Jeremiah, according to 2 Maccabees, kept the location secret, waiting for it to be revealed in the last times.

Tom Crotser's "find" certainly does not appear to be the genuine Ark of the Covenant. Only time will tell if the Ark does remain in the area of Mt. Nebo.

Endnotes for Chapter 23

1. On the date of and reliability of 2 Maccabees, John R. Bartlett writes:

The book may belong anywhere in the last 150 years B.C. . . . The more obvious linking the author of 2 Maccabees with the author of 1 Maccabees, for legendary material and theological explanation has tended to make modern scholars value 1 Maccabees more highly as a historical source. But it has become clear that 2 Maccabees does contain much genuine and valuable material (John R. Bartlett, *The First and Second Books of Maccabees*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1973, pp. 215,217).

Ellicott's commentary says.

The legend that Jeremiah had hidden the Tabernacle and Ark in a cave that they might later be restored in the latter days, presents a singular contrast to the higher thoughts of the prophet (*Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, edited by Charles John Ellicott, Vol. 3, 1 Kings-Esther, n.d., p. 20).

2. Regarding Mt. Pisgah, Earl S. Kallard writes.

Pisgah might not be a proper noun; (pisgah) means “cleft,” “ridge,” or “range.” The top of pisgah might mean the highest point of the ridge of mountains rising in Moab east of the Dead Sea (Earl S. Kallard, *Deuteronomy, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, p. 234).

Mount Suagha is the Arabic name for Pisgah. It means “the Mount of Goldsmiths.” It has been supposed that the story of it being the hiding place of the Golden Ark could have been behind this unusual name.

3. A.F. Futterer, *Palestine Speaks*, Los Angeles: A. F. Futterer, 1931, pp. 537,539.

4. Futterer, *ibid.*, pp. 543,544.

5. Futterer, *ibid.*, pp. 536,537.

6. “Tom Crotser Has Found the Ark of the Covenant—Or Has He?” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, (BAR), May/June, 1983, p. 67.

7. BAR, *ibid.*, p. 68.

8. BAR, *ibid.*, pp. 68,69.

9. BAR, *ibid.*, p. 68.

10. Anish Shorosh, *The Exciting Discovery of the Ark of the Covenant*, Winona, MN: Justin Books, 1984, p. 17.

11. BAR, *ibid.*, p. 66.
12. Shorosh, *ibid.*, p. 26.
13. Shorosh, *ibid.*, pp. 25,26.
14. Doug Wead, David Lewis, and Hal Donaldson, *Where is the Lost Ark*, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1982, pp. 80,81.

Shorosh, who believed that Crotser had discovered the Ark, had his own predictions as to the Second Coming of Christ. He wrote.

It seems to me that from age 40-50 the years of declension, destruction, and death will begin 1988-1998, concluding with the Second Coming of Jesus. The Rapture may happen from now [1984] till 1988 with His return 7-10 years later (Shorosh, *ibid.*, p. 38).

This provides us another example of how we should be careful in trying to calculate Christ's coming.

15. After unsuccessful attempts in 1992 to contact Crotser, the author called the Chamber of Commerce in Winfield, Kansas. He was told that Crotser and his group had moved several years previously and no one was certain of their whereabouts.
16. Shorosh, *ibid.*, pp. 28,46.
17. Shorosh, *ibid.*, pp. 19,20.
18. BAR, *ibid.*, p. 69.

Louis Rapoport notes the response to Tom Crotser's discovery.

No archaeologist took the report seriously—the dimensions of the “ark” were all wrong, according to Biblical references and the whole matter seemed spurious. . . Israeli rabbi’s also dismissed the report, as did the small Samaritan community, which claims the ark is in its possession on Mount Gerizim near the West Bank town of Nablus (Louis Rapoport, “The Mystery of the Real Lost Ark,” *Jewish Digest*, September 1982, p. 26).

CHAPTER 24

WAS THE ARK TAKEN TO ETHIOPIA?

With the disappearance of such a famous object as the Ark of the Covenant, unique explanations have arisen as to where the holy object is now located. One ancient theory as to what happened to the Ark involves the tiny country of Ethiopia. It has been alleged that sometime in the past, the Ark of the Covenant was taken from Israel and spirited away to Ethiopia.

As we will see, the Ethiopian connection takes two forms. The traditional Ethiopian account, handed down in various versions, asserts that the Ark was taken by Menelik I, the alleged offspring of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The genuine Ark of the Covenant was replaced with a bogus ark which was placed in the Holy of Holies. The real Ark was brought to Ethiopia where it resides to this day.

A more recent theory rejects this account as being unhistorical, yet contends the Ark did make its way to Ethiopia, but later in history. British author Graham Hancock gained international publicity by claiming that he had actually traced the Ark to its location—a tiny chapel in Axum, Ethiopia.¹ Upon close examination, we will find that neither of these theories has much to support them.

The Queen Of Sheba Visits Solomon

The Ethiopian story takes us back to the time of Solomon. The Bible says that the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon and paid him a visit:

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan-- with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones-- she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her (1 Kings 10:1-3 NIV).

She was duly impressed. The Bible says:

And she said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard” (1 Kings 10:6,7 ESV).

The Queen then gave Solomon gifts. Scripture says:

Then she gave the king one hundred twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon (1 Kings 10:10 NRSV).

Solomon, in turn, gave the Queen all her desire. The Bible explains it in this manner:

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country (1 Kings 10:13 NIV).

Some have interpreted this passage to mean that part of her desire was to bear Solomon's child. The story, still told in Ethiopia today, is that the Queen *did* conceive a son by Solomon and named him Menelik.

According to Ethiopian tradition, the son of Solomon and Sheba was Menelik I—or Ibn al-Hakim, “son of the wise man.” Today it is still believed in Ethiopia that the royal line “descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem.”

Menelik’s Visit

The story of Menelik is told in a variety of versions, both written and oral. The earliest written form, called the *Kebara Nagast*, (*The Book of the Glory of Kings*) dates from the thirteenth century A.D.

According to one version of the story, Menelik, who was twenty at the time, paid an unannounced visit to his father Solomon in Jerusalem. Solomon, who had not realized he had fathered this child through the Queen of Sheba, accorded him great honor. After staying for a year, he decided to go back home to Ethiopia.

Menelik, as the story goes, was given a present as he was leaving Jerusalem to go back to Ethiopia—a replica of the Ark of the Covenant. At his going away party, when the priests had become intoxicated, Menelik substituted the bogus ark for the real thing, all unbeknownst to the priests. With the help of certain other priests, he returned to Ethiopia bringing back the one, true Ark of the Covenant.

Menelik, it is said, took the Ark because he was concerned about the spiritual state of Israel. The Ark would be returned when Israel turned back to the Lord. Unfortunately, they never did and the Ark remains in Ethiopia to this day.

Another Version Of The Story

Another version of the story has Azarius, the son of the High Priest Zadok, taking the Ark and only telling Menelik of his theft while they were on their way back to Ethiopia. Whatever the case may be, it is agreed that the real Ark made its way to Ethiopia, never to return.

The *Kebrä Nagast* records the procession glided above the ground with the returning Ark:

And they loaded the wagons, and the horses and the mules in order to depart. . . And as for the wagons, no man hauled his wagon. . . and whether it was men, or horses or mules or loaded camels, each was raised above the ground to the height of a cubit; and to all those who rode upon beasts were lifted up above their backs to the height of one span of a man, and all the various kinds of baggage which were loaded on the beasts, as well as those who were mounted on them, were raised up to the height of one span of a man, and the beasts were lifted up to the height of one span of a man. And everyone traveled in the wagons. . . like an eagle when his body glideth above the wind.²

Solomon was later chastised for allowing the sacred object to be whisked away by his illegitimate son. The *Kebrä Nagast* reads:

Thy son hath carried away the Ark of the Covenant, thy son whom thou hast begotten, who springeth from an alien people into which God hath not commanded you to marry, that is to say from an Ethiopian woman, who is not of thy colour, and is not akin to thy country, and who is moreover black.³

The Evidence For This Tradition

It would seem on the surface that this story could be dismissed out of hand as mere legend. There are, however, a few interesting facts that prevent us from doing this.

First, there is a long held Ethiopian belief that they can trace the ancestry of their kings back to Solomon. For example, the late Ethiopian leader, Haile Selassie, was given titles belonging to the Davidic kings such as the “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

Second, there are many Ethiopians who practice their own form of Judaism. Known as “Falashas,” they practice Jewish customs, and have traces of Hebrew mixed in with their language. Their unique brand of Judaism has certain forms that resemble the Judaism practiced at the time of Solomon. The “Falashas” have not incorporated other Jewish practices that were added after Solomonic times. This, they contend, demonstrates their direct connection with Solomon.

