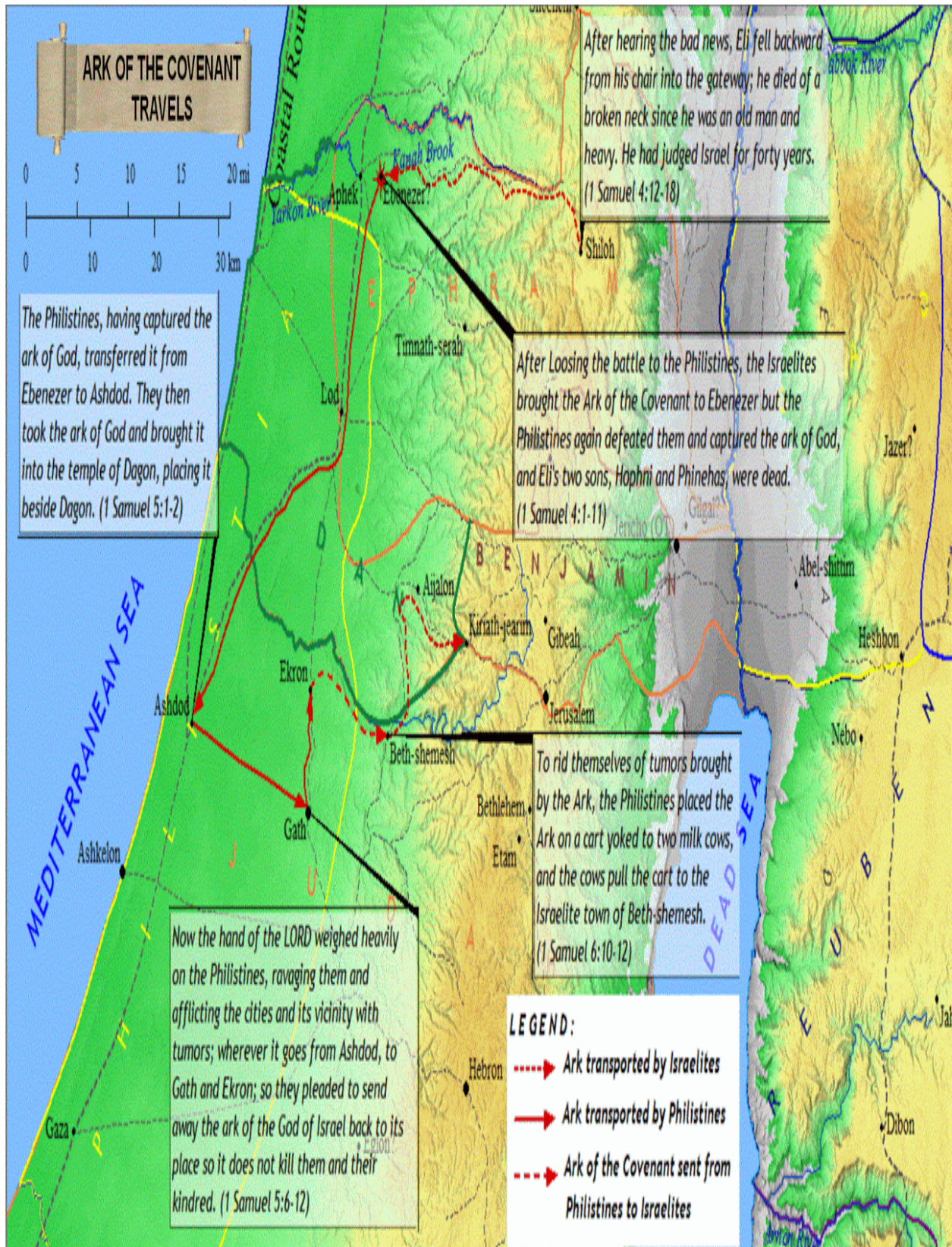


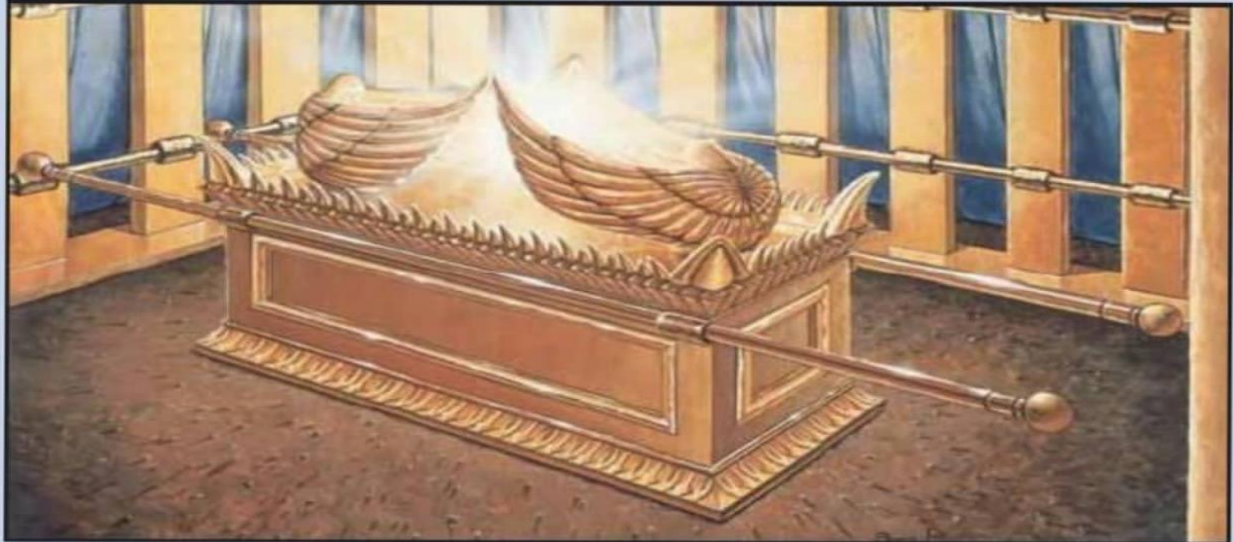
The Lost Ark of the Covenant

By David Lee Burris





The Ark of the Covenant



- The Ark of the Covenant was made of acacia wood and covered with gold. The Ark was the first item of furniture constructed after God told Moses to build the Tabernacle. It was the place where God met with and talked with MOSES (Exodus 25:10-22).
- The Tabernacle was built to house the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was intended to be the central focus of the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle, and 400 years later in the Temple (Ex. 40:1-21).
- The Ark of the Covenant rested in the Most Holy Place behind a thick curtain. This heavy veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus' death (Exodus 26:31-33; Matthew 27:50, 51).
- God set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark and stand before him, to serve him, and to bless his name. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place. He entered once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, to sacrifice and to sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat to atone for the sins of the people (Deut. 10:8; Lev. 16; Ex. 37:6-9).
- The Mercy Seat was placed on top of the Ark of the Covenant. It included the winged cherubim that faced each other. God dwelled between the cherubim and spoke to the priest (2 Samuel 6:2 and Psalm 99:1).
- There are two lists in Scripture about the contents of the Ark of the Covenant.
 - Hebrews 9:4 says that the Ark contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments (the "tables of the covenant"), a golden jar (pot) of manna, Aaron's rod (stick) that budded.
 - Exodus 25:16 and Deuteronomy 10:5 list the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. Other verses mention that a jar of manna (Exodus 16:32-34) and Aaron's rod (Numbers 17:10) were laid before the testimony and were to be kept for future generations.