Solomon was also well known for having many wives and concubines. It is, therefore, not out of the question that he would have fathered a child through the Queen of Sheba. Furthermore, there is a long-standing tradition that the Queen of Sheba was converted to the God of Israel after visiting Solomon. According to the *Kebrä Nagast*, the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon:

From this moment I will not worship the sun, but will worship the creator of the sun, the God of Israel. . . because I have found favor with thee, and before the God of Israel, my Creator.⁴

In addition, every Christian church in Ethiopia has a room similar to the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple. In this room a *tabot* is kept. The *tabot* is a wooden carving or stone slab representing the contents of the Ark—the Ten Commandments. The purpose of keeping this replica is to remind the people that the original Ark of the Covenant is in their country.

Finally, and most important, there is a chapel in the city of Axum where the Ark of the Covenant supposedly resides. The selected guardian only sees the ark. The only time the “ark” has been taken out of this chapel is at the time of a yearly celebration called Timkat.

Though the tradition of the Ark being brought to Ethiopia goes back centuries, the evidence of its genuineness is lacking.

The Problems With This Theory

The idea that the Ark was taken to Ethiopia by Menelik I, has insurmountable problems, the first being geography. The geographical location of Sheba, the home of the Sabean people, is debated. Most scholars, however, believe that it was in southwest Arabia, in the region of present-day Yemen,⁵ and not Ethiopia. Hence, the location of Sheba does not seem to match up with Ethiopia.

There is even a bigger problem with Ethiopia being the home of the Queen of Sheba. All historians agree that at the time of Solomon, 960 B.C., there were no large settlements in the country of Ethiopia. The Queen of Sheba is represented as ruling an empire, but no empire existed in Ethiopia during Solomonic times.

Graham Hancock, who at first attempted historical confirmation of the *Kebra Nagast*, had to admit that it was legendary. He writes:

Several authorities make much of the fact that in Solomon's time—a thousand years before Christ—Ethiopia had not possessed any real civilization of its own and certainly had not boasted an urban society capable of producing so illustrious a monarch as the Queen of Sheba. Indeed, the consensus was that enlightenment had not even begun to dawn in the Abyssinian highlands until about the sixth century BC and had not reached any level of sophistication until some four hundred years after that. Neither could this period of progress be regarded as an Ethiopian achievement: instead the catalyst had been an influx of Arab tribesmen whose ‘superior qualities’ had revolutionized the sluggish culture of the native inhabitants...

In short, Ethiopic civilization was not only much more recent than the Axumite legends implied but also had been borrowed from elsewhere. In their heart of hearts, furthermore, most Ethiopians knew this to be true and felt deeply insecure about their heritage. Indeed, one standard work went so far as to suggest that the *Kebra Nagast* was popular because it filled a deep psychological need on the part of the Abyssinians ‘to prove their ancient origins.’⁶

Hence the story of the Ark being taken to Ethiopia at the time of Solomon is historically improbable.

In addition, the idea that Solomon had a son through the Queen of Sheba, wherever she came from, has no historical basis. Geoffrey Grogan writes:

The Jewish romantic legend that the queen desired and received a son fathered by Solomon is unsubstantiated, as is the Ethiopic tradition that the royal Abyssinian line was founded by the offspring of Solomon and the queen of Sheba.⁷

Certainly there is nothing in Scripture to verify this story. Even granting Solomon and the Queen of Sheba conceived a son, there is nothing in the Bible that records this son's visit to Jerusalem, let alone having a replica of the Ark constructed for him.

The main problem with this theory is that the Ark is mentioned as being in the Temple some three hundred years *after* the time of Solomon. We read the following in Second Chronicles:

And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the LORD, "Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built; you need no longer carry it upon your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel" (2 Chronicles 35:3 RSV).

The Scriptures would have to be incorrect if previously it had been taken to Ethiopia.

The theory that Menelik I, the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, took the genuine Ark to Ethiopia has no biblical or historical basis.

The Theory Of Graham Hancock

In recent years, there has been a new twist on the Ethiopian connection by British journalist Graham Hancock. Hancock had been working on a book sponsored by the Ethiopian government when he heard the story of the Ark residing at Axum.

After some preliminary investigation, including an attempt to view the "Ark," he dismissed the Ethiopian account as pious legend. Only later, after considerable research, did he come to embrace the idea that the Ark does reside in Ethiopia.

The Time Of Manasseh

Hancock rejects the Ethiopian story that Menelik I brought the Ark from Jerusalem. He does believe the Ark was taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, but he asserts that this occurred during the time of Manasseh, hundreds of years after the reign of Solomon. The Ark, he contends, was then transferred to a Jewish garrison at Elephantine Island in the upper Nile of Egypt.

From there it was brought to Tana Kirkos Island in Ethiopia's Lake Tana—the source of the Blue Nile. Finally, it was brought to a stone chapel in Axum Ethiopia where it remains to this day.

It is interesting to note that Hancock wanted to verify the historicity of the Ethiopian story that tells of the Ark's journey. He, however, realized it could not be historically verified. Undaunted, he then felt that it was more like a metaphor than genuine history. He wrote:

I had looked for alternative resting places for the Ark, but none of those that legend or tradition offered had seemed in the least bit likely. I had looked for proofs that the relic might have been destroyed, but no such proofs existed. I had established that the Kebra Nagast's claims about Solomon, Sheba and Menelik could not literally be true—only to discover these same claims might well serve as a complex metaphor for the truth. Certainly, the Ark of the Covenant could not have gone to Ethiopia in the era of Solomon; but it was entirely plausible that it might have made the journey later, at the time of the destruction of the Jewish Temple that had stood on the island of Elephantine in the upper Nile.⁸

Manasseh And The Ark

Hancock believes the Ark was taken out of the Temple during the time of Manasseh. This however, brings up the problem of the mention of the Ark in 2 Chronicles 35:3, after the time of Manasseh. Hancock found this passage actually provided support to his thesis.

It was immediately obvious to me that these few short verses. . . were of vital importance to my quest. Why? Quite simply because Josiah would have had no need to ask the Levites to put the Ark in the Temple if it had already been there.⁹

Hancock does not believe the Ark was returned per Josiah's request. He wrote:

What Chronicles did not do, however, was give any indication at all that the Levites had complied with the king's order; indeed, far from the colorful ceremony that one might have expected to accompany any reinstallation of the Ark in the Temple, there was no follow up—either in this book or in any other part of the Bible to Josiah's strange command. On the contrary, it was clear that his words had fallen on deaf ears or on the ears of people who were not in a position to obey them.¹⁰

Hancock then coupled this reference to the prophecy given by Jeremiah that the Ark would no longer be missed. We read the following:

"In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made" (Jeremiah 3:16 NIV).

He claimed this as final evidence that it had been taken out of the Holy of Holies some time previously. This, he believed, confirmed his theory that the Ark was taken out of the Temple during the time of King Manasseh.

The Ark Had Been Removed

It is agreed by all that the Ark had been removed from the Temple sometime before Josiah ordered it returned. As we have seen, various theories have been given why this was so. But, contrary to Hancock, there is no hint that the order was not carried out. The natural assumption in reading the passage is that the Ark was restored upon the command of the king. To argue otherwise is not very convincing. In addition, as we mentioned earlier, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, in Second Chronicles 35:3, states that the Levites *did* put the Ark back into the Temple.

Experts Disagree With This Theory

The experts have responded to Hancock's theory with universal disbelief. For example, Edward Ullendorff, retired professor of Ethiopian Studies of the University of London and preeminent expert on Ethiopia, said of Hancock's work:

It's just a sad joke. I wasted a lot of time reading it.¹¹

Ullendorff told the Los Angeles *Times* that he had seen this "ark" that resides in Ethiopia.

"They have a wooden box, but it's empty. . . Middle to late medieval construction, when these were fabricated "ad hoc." The mystery around it is "mostly to maintain the idea that it's a venerated object." How does he know this? No one was permitted to see it, the monks said. Hancock had even tried to make a virtue out of this by arguing that it attested to the object's importance. For obviously, no mere mortal would be permitted to view something so divine. ("I . . . was never worthy enough," he wrote.)

Hogwash, Ullendorff says. "I've seen it. There was no problem getting access when I saw it in 1941," he says.

He isn't surprised that Hancock was denied permission, for he was nothing but a parvenu. "You need to be able to speak their language, classical Ge'ez," he said. "You need to be able to show that you're serious."¹²

University of Toronto archaeologist John Holladay made the following comment:

Garbage and hogwash with no scientific merit whatsoever.¹³

Conclusion

The story of the Ark's journey to Ethiopia has too many "ifs" and conjectures to make it plausible. The Ethiopian tradition does not provide convincing evidence of the Ark's location. We must look elsewhere.

Endnotes for Chapter 24

1. Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1992.
2. Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her Only Son Menelik*; being the 'Book of the Glory of Kings' (*Kebra Nagast*), Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 29.
3. Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, ibid., pp. 77,78.
4. Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, ibid., p. 29.
5. For example, the Bible says the Queen of Sheba gave Solomon 120 talents (9,000 pounds or 4 and one half tons) of gold. Allan Millard writes:

The Queen of Sheba's gift of gold was probably drawn from the gold mines in western Arabia. Remains of extensive mine works dating back at least to Roman times have been explored there recently, and there are reports that considerable quantities of gold still await the miners pick (Allan Millard, "Does the Bible Exaggerate King Solomon's Golden Wealth?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May/June, 1989, p. 34).

6. Hancock, ibid., pp. 131,132.
7. Geoffrey Grogan, *Isaiah*, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, p. 122.
8. Hancock, ibid., p. 436
9. Hancock, ibid., p. 409.
10. Hancock, ibid., p. 410.
11. Michael A. Hiltzik, "Does Trail to Ark of Covenant End Behind Axum Curtain?", *Los Angeles Times*, Tuesday, June 9, 1992, H 6.
12. Hiltzik, ibid., p. H6.
1. Hiltzik, ibid., p. H6.

Note: Ethiopia And The Bible:

The late Bible teacher Arthur Bloomfield taught the novel theory that after Solomon's death, the kingdom divided into a three parts, Israel, Judah and Ethiopia. Though Ethiopia was the smallest of the three kingdoms Bloomfield contended they kept their faith in God and eventually came to possess the Ark of the Covenant. Through Solomon's son, Menelik, they also had a king of the house of David and the tribe of Judah. This is historically improbable and biblically impossible. Bloomfield wrote:

The Jews of Ethiopia are called Falashas. They were recognized by the Spirit when he sent Philip to the Ethiopian officer before the Gospel was given to the Gentiles. (Acts 8:26-40). This would indicate that the Ethiopian Jews have an important place in the future. It is not without significance that they are supposed to possess the Ark of the Covenant, which corresponds so closely to the ensign of prophecy (Arthur Bloomfield, *Bloomfield's Prophetic Atlas*, Angola, Indiana, Traveling Bible Institute, 1946, pp. 46,47).

Prophecy writer Grant Jeffrey has taken Bloomfield's theory (of the Ark going to Ethiopia) and made it popular in our day. He, like Bloomfield, accepts the unhistorical Ethiopian account as being the true story of what happened to the Ark. He believes the last mention of the Ark was during the time of Solomon.

The last time we read that the Ark of the Covenant was still unquestionably in the hands of Israel is the report of the Second Book of Chronicles 8:11 in which Solomon asked his wife, the pagan daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh, to leave the area where the Ark of the Covenant was stored because she was not a believer. Shortly after this event the most important and powerful religious object in history disappears from the scene of Israel's national life. In all of the Bible's subsequent accounts of battles, rebellions, invasions and the looting of the Temple by various armies, there is not one single word about this most sacred and powerful object (Grant R. Jeffrey, *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny*, New York: Bantam Books, 1990, p. 112).

Jeffrey believes 2 Chronicles 35:3 does not refer to the Ark of the Covenant.

There is one brief mention of an "ark" in 2 Chronicles 35:3 during the reign of King Josiah, when he ordered the priests to put this object back in the Temple, since it had been removed earlier by a wicked king to make room for idols. It is unlikely that this object referred to as an "ark" is, in fact, the true Ark of the Covenant because the Bible does not call it the "the Ark of the Covenant" (Jeffrey, *ibid.*, pp. 112,113).

This is incorrect. Any good Bible commentary on 2 Chronicles, whether it be Christian or Jewish, will testify it was the genuine Ark that was placed in the Holy of Holies. As we have seen, the Bible uses over twenty designations for the Ark. It is called the Ark of the Your Strength, The Ark of God, the Ark of the Lord. The designation "Holy Ark" in 2 Chronicles 35:3 certainly speaks of the genuine Ark of the Covenant.

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* noted.

Over twenty different designations appear with reference to the ark, and discerning any invariable pattern in usage is difficult (W. Lotz, M.G. Kyle, C.E. Armerding in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 1, Revised Edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, p. 293).

Though popular among some Christians, the idea of the Ark going to Ethiopia has no biblical or historical support.

Note: Has The Lost Ark Actually Been Seen In Ethiopia?

The author has in his possession a book written in 1951 that makes the following claims about his drawing of the Ark.

These original drawings were made from microfilm photographs of an exact replica or reproduction of the Ark of the Covenant, which reposes in the ancient Coptic Cathedral at Axum, Ethiopia . . . This is the first time any representation of this ark has ever been reproduced for publication in America.

This micro-film was kindly provided by my personal friend Dr. J.O. Kinnaman, who spent fifty years in archaeological research and investigation in many parts of the world. . . He was called to Ethiopia and commissioned by Haile Selassie, Emperor of Abyssinia, now Ethiopia, to investigate, discover, and make records of all information available for the national archives, and to place in the national museum all objects to be found in Ethiopia of permanent archaeological value. As a mark of special respect and appreciation, Dr. Kinnaman was permitted to spend many hours in the immediate presence of the Ark of the Covenant in this national cathedral. His request to photograph it was denied; but he was permitted to make minutely exact measurements and sketches of certain of its details. On returning to America, a skilled sculptor fashioned a replica of the Ark from this data. This replica was photographed and from these photographs our artists drew the illustration [see illustration]. . . Dr. Kinnaman told the author that after many hours of silent contemplation in the presence of the ark at the temple in Axum, it was not difficult to accept the claims of the ecclesiastical authorities of the Coptic church in Ethiopia that they are, indeed, the custodians of the ORIGINAL ARK OF THE COVENANT THAT FIRST WAS PLACED IN THE TABERNACLE IN THE WILDERNESS [emphasis his] (Bruce Corbin, *The Tabernacle in the Wilderness*, Enid, Oklahoma: Truth Publishing Company, 1951, p. 59).

The possibility of this story being true seems remote. From all that is known about the sacredness of the “ark” in Ethiopia, it does not appear that the Ethiopians would allow anyone to make minute drawings of it.

CHAPTER 25

HAS THE ARK BEEN FOUND UNDER THE TEMPLE MOUNT?

Is it possible that the Ark of the Covenant has been hidden for over 2,600 years, directly below the place where Solomon's Temple stood? Has the Holy Ark been discovered in a secret passageway underneath the Temple Mount? In recent years, reports from Jerusalem have made such a claim.

We now arrive at a third possible resting place of the Ark—somewhere under Jerusalem's Temple Mount. If the Ark were hidden by the Jews sometime in their past, this would have been the most likely place.

The Sacred Temple Mount

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is the place where the First and Second Temples stood. It is located on Mount Moriah—a mountain range than runs through the city of Jerusalem. On the western side of the Temple Mount is the only physical remains of the Second Temple area. It is a one hundred-and-eighty-five-foot wall known as the Western Wall or Wailing Wall. The Jews worship today at the Western Wall while the top of the Mount is off limits to Jewish worship.

It Will Be Center-Stage For Future Events

The Bible indicates that the Temple Mount will find itself center-stage in momentous future events.¹ One of these events could possibly be the locating of the Ark of the Covenant. For centuries, stories have circulated that the Ark was hidden underneath the Temple Mount to insure its safety. It is also believed the sacred object will be discovered in the “last days.”

Solomon's Hiding Place?

It has been theorized that when King Solomon built the Temple, he also ordered a secret underground vault to be built, to hide the Ark of the Covenant. If Jerusalem were ever put to siege by foreign invaders, then the Ark could be taken from the Holy of Holies and placed into this hiding place. Though the Bible does not speak of such a secret room, many Jewish authorities have argued for its existence.

Josiah's Reign

This underground hiding place was supposedly put to use in the reign of King Josiah. We have already seen that Josiah ordered the Ark returned to the Temple after it had been previously removed:

He said to the Levites, who instructed all Israel and who had been consecrated to the LORD: “Put the sacred ark in the temple that Solomon son of David king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about

on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel” (2 Chronicles 35:3 NIV).

Many Jewish interpreters speculate that Josiah did not put the Ark back in the Holy of Holies at this time, but rather placed it in Solomon’s secret hiding place.

He did this because he knew the treasures of the Temple were about to be plundered. King Josiah had been told by Huldah the Prophetess that the Temple would be destroyed soon after his death. Knowing this, he ordered the Ark to be put in this underground vault. Many Rabbincal interpreters believe that the Ark has remained hidden in that place ever since and shall only be manifested and brought out again in the days of the Messiah.

Was The Ark Hidden By An Angel?

There is also the tradition that an angel hid the Ark. According to one Jewish apocryphal source called *The Vision of Baruch*, Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, saw an angel take the Ark and hide it beneath the sealed foundation stone on the Temple Mount known as the “Well of Souls.” This is recorded in the following manner:

And I saw that he descended in the Holy of Holies and that he took from there the veil, the holy ephod, the mercy seat, the two tables, the holy raiment of the priests, the altar of incense, the forty-eight precious stones with which the priest were clothed, and the holy vessels of the tabernacle. And he said to the earth with a loud voice:

Earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the mighty God, and receive the things which I commit to you and guard them until the last times, so that you may restore them when you are ordered, so that strangers may not get possession of them. For the time has arrived when Jerusalem will also be delivered up for a time, until the moment that it will be said that it will be restored forever. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.²

The angel then spoke to the earth saying, “hear the word of God and receive what I commit to your care until the last times.”