Atonement for Sins

	OLD COVENANT (OLD TESTAMENT)		NEW COVENANT (NEW TESTAMENT)	
Type of Sacrifice	Blood of animals	Exodus 12:5 Leviticus 1-7	Blood of Jesus	Hebrews 9:12; 13:12 1 John 1:7
Quality of Sacrifice	Not enough Offered over and over	Leviticus 1-7 Hebrews 9:7-9; 10:4	Enough Offered just once	Hebrews 9:12, 26
Quantity of Sacrifice	Many	Leviticus 1-7 Hebrews 10:1	One	Hebrews 9:25, 26
Effectiveness	For a day, for a year	Exodus 29-30 Hebrews 10:1-4	Forever	Hebrews 7:26, 27 Hebrews 9:12-15
Action or Result	Temporary	Exodus 30:10 Hebrews 9:25	Final	Romans 6:10 Hebrews 9:25-28

1. Dimensions, &c of. Ex 25:10; 37:1.
2. Entirely covered with gold. Ex 25:11; 37:2.
3. Surrounded with a crown of gold. Ex 25:11.
4. Furnished with rings and staves. Ex 25:12–15; 37:3–5.
5. Tables of testimony alone placed in. Ex 25:16, 21; 1 Ki 8:9, 21; 2 Ch 5:10; Heb 9:4.
6. Mercy-seat laid upon. Ex 25:21; 26:34.
7. Placed in the Holy of Holies. Ex 26:33; 40:21; Heb 9:3, 4.
8. The pot of manna and Aaron's rod laid up before. Heb 9:4; Ex 16:33, 34; Nu 17:10.
9. A copy of the law laid in the side of. De 31:26.
10. Anointed with sacred oil. Ex 30:26.
11. Covered with the vail by the priests before removal. Nu 4:5, 6.
12. Was called the
 - a. Ark of God. 1 Sa 3:3.
 - b. Ark of God's strength. 2 Ch 6:41; Ps 132:8.
 - c. Ark of the covenant of the Lord. Nu 10:33.
 - d. Ark of the testimony. Ex 30:6; Nu 7:89.
13. A symbol of the presence and glory of God. Nu 14:43, 44; Jos 1:6; 1 Sa 14:18, 19; Ps 132:8.
14. Esteemed the glory of Israel. 1 Sa 4:21, 22.
15. Was holy. 2 Ch 35:3.
16. Sanctified its resting place. 2 Ch 8:11.
17. The Israelites enquired of the Lord before. Jos 7:6–9; Jdj 20:27; 1 Ch 13:3.
18. Was carried
 - a. By priests of Levites alone. De 10:8; Jos 3:14; 2 Sa 15:24; 1 Ch 15:2.
 - b. Before the Israelites in their journeys. Nu 10:33; Jos 3:6.
 - c. Sometimes to the camp in war. 1 Sa 4:4, 5.
19. Profanation of, punished. Nu 4:5, 15; 1 Sa 6:19; 1 Ch 15:13.
20. Protecting of, rewarded. 1 Ch 13:14.
21. Captured by the Philistines. 1 Sa 4:11.
22. Miracles connected with
 - a. Jordan divided. Jos 4:7.
 - b. Fall of the walls of Jericho. Jos 6:6–20.
 - c. Fall of Dagon. 1 Sa 5:1–4.
 - d. Philistines plagued. 1 Sa 5:6–12.
 - e. Manner of its restoration. 1 Sa 6:1–18.
23. At Kirjath-jearim twenty years. 1 Sa 7:1, 2.
24. Removed from Kirjath-jearim to the house of Obed-edom. 2 Sa 6:1–11.
25. David made a tent for. 2 Sa 6:17; 1 Ch 15:1.
26. Brought into the city of David. 2 Sa 6:12–15; 1 Ch 15:25–28.
27. Brought by Solomon into the temple with great solemnity. 1 Ki 8:1–6; 2 Ch 5:2–9.
28. A type of Christ. Ps 40:8; Re 11:19.¹

¹ Torrey, R. A. (2001). [*The new topical text book: A scriptural text book for the use of ministers, teachers, and all Christian workers.*](#) Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Bible Software.