Did Jeremiah Hide The Ark?

It has also been taught that the prophet Jeremiah hid the Ark before the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Leibel Reznick writes:

Before the destruction of the First Temple. . . the prophet Jeremiah hid the national treasures of the Jews under the Holy Temple to prevent them from falling in the hands of the invading Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian troops. The treasures included the Holy Ark, the Two Tablets with the Ten Commandments carved upon them, the staff of Aaron, the oil for anointing compounded by Moses, and a container holding the last sample of the manna that sustained the Children of Israel during their forty years of wandering

through the desert. After the seventy years of the Babylonian exile, the Jews returned to Zion, but, alas, the treasures were never found.³

That Jeremiah hid the ark is indeed a popular theory.

The Chamber Of Wood

According to a late Jewish tradition, the Ark was buried under the Chamber of Wood in the Temple prior to the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians. Leibel Reznick writes:

The Mishnah (Shekalim 6:1) records that the Holy Ark was hidden in a secret passageway that began beneath the Chamber of Wood, which was located in the northwestern corner of the Women's Courtyard. . . there is an underground room. . . in that corner. It is a chamber forty-four feet below ground level, and has a vaulted ceiling. It has never been explored.⁴

Could any of these places contain the lost Ark? There are several things keeping interested parties from thoroughly investigating these claims.

First, it is impossible to do any excavating from the top of the Temple Mount because it is under Islamic control. No type of digging is allowed—certainly none to find the location of the most holy object to the Jews.

Though the Jews cannot excavate from the top of the Temple Mount, they do have control of the area at its base. Since 1982, a tunnel has been dug and excavated that runs the entire length of the Western Wall—some 1,000 feet. Much exploration has already occurred from this place known as the Rabbinical Tunnel.

Encountering The Ark?

A number of claims have been made publicly that the Ark has been discovered in a secret chamber underneath the Temple Mount or, at the very least, the location of the Ark is known.

A number of years ago, the late Bible prophecy specialist David Lewis related a conversation with Rabbi Hacohen, one of the Jewish activists engaged in preparation for building a Third Temple. Speaking to Dr. Lewis and his tour group, Hacohen talked about some of the excavations made underneath the Temple Mount. Lewis recalls Hacohen's story.

He told of how he was working late at night with Rabbi Getz, a group of archaeologists, and rabbinical scholars. . . Hacohen told of how they were excavating along the lower level of the Western Wall. Passing through this doorway, the crew entered a fairly long tunnel. At the end of the tunnel, Rabbi Hacohen said, "I saw the golden ark that once stood in the holy Place of the Temple of the Almighty."

It was covered with old, dried animal skins of some kind. However, one gold, gleaming end of the ark was visible. He could see the loops

of gold through which the poles of acacia wood could be thrust so that the ark could be properly carried by the dedicated Levites.⁵

Hacohen and his friends went immediately to the home of then Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren. The sleeping Rabbi was awakened to hear the news; the holy Ark of the Covenant had been discovered!

Goren told the excited group that preparations had already been made for such an event. The Ark would be carried out in triumph, by members of the tribe of Levi, the very next morning.

The next morning brought shock to the group as they went to the tunnel. Lewis explains.

They found that during the night, the Moslems had erected a wooden frame and prepared a concrete wall, sealing off the tunnel that would give access to the ark of the covenant. I asked, "Why didn't you break through the concrete? It would have been so easy to do."

He replied, "I begged Goren to give us permission to break through the wall, but Rabbi Goren replied, 'Every time we do anything around the Temple Mountain, it creates big problems for Israel with the Arabs, the United Nations, and the United States. It seems to make everybody upset, so we will not break through. We know where the holy object is and when we receive the word from the Almighty, we will go in and recover it. Don't worry, the Moslems revere the ark as much as we do and they would be afraid to touch it.'⁶

The story that Hacohen had told Dr. Lewis and his tour group was never repeated to him as he noted:

In years following, I talked to Rabbi Hacohen on a number of occasions about the previous discussion and each time I talked to him, he was more reluctant to have the subject brought up. Finally, in the presence of several people, he simply refused to talk about it at all. I suppose he got in trouble with his colleagues for talking to me and my tour group about their sighting of the ark of the covenant. I would like to point out, however, that we have a tape recording of his original discussion with our tour group on the very first occasion that he talked about the ark. It is our custom on our tours to record everything that every guide and every speaker has to say about any subject. So we have good records of everything that has been said. I have a colored slide showing Rabbi Hacohen holding a map and pointing to the tunnel as he is saying, "This is where we saw the golden ark of the Lord." Only time will tell what he and his friends actually saw.⁷

This seems to be the only direct claim of anyone actually seeing the Ark. A number of other Jews have claimed that they know where it is, but have not seen it.

Rabbis Getz And Richman

The late chief Rabbi of the Western Wall, Yehuda Getz, also claimed that the location of the Ark had been discovered under the Temple Mount through a newly re-discovered entrance known as “Warren’s Gate.”⁸ However, he never personally claimed to have seen it himself.

Earlier in the same year, the author heard a similar claim about the location of the Ark being discovered somewhere underneath the Temple Mount. In February/March of 1992, the First Annual Temple conference was held in the city of Jerusalem. One of the speakers was Rabbi Chaim Richman of the Temple Institute. Richman said that the Ark was in a safe place. He, like the others, said it will be brought out “at the right time.”

It is important to note that not all Israelis give credence to this story. Many, such as Dan Bahat chief archaeologist of Jerusalem, believe there are no buried treasures underneath the Temple Mount.

After thoroughly examining all the recent claims of the discovery of the Ark underneath the Temple Mount, Randall Price offers this assessment:

Confirmation of the rabbis’ claims is presently impossible since the Wakf and the Israeli government sealed up the Warren’s gate entrance. However, Rabbi Getz’ synagogue, built directly on the wall above the sealed entrance to Warren’s Gate, continues to be used and bears testimony to the discovery of the ancient gate. When we evaluate the testimony of these witnesses, we should remember that they are leading political and religious figures in Israel, and they have nothing to gain by being discredited by a false rumor of this magnitude. Neither can we doubt that as trained rabbis they know what they have seen. Some rabbis in Israel, most notably Rabbi Nachman Kahane of the Institute for Talmudic Commentaries, doubted that these rabbis actually knew the true location of the Ark. But others, such as Rabbis Israel Ariel and Chaim Richman of the Temple Institute, are convinced their story is accurate.

Therefore, for the time being, the Ark may remain locked in a secret behind an entrance blocked with three meters of concrete and steel. In addition, the Antiquities Authority in agreement with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which oversees the site, has added a stonework facade to the sealed entrance, giving it the appearance that it was never opened! Today, although a small sign identifies Warren’s Gate as one of the entrance gates to the Temple Mount, only informed tour guides mention its possible connection to the hiding place of the Ark. However, the Temple Institute in the Jewish Quarter, located a few hundred yards away, assures visitors that the Ark is still safely under the Temple Mount and will be brought out in the near future.⁹

Again, only time will tell whether the Ark of the Covenant still exists in a safely hidden place underneath the Temple Mount.

Other Possible Sites

We have looked at three popular views as to where the Ark of the Covenant may be resting. We should also note that many other theories have come and gone over the years with astounding claims that people “know” the exact location of the Ark. This includes: The Vatican, Gordon’s Calvary, Qumran, and Ein Gedi. However, there is no real evidence that any of these sites may be the restingplace of the Ark. However, we do know this: until the Ark of the Covenant is found, there will always be claims made as to where it is located.

Endnotes for Chapter 25

1. Don Stewart, *The Jews, Jerusalem, and the Coming Temple*
 2. 2 Baruch 6:4-8.
 3. Leibel Reznick, *The Holy Temple Revisited*, Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1990, 147.
 4. Reznick, *ibid.*, p. 146.
- The great Jewish scholar Maimonides wrote.
- When Solomon built the Temple, he was aware it would ultimately be destroyed. He constructed a chamber in which the Ark could be entombed below the Temple in deep, maze-like vaults. King Josiah commanded that the Ark be entombed in the chamber built by Solomon. . . When it was entombed, Aaron's staff, the vial of manna, and the oil for anointing were entombed with it. All these sacred articles did not return to the Second Temple (Maimonides, *The Laws of God's Chosen House*).

C.F. Keil comments on this ancient theory.

Some Rabbins regard it as a command to remove the Ark from its place in the Most Holy Place into some subterranean chamber of the Temple, so as to secure its safety in the event of a threatened destruction of the Temple taking place. But this hypothesis needs no refutation, since it in no way corresponds to the words used (C.F. Keil, *Chronicles, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1971, p. 496).