"Contradictions" Regarding the Ark of the Covenant

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D.](#)



How does the “20 years” reference in 1 Samuel 7:2 harmonize with the fact that the ark was not brought from Kirjath-jearim until 2 Samuel 6:4—more than 40 years later?

Even though God’s Word can be substantially communicated from one language to another, the translation process is sufficiently complex to the extent that many of the subtleties of the parent language are lost in translation. These subtleties rarely, if ever, involve matters that are critical to the central purpose of revelation. However, apparent discrepancies on minor details can surface that require a careful re-examination of the actual linguistic data of the parent language (in this case Hebrew) in order to dissolve the apparent discrepancy.

The individual clauses of 1 Samuel 7:2-3 are linked in Hebrew by “*waw* consecutives” that bring the statements into close logical and temporal connection. The three verbs of verse two are a continuation of the infinitive, which points to the main sentence being resumed in verse three (“and Samuel spoke”). The gist of these grammatical data is that the writer is informing us that after the ark’s capture, the people endured Philistine oppression for the next twenty years. Though all Israel “lamented after the Lord,” He allowed the Israelites to continue their suffering at the hands of the Philistines for 20 years—at which time Samuel called upon the nation to put away its idols.

First Samuel describes the final years of the period of the judges. **The reliance upon the ark as a sort of mystical talisman brought swift military tragedy, precipitating yet another period of foreign oppression by Israel’s enemies due to their own apostasy.** This period of Philistine preeminence went on for twenty years before the lamentations of God’s people were finally heard. At the end of the twenty years, Samuel called on them to couple their lamentations with genuine penitence (1 Samuel 7:3). When they put away their idolatry (vs. 4), they once again enjoyed the services of the judge (vs. 6), who assisted them in throwing off Philistine oppression by military defeat (vss. 10ff.).

Thus the twenty years refers—not to the total number of years that the ark remained in Kirjath-jearim—but merely to the number of years the ark was in Kirjath-jearim before the Lord chose to hear the people’s lamentations and provide them with intervention through Samuel.



Photo: Levant Photo Service

A stone carving that may represent the Ark of the Covenant, discovered at the excavation of a synagogue in Capernaum.²

² Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In [Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary](#). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

The Ark of the Covenant – Its Significance

TITLE: The Ark of the Covenant

PROPOSITION: We will discuss the ark of the covenant, its 1) Form, 2) Function, and 3) Fame.

INTRODUCTION:

1. Read: [Exodus 25:10-16](#)
2. About the Text:
 - 1) “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” ([Exodus 25:8](#)).
 - 2) The Ark of the Covenant refers to a piece of furniture that was made for the tabernacle.
 - 3) It was in the most holy place where only the high priest was permitted once a year.
 - 4) It was the “mercy seat” of God.

I. FORM

1. The word “ark” means “box.”
 - 1) The English word comes from the Latin “Arca.”
 - 2) Noah’s Ark – “And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits” ([Genesis 6:15](#)).

- 3) The ark into which Moses was put as a child: “But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank” ([Exodus 2:3](#)).
2. The ark of the covenant was a wooden box – “And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height” ([Exodus 25:10](#)).
3. It was overlaid with gold – “And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around” ([Exodus 25:11](#)).
4. It was designed to be carried with poles – “You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it” ([Exodus 25:12-15](#)).
5. The 10 Commandments/Testimony was to be put inside of it – “And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you” ([Exodus 25:16](#)).
6. The ark of the covenant had a top called “The Mercy Seat” – “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width” ([Exodus 25:17](#)).

7. It had two cherubim on the top – “And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat” ([Exodus 25:18](#)).
8. The top of the ark was to be placed on the ark – “You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you” ([Exodus 25:21](#)).
9. The ark sat in the most holy place of the tabernacle and later the temple – “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. You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy” ([Exodus 26:33-34](#)).

II. FUNCTION

1. The “mercy seat.”

- 1) “And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel” ([Exodus 25:22](#)).
- 2) “Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him” ([Numbers 7:89](#)).

2. The Day of Atonement

- 1) The ark was used to atone for the sins of the priests and the people.
- 2) The instructions for this day's activities are found in Leviticus 16.
- 3) First, the high priest washed and changed into white linen clothing ([Leviticus 16:4](#)).
- 4) He then offered a bull as a sin offering for himself and his house ([Leviticus 16:6](#)).
- 5) Next, he offered incense to fill the most holy place with smoke ([Leviticus 16:13](#)).
- 6) God commanded him to bring two goats, one for a sin offering and the other to escape into the wilderness ([Leviticus 16:7-10](#)).
- 7) He took the blood from the bull and goat and sprinkled it on the mercy seat ([Leviticus 16:14-15](#)).
- 8) No one was to enter while he did this ([Leviticus 16:17](#)).
- 9) "For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" ([Leviticus 16:30](#)).

3. It held the items of God's covenant with His people.

- 1) The 10 Commandments – "So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand. And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the Lord had spoken to you in the mountain from

the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. 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 10:3-5](#)).

- 2) The rod of Aaron that budded – “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.’ Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did” ([Numbers 17:10-11](#)).
- 3) A pot of manna – “And Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations.’ As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept” ([Exodus 16:33-34](#)).

III. FAME

1. The ark of the covenant was just a physical “thing” God used for a purpose.
 - 1) To provide a place for communication between God and man.
 - 2) To emphasize God’s holiness.
 - 3) To mediate forgiveness of sins until Jesus’ sacrifice.
 - 4) It also served as a historical reminder of the history of Israel.
2. It is lost to history.

- 1) We don't know what happened to the Ark of the Covenant.
- 2) Josiah restored it to the temple in [2 Chronicles 35:3](#) around 640 B.C.
- 3) It disappeared after his rule never to return according to Jeremiah's prophecy.
- 4) Jeremiah prophesied at this time that the ark would no longer be in the temple in the future – “Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days,” says the Lord, “that they will say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore.” ([Jeremiah 3:16](#)).

3. The ark was a shadow of better things to come.

- 1) “who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’” ([Hebrews 8:5](#)).
- 2) “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” ([Hebrews 10:1](#)).