5. David Lewis, *Prophecy 2000*, Green Forest, Arizona: New Leaf Press, 1990, pp. 175,176.
6. Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 176.
7. Lewis, *ibid.*, pp. 176,177.
8. Warren's Gate was named after the 19th century British explorer Charles Warren. During his survey of the Temple Mount he claimed to have discovered one of the four entrance gates which led to the Temple itself. Warren did not reveal the exact location of the gate, or how he knew it was one of these four gates. A later British explorer, Charles Wilson, rediscovered it and named it "Warren's Gate." Former Chief Archaeologist of Jerusalem, Dan Bahat, explains the significance of this particular gate.

This is a threshold to the Temple Mount. . . one of the gates to the Temple. This gate is the most important of all the gates because it is the nearest gate to the Holy of Holies. The eastern extremity of this passage is even nearer to the Holy of Holies, and this is why it is preferable for Jews to pray inside this vault. For over 450 years it was the holiest place

where people came to pray. . . from the Arab conquest of 638 A.D. till the Crusader conquest of 1099 A.D. it was the central synagogue of Israel's Jewry. It was called the Cave because it is in the form of a cave, a kind of underground vault penetrating into the Temple Mount, and thus is played a very important role in Jewish life in Jerusalem in the early Arab period simply because of its proximity to the Holy of Holies. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem after the Crusader rule, the Jews wanted to come back into [Warren's Gate], but the whole area was filled in with Islamic buildings, so they chose the second best site, the Western Wall farther down (Jimmy DeYoung, Interview with Dan Bahat, 1994: cited by Randall Price in *Searching For The Ark Of The Covenant*).

9. Randall Price, *Searching For The Ark Of The Covenant*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1995, pp. 162,163.

SECTION 4

DOES THE ARK HAVE A ROLE IN THE FUTURE?

Has the Ark of the Covenant been forever lost or does it have a role in the future? Does the Bible say anything on this matter? Will the Ark be used in a Third Temple built by the Jews?

These and other issues will be the focus of our last section.

CHAPTER 26

HAS THE ARK BEEN FOREVER LOST?

We have examined the possibility that a foreign invader had taken the Ark of the Covenant or that friendly hands had hidden it. There is another possibility with regard to the mystery of the Ark's disappearance—the Ark may have been destroyed. A great number of people are of the opinion that this is exactly what happened.

Frank H. White's view is typical of what many think happened to the Ark:

When the Temple was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar, the Ark doubtless perished in the general conflagration (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19). Neither Ezra, Nehemiah, the Maccabees, nor Josephus make any mention of an Ark in connection with the second, or Zerubbabel's temple. The last authority expressly states that there was nothing in the Most Holy Place when the Temple was destroyed by Titus. Certainly no representation of such appears on the arch erected at Rome in honor of that conqueror, in which the spoils of the Temple are displayed.¹

If the Ark had been destroyed, then the most probable time was during the sacking of Jerusalem by the armies of Babylon. As we have already noted, the Ark was in existence prior to this time, however, no mention of its existence is made after the Babylonian captivity. We know that Nebuchadnezzar plundered the holy vessels of the Temple:

He also carried off from there all the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king's palace, and he cut into pieces all the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the Lord's sanctuary, just as God had predicted. (2 Kings 24:13 HCSB).

If the Ark were among the vessels taken, then the gold was possibly stripped off and the wooden container discarded. Eighteenth century writer Humphrey Prideaux comments:

What became of the old Ark on the destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar is a dispute among the Rabbins. Had it been carried to Babylon with the other vessels of the Temple, it would have been brought back with them at the end of captivity. But that it is not so is agreed on all hands, and therefore it must follow, that it was destroyed with the Temple as were also the Altar of Incense, the Shew-bread Table, and the Golden Candlestick. For all these in the second Temple were made anew after the rebuilding of it.²

This line of reasoning does not necessarily follow. It is not required to assume the Ark was destroyed. The Temple vessels destroyed were the ones *made* by Solomon for Temple service. This would not include the Ark or the other furniture that was made by Moses and company at Mt. Sinai.

Was The Ark Gone Earlier?

There are those who contend that the Ark was gone before the Babylonian captivity. Liberal scholar William Bennett writes:

The Ark disappears from history after it is placed in Solomon's Temple, 1 Kings viii. 21. It was lost or fell to pieces some time before the Exile, and a prophetic oracle, Jer. iii. 16, forbade the construction of a substitute. Ps. cxxxii. seems to express the hope that God would in some way replace it.³

Jeremiah's Statement About The Ark

There are those who see Jeremiah's statement as indicating the Ark was gone by his time (600 B.C.):

When you multiply and increase in the land, in those days" — the Lord's declaration — "no one will say any longer, 'The ark of the Lord's covenant.' It will never come to mind, and no one will remember or miss it. It will never again be made (Jeremiah 3:16 HCSB).

C.J. Ball, commenting on this verse, writes:

The reference to the Ark of the Covenant in verse 16 is remarkable upon several grounds. This sacred symbol is not mentioned among the spoils which Nebuzaradan took from the temple; nor is it specified among the treasures appropriated by Nebuchadnezzar at the surrender of Jechoniah. The words of Jeremiah prove that it cannot be included among "the vessels of gold" which the Babylonian conqueror "cut in pieces" (2 Kings xxiv. 13). We learn two facts about the ark from the present passage: (1) that it no longer existed in the days of the prophet; (2) that people remembered with regret, though they did not venture to replace the lost original by a new substitute. It may well have been destroyed by Manasseh, the king who did his utmost to abolish the religion of Iahvah [Jehovah].⁴

Jeremiah's statement has convinced many that the Ark had disappeared at the time of his writing.

Manasseh

It has been conjectured that the Ark was destroyed earlier by the evil king Manasseh. Menahem Haran writes:

In actual fact, the disappearance of the inner sanctum objects from the Jerusalem temple does not seem connected with any external event, but with internal factors within the Judean kingdom—a unique religion-political constellation into which it passed only once in history. This was the sin of Manasseh. . . Throughout the various changes that took place in the Kingdom of Judah, the Temple at Jerusalem never ceased to serve exclusively as the Temple of Yahweh . . . There was

only one single period in its history when it was temporarily deprived of its original function and for a short while ceased to serve as a Temple for Yahweh . . . This occurred during the reign of Manasseh. . . who set up vessels for Baal . . . in the outer sanctum and introduced the image of Asherah into the inner sanctum of the Temple. . . This is the only happening which may explain the disappearance of the Ark and the cherubim. Some fifty years afterwards, when Josiah removed the Asherah from the Temple and burnt it in the Kidron Valley, beating it to dust and desecrating even the dust, the Ark and the cherubim were no longer there.⁵

There Is No Record Of The Destruction Of The Ark

There is, however, no historical account, whether it be in the Bible or elsewhere, that records the destruction of the Ark. We find that neither Daniel nor Ezekiel, nor Jeremiah ever record the Ark's destruction in Scripture. Furthermore, neither Flavius Josephus nor the Talmud gives evidence that the sacred object had been demolished.

Some feel it would be unlikely that King Nebuchadnezzar would have deliberately destroyed such a prized trophy as the Ark. If he found the Ark, he would have kept it to display before his people.

Because there is no mention of the destruction of the Ark, or its returning with the exiles, many have felt that another solution needs to be found to explain its disappearance. While it is possible that the Ark has been destroyed, the fact that the Scripture is silent to its fate might weigh against this.

If the Ark does still exist, and is eventually found, what role will it play, if any, in "last days" Bible prophecy? This will be the question we will answer in our next chapter.

Endnotes for Chapter 26

1. Frank H. White, *Christ in the Tabernacle*, London: S.W. Partridge and Company, 1910, p. 147.

William Knight writes.

What became of the Tabernacle vessels we know not: but we are told that, when Nebuchadnezzar took the Temple, he carried out the treasures of the Lord's House, and cut into pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon had made for the Temple-service; that is the larger and more important implements. Many of the smaller ones were taken to Babylon, and after having been exhibited at Belshazzar's feast, were brought back on the return from the Captivity. Those that had been destroyed were restored by Ezra, in pursuance with the orders of the Persian kings (William Knight, *The Ark of Titus*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1896, p. 88).

2. Humphrey Prideaux, *Old and New Testament Connected*, Part 1, Vol. 1, 10th edition, 1729, p. 212.
3. William H. Bennett, *The Books of Chronicles*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989, p. 201.
4. C.J. Ball, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1903, p. 124.
5. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 277.

We also have a reference that King Ahaz cut to pieces some of the holy vessels.

Ahaz gathered together the furnishings from the temple of God and cut them in pieces. He shut the doors of the Lord's temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 28:24 NIV).

There is also the fact that Ezekiel records the glory of God departing from the Temple in his time (600 B.C.)

Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. . . And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city (Ezekiel 10:18:11:23).

Zev Vilnay records some Jewish legends concerning the Ark.

What became of the Holy Ark? After the Temple was destroyed some say it sank in its place on Mount Moriah, into the depths of the earth. . . In the course of his duties in the courtyard, a priest serving in the Second Temple perceived in the floor a slab which differed from all the others. He went to tell his friends about it, but before he finished

speaking his soul departed from his body. Then the priests knew that the Holy Ark was hidden beneath this particular slab. . . The Ark was struck with a hammer until a flame was kindled and it was burnt (Zev Vilnay, *Legends of the Jerusalem, Sacred Land Vol. 1*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973, p. 32).

CHAPTER 27

THE ARK AND THE THIRD TEMPLE

As we have documented, the fate of the Ark is unknown. It may have been destroyed; it may have been hidden away somewhere. We simply do not know.

However, if the Ark of the Covenant does still exist, and is eventually located, it may play a decisive role in a future Temple to be built in the city of Jerusalem.

We have already seen that Israel has had two Temples in its past. The First Temple was built by Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians. The Second Temple was built by Zerubbabel, expanded by Herod and then destroyed by the Romans.

The Desire Of The Jewish People

Since the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70, it has been the desire of the Jewish people to see a Third Temple built. Rabbi Leibel Reznick writes:

The Holy Temple was the very heart and soul of the Jewish people. Before the First Temple was ever built, King David longed for it. In anticipation, he dedicated his royal treasures to the Temple building. He composed Psalms, liturgical works to be sung in the Temple service.

After the Second Temple was destroyed, Jews yearned to rebuild it. It is now almost 2,000 years since the destruction of the Temple and still, three times each day, Jews express in their prayers their hopes for the rebuilding of their Temple. The Temple is not only a proud memory of the past, but represents the future of the Jewish nation.

The future Temple, according to prophetic visions, will herald an era when no nation will raise up a sword against another, when war will not be taught, and when instruments of battle will be beaten into plowshares. The Jewish Temple is the hope of mankind. The future Temple will be God's palace on earth. God shall reign as King and His subjects will be at peace with one another.¹

This has been the hope of the Jewish people for almost two thousand years.

Bible Prophecy Has Much To Say

The hope of Christians is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Certain things, however, still have to take place on earth before Christ returns.² Many students of Scripture believe that one of the necessary things is the building of a Third Temple.

There are, however, good Christian Bible students who do not believe that the Scripture requires that a Third Temple be built. They believe these prophecies have already been fulfilled or will not be fulfilled literally. The author respectively disagrees with this position and has documented the reasons in another book.³

Where The Ark Fits In

It is possible that the Ark will never be found and a Third Temple could still be built. We have already seen that the Ark of the Covenant was not in the Second Temple—which lasted from 515 B.C. to A.D. 70. Likewise, a Third Temple could be constructed without the Ark.

The discovery of the Ark, however, could certainly speed up this process of the Temple's rebuilding by giving the Jews an incentive to begin construction. In fact, if the Ark is discovered, it may not be possible to stop the building of a Third Temple. Too many Jewish authorities in the past have spoken of the day when the Ark will be discovered and the Third Temple built. Louis Rapoport notes.

Recently a noted (but unnamed) Israeli archaeologist told Ha'aretz that the discovery of the Temple treasure would be the crowning achievement for any archaeologist who has worked in Jerusalem. He might have added that such a discovery would have such an immense impact on the world; according to Jewish belief, it would portend the advent of the Messiah and the building of the Third Temple.⁴

The Location Cannot Be Revealed Now

Former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren said that it is against Jewish belief to reveal the real story of where the Ark was hidden:

"The secret will be revealed just prior to building the Third Temple," he said. "The ark will reveal the truth of accepting the Ten Commandments from heaven. This is the evidence that Moses brought to the Jews. It will be the greatest testimony of what we have followed because it contains both the broken tablets and the complete second tablets.⁵

One Israeli Rabbi put it this way:

If we find the ark, it will force us to build the temple. After all the first temple was built to house the ark of the covenant. If we find the ark, what would we do with it? We couldn't store it in the prime minister's basement. It would demand the rebuilding of the temple. However, if we find the ark or not we are going to build the temple of Almighty God on the . . . temple mountain.⁶

According to one Jewish tradition, when the Messiah comes he will perform seven miracles to prove his authenticity, one of them is discovering the Ark of the Covenant. Only time will tell, however, if the lost Ark will be found and placed in the Third Temple.

Endnotes for Chapter 27

1. Leibel Reznick, *The Holy Temple Revisited*, Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1990.
2. This refers to the Second Coming of Christ, not the rapture of the church.
3. Don Stewart, *The Jews, Jerusalem, and the Coming Temple*
4. Louis Rapoport, "The Mystery of the Real Lost Ark," *Jewish Digest*, September 1982, p. 26.
5. Rapoport, *ibid.*, p. 28.
6. Rabbi Hacohen cited by David Lewis, *Prophecy 2000*, Green Forest, Arizona: New Leaf Press, 1990, p. 178.

CHAPTER 28

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE ARK?

In our search for the lost Ark we have looked at various theories as to what has happened to the sacred object in the past. We will now investigate what the Bible has to say about the Ark's future. There is one passage in Scripture that speaks directly about this matter:

"In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made" (Jeremiah 3:16 NIV).

The people of Jeremiah's day attached too much importance to the Ark as the visible symbol of the Lord's presence. They needed to understand that this symbol was not made to last forever. Hence, Jeremiah spoke of a day when the Ark would no longer exist, would never be made again, and never even come to mind.

This Is The First Time It Was Announced

This was the first time in the history of Israel that such an announcement had been made, and it must have come as a shock to the Jews. Never had an Old Testament prophet made such a statement—it was unparalleled. Their entire worship was built around the Ark of the Covenant which symbolized the presence of God Himself. Now they were told it would disappear and no longer be missed.¹

Many commentators feel that Jeremiah, writing before the destruction of the Temple, was predicting the soon loss of the Ark. They feel he was, in effect, preparing the people for what they were about to experience.

When Will This Occur?

It is clear that Jeremiah predicted that the Ark would be lost someday and never come to mind. The question before us now is, "When was this supposed to occur? Many commentators believe it was at the destruction of the First Temple in 587 B.C. They point to the fact that the Ark has been lost and not rebuilt as he predicted. Thus, Jeremiah's prophecy has been literally fulfilled.

There Is Another Possibility

There is, however, another way of looking at Jeremiah's prediction. First, he prefaces his remarks by saying it will occur when the people are "multiplied and increased in the land." It is difficult to find this part of the prophecy having been fulfilled. After the First Temple was destroyed, only a remnant of the people returned to Jerusalem. It seems that the blessings

that Jeremiah said would come did not transpire in those days, nor in the entire period that the Second Temple existed.

Therefore, it appears likely that the context he was speaking of is still in the future.

The next two verses give us a further clue that Jeremiah's prediction is for some time still in the future:

At that time Jerusalem will be called, Yahweh's Throne, and all the nations will be gathered to it, to the name of Yahweh in Jerusalem. They will cease to follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah will join with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land I have given your ancestors to inherit (Jeremiah 3:17,18 HCSB).

This future era will be a time when the Lord Himself, the One whom the Ark symbolized, is ruling from the city of Jerusalem—a time when Judah and Israel become one. In those days, they will not speak of the Ark. But those days have not yet come for all nations have not gathered in Jerusalem to worship the Lord, and the Jews have not stopped talking about the Ark.

In fact, they have longed for it since the time of its disappearance. This part of the Jeremiah's prophecy is yet to be fulfilled.

The Ark Still May Appear

The conditions that Jeremiah has predicted have not yet come upon the earth. Because these prophecies have not been completely fulfilled, it is possible that the Ark may indeed appear again in the future.²

We can, therefore, say that the prophet Jeremiah does not seem to rule out the Ark surfacing again.

Revelation 11

The future of the Ark is thought by some to be found in a passage in the Book of Revelation. The Bible says:

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail (Revelation 11:19 NRSV).

Many commentators believe this statement teaches that the Ark was taken to heaven by God.³ This, it is argued, reveals that we will never find the Ark on earth because it is actually in Heaven. The Book of Revelation, however, is not speaking of the Ark of the Covenant that was built upon earth, but rather the one that exists, and has always existed, in Heaven. The Bible says that the Tabernacle and its furniture were built from copies of things that are in Heaven.

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands—the representation of the true sanctuary but into heaven itself, and he appears now in God’s presence for us (Hebrews 9:24 NET).

Though the eleventh chapter of Revelation speaks of the Ark of the Covenant in heaven, this passage may have some implications as to the lost Ark’s discovery. The fact that the Ark in heaven is mentioned in a chapter (Revelation 11) dealing with the future Third Temple and the coming “Man of Sin” may indeed indicate that the Ark built on earth has been found and is used in this Third Temple. The Book of Revelation, which deals with the future, only mentions the coming Temple in chapter 11, the same chapter where the Ark in heaven is mentioned.