4. The real throne of God is in heaven.

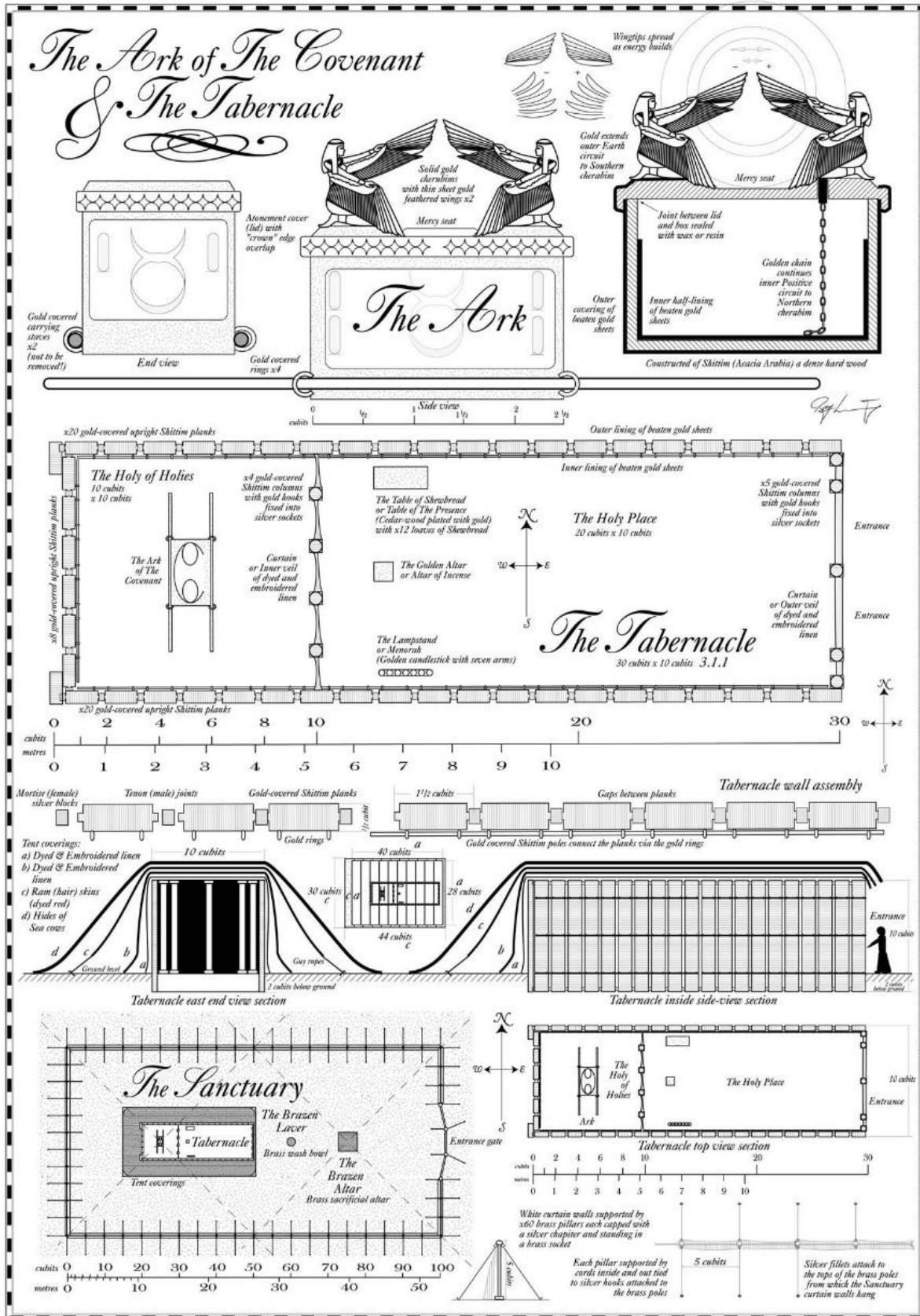
- 1) “The Lord is in His holy temple, The Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men” ([Psalm 11:4](#)).

- 2) “Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?” ([Isaiah 66:1](#))
- 3) “But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne” ([Matthew 5:34](#)).

5. Our high priest today is Jesus.

- 1) “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” ([Hebrews 2:17](#)).
- 2) “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever” ([Hebrews 7:26-28](#)).
- 3) “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: we have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” ([Hebrews 8:1-2](#)).

- New Boston Church of Christ



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 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). God honored David for his desire to build a more lasting structure to house the Ark. But David was told by the Lord 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.

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

Then 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 Chron 28:2,3). 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. To house the Ark, he constructed one of the most magnificent structures in the ancient world—the Temple of Jerusalem.

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). 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). 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). 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 (2nd Chron 5:3-5). 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). 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 (2 Chronicles 5: 7-9). 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.

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). 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 Wasn't 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 Chron 6:18). Solomon also repeated the wilderness prayer of Moses. He said.

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). The Ark now rested in the Temple with only the poles visible.

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). 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 Carved Cherubim Are Placed In The Holy Of Holies

A new feature was added to the inside of the Holy of Holies: two giant cherubim 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).

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. They were to offer their sacrifices in Jerusalem in times of famine, drought, war; for sins; and during festivals. The temple of Solomon was an undertaking that deepened the relationship between the city of David and the people of Israel.

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 with them into battle forever ceased. From this time onward, the historical references concerning the Ark of the Covenant are few.

Stewart, Don. In Search of the Lost Ark: The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant (pp. 149-154). Educating Our World. Kindle Edition.

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.

During the third siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. the armies of king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed both the city and its 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? 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 of Babylon 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.**

Stewart, Don. In Search of the Lost Ark: The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant (pp. 163-165). Educating Our World. Kindle Edition.

The Second Temple Period. The city of Jerusalem had been judged for its idolatry. The magnificent Temple, built by Solomon, had been destroyed and the people were in exile. Yet this would be temporary. The people were soon returned to their land and a Second Temple was constructed.

Seventy years after their expulsion, the people returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. The Temple restoration was their major focus of attention.

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 then 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 taken by Nebuchadnezzar were returned. We read about this in the Book of Ezra. It says.

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. 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. *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. The old Temple continued to be in regular use during 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 Showbread Table, 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.

The Bible says.

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. 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. 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.**

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 Thummin, (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.” 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 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 Jewish 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. 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.

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. (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 & 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 & 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 his magnificent apparel and mounted on a horse that was itself a site worth seeing. **The Ark is nowhere to be found among the items taken from the Second Temple by the Romans. Its fate remained unrecorded.**

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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 - not the 10 Commandments?

Various Theories Of The Ark's Purpose

- 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. An ancient war machine.**
- 5. A container for the Ten Commandments as well as a representation of God's presence.**

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 was confined to the Ark does not fit the facts. The Bible 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). 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). 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

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.

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.

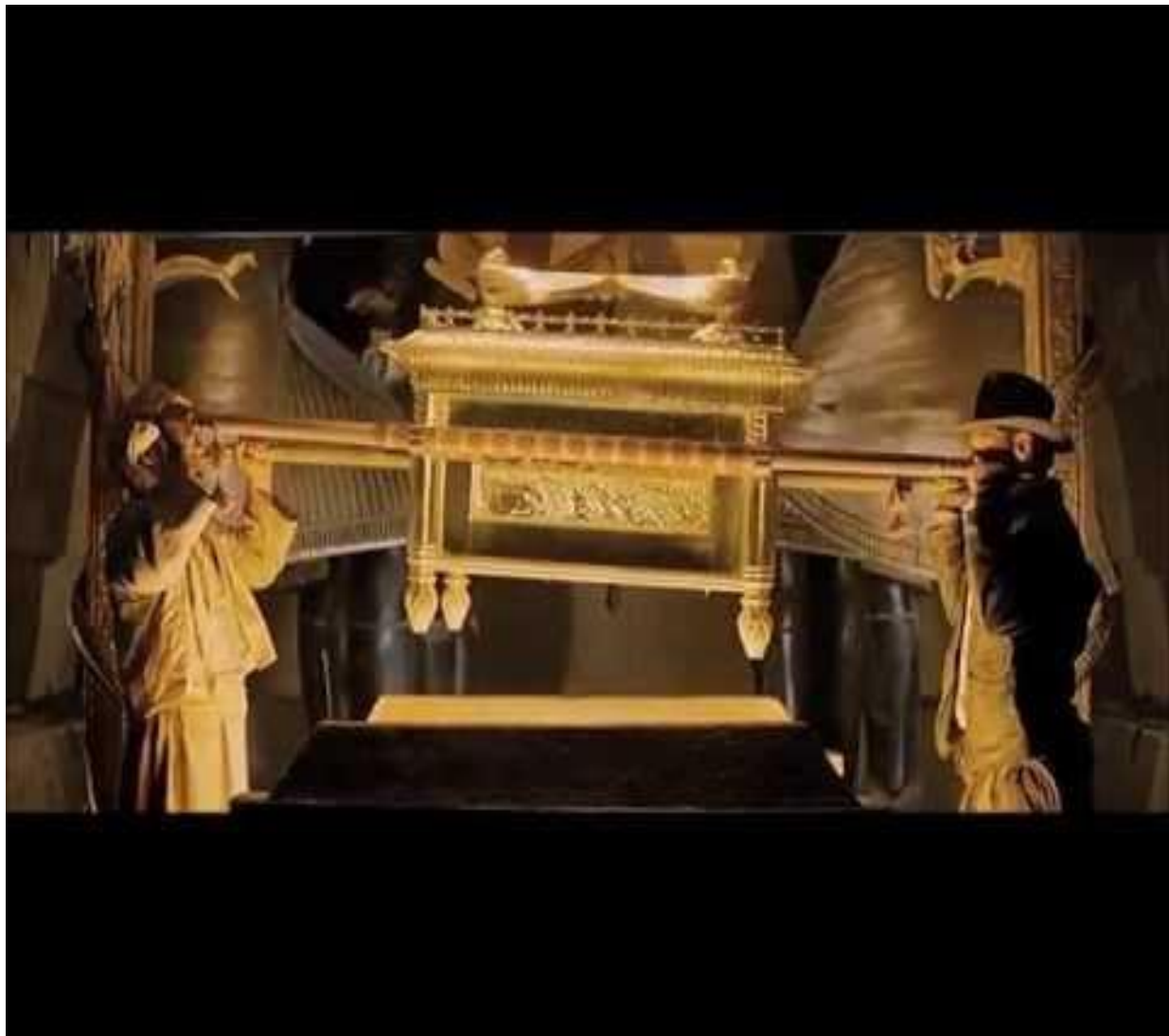
So, the Philistines fought. Israel was defeated; they all ran home. The slaughter was very great; thirty-thousand foot soldiers fell in battle. The ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, were killed (1 Samuel 4:10,11).