This connection obviously has some significance, possibly hinting at the previous rediscovery of the Ark. The Lord, by revealing the heavenly Ark, may be contrasting the original in heaven with the copy that was made on earth.

Though we do not know this for certain, it is entirely possible, and can fit consistently into the Bible’s end-time scenario.

Conclusion

Jeremiah 3:16 speaks of a day when the Ark of the Covenant will not exist, will not be constructed again, and will be forgotten by the people. Many interpreters believe this day has already come. Others think the time Jeremiah spoke of is still future to our day. Revelation 11 may provide a hint about the future discovery of the Ark seeing that it is connected with events surrounding the Third Temple. There are no other passages that clearly speak of the Ark’s discovery.⁴

What we can say is this, until Jesus Christ comes back and sets up His kingdom upon the earth, the Ark of the Covenant will remain in the minds of people.

A Final Thought

After examining the possible solutions to the problem of the lost Ark the only thing one can say for sure is that the fate of the Ark is still a mystery. Although some have claimed to know the solution to this mystery, nothing has yet been brought forth to prove any particular case.

Whether it will ever be found, no one knows for sure—the Scripture does not expressly state it one way or the other. We can only wait and see.

Endnotes For Chapter 28

1. These statements by Jeremiah that the Ark, containing God's eternal law, would be lost, have particularly perplexed Jewish commentators. Charles Feinberg notes:

One of them, Abarbanel, expressed the opinion that the promise was bad since it uprooted the whole law and he wondered how the Scripture could refer to it as good (Charles Feinberg, *Jeremiah, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 6, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, p. 402).

It is also recognized that the Ark will not be used in the future Temple of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-48).

2. Some commentators assert that the Scriptures predict the discovery of the Ark. Grant Jeffrey writes:

Only the passage of time and further research will conclusively prove the true location of the lost Ark. However, biblical prophecies clearly indicate that the Ark (wherever the Lord has preserved it) will be involved in the motivation of the Jews to build the Third Temple (Grant R. Jeffrey, *Messiah War in the Middle East & The Road To Armageddon*, Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1991, p. 247).

This statement is going too far. It is *not* true that the Bible unquestionably expresses the Ark will be found, or that will be involved in the Jewish desire to build a Third Temple. While this scenario is possible, it certainly isn't "clearly indicated."

3. Henry Morris writes:

But there is no mystery as to where it is. God showed John, when He revealed to him in the Apocalypse, that it was safely stored in the heavenly temple. No doubt the two tables of the Ten Commandments are there as well. If God could translate Enoch and Elijah to heaven, and if the resurrected Christ could ascend to heaven, He would be quite able to remove the ark from Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar's armies sacked the temple, and then have him carry it safely to the true tabernacle in the New Jerusalem under construction in heaven (Morris, p. 211)

4. The late Bible commentator, Arthur Bloomfield, believed the Ark would be brought back from Ethiopia as a "sign" to the nations shortly before the coming of Christ. He argued that the word translated "banner" (Hebrew *Nes*) in several Old Testament passages was actually speaking of the Ark of the Covenant. His theory, which has been promoted by others, does not have any biblical support.

To begin with, this term (*Nes*) is never used of the Ark of the Covenant in any of the historical sections of the Old Testament. To assume Scripture

speaks of it prophetically has no basis in fact. K.H. Maahs explains what the term “banner” meant.

A banner was usually a flag, streamer, or wrought emblem affixed to the end of a standard. It was common in the ancient world for banners to be used for military, national or religious purposes in much the way they are today. The purpose of the banner was to indicate the rallying point for any group holding to a common cause (K.H. Maahs, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 1*, Revised Edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, p. 409).

Furthermore, the verses which Bloomfield and others use to support their argument are very weak. One example will be sufficient.

Isaiah chapter 18:1-7, are supposedly clear references to the Ark being brought from Ethiopia to Jerusalem before Christ returns. Grant R. Jeffrey writes:

In Isaiah 18, we find the clearest indication that the Ark of the Covenant will be brought from Ethiopia at the time of the end. God addresses the people of Ethiopia in the first two verses and tells them of the part they will play in the unfolding events of the last days (Grant R. Jeffrey, *Armageddon Appointment with Destiny*, New York: Bantam Books, 1990, p. 119).

A close examination of these verses will show this is not the case. The subject of the passage is “Ethiopia” or “Cush.”

Woe to the land of whirring wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water. Go, swift messengers, to a people tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers (Isaiah 18:1,2 NIV).

The term Cush, which some Bible versions translate as Ethiopia, seemingly involves more than the modern country. Geoffrey Grogan writes:

Biblical Cush is usually translated “Ethiopia,” but the NIV has wisely chosen transliteration rather than translation; for the term designates a much larger area than present-day Ethiopia—an area including the Sudan and Somalia. This somewhat mysterious area, situated at the limits of the normal biblical world, had come right into the world in Isaiah’s day. It was normally in Egypt’s area of influence and, usually, of control; but for a period during the eighth century, Egypt was ruled by an Ethiopian dynasty (Geoffrey F. Grogan, *Isaiah, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein General Editor, Volume 6, Zondervan, Grand Rapids: 1986, p. 122).

Isaiah 18:3 reads.

All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will see it, and when a trumpet sounds, you will hear it (Isaiah 18:3 NIV)

The word translated “banner” here is supposedly referring to the Ark. Yet this passage has been fulfilled long ago. It is *not* talking about a future time, nor is it speaking of the Ark. David F. Payne writes.

Chapters 18 ff. are concerned with Egypt but ch. 18 names the people of Ethiopia (Cush), because it was an Ethiopians Dynasty which came to power in Egypt in 715 B.C. Evidently the Ethiopian King Piankhi, had sent ambassadors to the king of Judah, Hezekiah; we can be certain their purpose was to involve Judah in a coalition against the Assyrians. Isaiah warns Hezekiah against any such folly, by providing God’s answer to the ambassadors. They are to go back home, to their land renowned for both its profusion of insects, and also for its tall and warlike people. For all their military prowess and their distance from Assyria, the people of Ethiopia are not safe; God Himself has spoken and it is a word of doom and destruction (David F. Payne, *The New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, Editors G.C.D. Howley, F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellison, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979, p. 784).

Verses 1-6 saw its fulfillment long ago at the fall of Assyria. It has nothing to do with the future as far as we are concerned. Geoffrey F. Grogan writes.

Chapters 18-20. . . all deal with Egypt and Cush, which were one at this time . . . the doom is really pictured as falling on Assyria. . . The message given to the messengers had universal application, for the whole world would reverberate at the trumpet blasting Assyria’s fall (v.3). The banner and trumpet (addressing the eye and ear) represent the call to rally for battle (Grogan, *ibid.*, pp. 122,123).

Isaiah 18:7 does speak of a future time when Ethiopians come and bear gifts. This is the age when Jerusalem is the city of the great King (the Millennium). Commenting on Isaiah 18:7 David F. Payne writes.

Verse 7 is addressed to the reader, not to the envoys; it looks beyond the immediate fate of the Ethiopian and Egyptian armies (defeated by the Assyrians in 701 B.C.). Ultimately, the prophet reminds his readers, God intends that even such a distant nation as the Ethiopians shall worship the Lord of hosts, bringing their offerings to the Jerusalem temple. God’s final purposes in history are those of a worshipping people drawn from all nations; cf. 66:23 (David F. Payne, *ibid.*, p. 784).

The “gift” the Ethiopians bring is possibly their own presence. Derek Kidner observes.

The final verse seems to look beyond the immediate crisis of Assyrian aggression which had brought the envoys to Jerusalem. Isaiah now sees the travelers in a new light, as the first of many who will come to Zion one day in homage (the Heb. lacking the word from in v. 7a suggests that they will be themselves the homage gift). It is the prospect already

seen in 2:3; 11:10; it will be further developed in chs. 60-62 (Derek Kidner, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Moyer, A.M. Stibbs, D.J. Wiseman, Third Edition, Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1970, p. 601).

This will happen at a future time when the Messiah is ruling in Jerusalem through His Temple. Geoffrey W. Grogan comments.

The very people who, from their position of strength, had sent word to Judah to secure her cooperation in a military venture would come again with gifts for the true God in Zion. This picture (cf. 45:15 and also Pss 68:31; 87:4; Zeph 3:10) is a specific illustration of the general vision in passages like 2:1-4 and 60:1-14 of Zion as the religious center of the whole world (Grogan, *ibid.*, p. 123).

In verse 7 Isaiah is speaking of a time when the Lord is ruling from Jerusalem and former enemies, from the area of Ethiopia and beyond, are bringing him *gifts* (plural).

Other passages often cited as predicting the return of the Ark (Ezekiel 39:21,22, Zephaniah 3:9,10, Jeremiah 4:6, Isaiah 11:11,12) are likewise unconvincing.

The idea, therefore, that the Ark still exists in Ethiopia seems highly unlikely, it is also unlikely that these passages are referring to its return to Israel in the last days.

CHAPTER 29

WHY THE ARK IS NO LONGER NECESSARY

The Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred object in Israel's history, disappeared some 2,600 years ago. Perhaps it will someday reappear. Maybe it is forever lost. Whatever the case may be, the Ark of the Covenant is no longer necessary for us today. This is because the promises that the Ark represented have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Promise Of God

In the Old Testament, God made a promise that He would dwell among His people. The Lord said:

I want the people of Israel to build me a sacred residence where I can live among them (Exodus 25:8 NLT).

In the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple, God's presence was manifested through the Ark of the Covenant which symbolized His presence in a special way.

Yet the Ark pointed to an even greater reality—the time when God would personally come down and visit our planet. The Bible testifies that God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ:

The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 HCSB).

The True Bread From Heaven

The manna in the wilderness was gathered in the golden pot that was placed in the Ark. This spoke of Jesus Christ the "true bread from heaven." This is the claim of Jesus Himself.

We read the following in the Gospel of John:

Jesus then told them, "I tell you for certain that Moses wasn't the one who gave you bread from heaven. My Father is the one who gives you the true bread from heaven. And the bread that God gives is the one who came down from heaven to give life to the world." The people said, "Lord, give us this bread and don't ever stop!" Jesus replied: I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No one who has faith in me will ever be thirsty (John 6:32-35 CEV).

Thus, the bread, or manna, was a representation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Spoke Of A New Covenant

Jesus spoke of a new covenant between God and the human race—a covenant which He would establish. On the night of His betrayal we read the following:

Jesus picked up a cup of wine and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this and drink it. This is my blood, and with it God makes his agreement with you. It will be poured out, so that many people will have their sins forgiven” (Matthew 26:27,28 CEV).

The covenant between God and His people was to be made with blood. Once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement, blood was sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat—the Atonement Cover. The blood of bulls and goats could only cover up sin. The death of Christ *took away* the sins of the world. The Bible says:

Once for all time he took blood into that Most Holy Place, but not the blood of goats and calves. He took his own blood, and with it he secured our salvation forever (Hebrews 9:12 NLT).

Jesus Christ is the means of forgiveness of sins in the New Covenant sprinkled not with the blood of animals but with His own blood. At Calvary’s cross, God made satisfaction for our sins:

He is the sacrifice for our sins. He takes away not only our sins but the sins of all the world (1 John 2:2 NLT).

When Christ died upon the cross, the veil of the Temple separating the Holy place from the Holy of Holies was torn in half:

Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked and the rocks were split (Matthew 27:51 HCSB).

This signified that humankind now had direct access to God, there was no longer a veil keeping Him out. The sins that previously had only been “covered up” could now be taken away.

There Was Only One Door

The Tabernacle, as well as the Temple, had only one door by which a person could enter and have access to God. To enter into this new covenant, you must come through the door that God has provided. Jesus said He Himself was that door:

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture (John 10:9 HCSB).

The Ark of the Covenant, made out of wood and covered with gold, is no longer necessary for humanity. The access to God has now been made complete through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion To Our Study

We close our study of the Ark of the Covenant with the words of 19th century Bible commentator Samuel Ridout:

May Christ, the Ark of the Covenant, be increasingly dear, as the One who in Himself contains all our treasures, and who will keep them and us safe till the day of glory and of joy, to the praise of His grace.¹

Endnotes For Chapter 29

1. Samuel Ridout, *Lectures on the Tabernacle*, New York: Loizeaux Publishers, 1914, p. 266.

Christ is the mediator of a better covenant—a covenant that will be kept because it is between God the Father and Himself.

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15 NRSV).

The New Testament speaks of the one who makes the covenant:

In order for a will to take effect, it must be shown that the one who made it has died. A will is used only after a person is dead because it goes into effect only when a person dies. That is why even the first promise was made with blood (Hebrews 9:16-18 God's Word).

The promise that God would dwell with His people will be completely fulfilled when Christ returns:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them (Revelation 21:3 NET).

APPENDIX 1

BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The following is a basic history of the Ark of the Covenant as recorded in the Bible:

MT. SINAI

God gives directions to Moses for the Ark's construction.
Exodus 25:10-22

The Ark is ordered to be placed in the Holy of Holies.
Exodus 26:34; 40:3

Moses orders the Ark to be constructed.
Exodus 35:12

The Ark is constructed by Bezaleel.
Exodus 38:1-9

The Ark is brought to Moses by the Israelites.
Exodus 39:35

The Ten Commandments are placed inside the Ark by Moses.
Deuteronomy 10:1-5; Exodus 40:20

The Ark is placed in the Tabernacle by Moses.
Exodus 40:21

The Ark is ordained to be the meeting-place between God and Moses.
Numbers 7:89; Exodus 25:22

The Ark to be anointed with the Holy Oil.
Exodus 30:26; 40:9

The Ark is anointed when the priests are consecrated.
Leviticus 8:10

Aaron is not able to approach the Ark whenever he wishes.
Leviticus 17:2

The blood is to be sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, and before the Mercy Seat,
once a year by the High Priest on the Great Day of Atonement.
Leviticus 17:2

The Kohathite Levites are to be in charge of the Ark.
Numbers 3:31

The Ark is to be covered before marching.
Numbers 4:5,6

The usual place of the Ark in the procession.
Numbers 10:21

WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

The Ark leaves Mt. Sinai.
Numbers 10:33-36

The Ark remains in the camp of Israel.
Numbers 14:44

Aaron's rod is placed before the Ark.
Numbers 17:10

The Ark was possibly taken to battle under Phineas.
Numbers 31:6

Moses orders the Levites to put the book of the Law in the Ark.
Deuteronomy 31:9-26

THE ARK IN THE PROMISED LAND

The waters of the Jordan are divided by the Ark.
Joshua 3,4

The Ark leads the procession around the walls of Jericho.
Joshua 6

The walls fall down in the presence of the Ark.
Joshua 6

Israel loses battle with Ai. Joshua prostrates himself in the presence of the Ark.
Joshua 7

The Ark stands between Ebal and Gerizim as the blessings and cursings are read.
Joshua 8:30-35; Deuteronomy 26:11-26

Joshua camps at Gilgal where he directs the battles for the land of Canaan.
Joshua 9:6; 10:7-43

The Tabernacle and the Ark are brought to Shiloh.
Joshua 18

Joshua gathers all Israel and the Tabernacle to Shechem. The Ark may have remained behind in Shiloh.
Joshua 24:21-26

The Tabernacle and the Ark are at Shiloh during the days of Samuel and Eli.

Judges 20:18-26; 1 Samuel 3:3

The High Priest Phineas received counsel from the Lord concerning the civil war with the tribe of Benjamin.

Judges 20:27

The Ark is taken to battle and is captured by the Philistines.

1 Samuel 4; Psalm 78:60,61

The Ark is taken to the Philistine city of Ashdod. In the house of Dagon at Ashdod, the idol of Dagon falls before the Ark.

1 Samuel 5:1-8

The Ark is sent to Ekron where the people are plagued.

1 Samuel 5:8-12; 6:1-2

The Ark is placed in a new cart and goes by Beth Shemesh. The men of Beth Shemesh die after looking into the Ark.

1 Samuel 6:9-20

The Ark is taken to Kirjath Jearim and remains there 20 years.

1 Samuel 6:21; 7:1,2

Saul consults the Ark in Gibeah where it must have been previously moved.

1 Samuel 14:16-18

The Ark is back in Kirjath Jearim.

2 Samuel 6

Uzzah dies while touching the Ark.

2 Samuel 6:11

The Ark remains in the house of Obed-Edom for three months.

1 Chronicles 13:14

David prepares a place in Jerusalem for the Ark.

2 Samuel 6:12-23

David wishes to build a house for the Ark, but God does not allow it.

2 Samuel 7:2

David has an affair with Bathsheba. Her husband Uriah refuses to stay in his own house because Israel and the Ark are living in tents.

2 Samuel 11:11

David flees Jerusalem with the Ark because of the rebellion of his son Absalom. David sends the Ark back to Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 15:24,25

In Search Of The Lost Ark

Solomon builds the Temple on Mt. Moriah to house the Ark.
2 Chronicles 3:1

The Ark is brought from Mt. Zion to permanent resting place on Mt. Moriah.
2 Chronicles 5

The Ark is placed in the Temple.
1 Kings 8

Solomon moved his pagan wife away from the area of the Ark.
2 Chronicles 8:11

Josiah orders the Ark to be returned to Temple. This is the last historical reference to the Ark.
2 Chronicles 35:3

The Ark is mentioned in reference with the Tabernacle.
Hebrews 8

The Ark of the Covenant in Heaven is highlighted.
Revelation 11

About The Author

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over seventy books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies. His available books can be found on his website www.educatingourworld.com.

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