Option 4: 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.

THE LOST ARK WAS NOT AS IN THE MOVIES:





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). 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).



Option 5: 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).

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 glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God has been captured" (1 Samuel 4:22). 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. It says.

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). 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

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.

Lessons from the Ark of the Covenant

By **Wayne Jackson**



When the children of Israel were delivered from Egyptian servitude, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. There Jehovah gave them a temporary house of worship—the tabernacle (tent).

The tabernacle consisted of two rooms: first, the holy place, in which the priests ministered daily; then, the most holy place, into which the high priest went annually on the day of atonement.

Within this inner compartment was a small chest called the ark of the covenant. Several items connected with this ark provide valuable lessons for the people of God today (cf. Rom. 15:4; Heb. 9:9).

The ark of the covenant housed a small pot of manna (Ex. 16:32-33), Aaron's staff (Num. 17:10), and the two tables of stone containing the Ten Commandments. See the reference to these items in Hebrews 9:4b.

Covering the ark was a lid designated as the mercy-seat (Exodus 25:17). Above the mercy-seat were two golden cherubim (plural of "cherub"), representing a certain order of angels (vv. 18ff; cf. Gen. 3:24). Let us ponder several of these items.

The God Who Sustains

As the children of Israel wandered in the barren wilderness of Sinai for forty years, the Lord provided the vast multitude (some two million people) with daily food, the main item of which was a “bread from heaven” (Ex. 16:4) called manna (cf. v. 15, ASVfn).

As the tabernacle arrangement was initiated later, a small container of this manna was to be deposited in the ark of the covenant (16:33-34). This was designed to be a reminder of the need to trust God as a provider and to establish Jehovah’s credibility as the only true God (v. 12).

At some point across the years, this container of manna disappeared; when the temple of Solomon was dedicated, there was nothing remaining in the ark except the two tables of stone (1 Kgs. 8:9).

The lesson for us is this. Just as God sustained his people under the former covenant, so he will today as well under the better covenant—not by miraculous means, but through the grace of his providence (cf. Mt. 6:11; Phil. 4:19).

Respect for Authority

Numbers 16 contains the sad narrative regarding Korah, a kinsman of Moses, and his companions. These men resented the authority with which Moses and Aaron had been endowed. They suggested that the two brothers had “taken too much” upon themselves, and that the entire congregation was as “holy” as they (vv. 2-3).

These rebels had ambitions to be priests rather than being content with their lot as Levites (v. 10). But their attempt to overthrow Moses and Aaron was short-lived. Jehovah destroyed those who opposed his delegated leaders (vv. 28-35).

Subsequently, instruction was given that a rod was to be taken from each of the twelve tribes. These were to be placed in the most holy place. God would show by a miracle who his representative was.

The following morning revealed that Aaron's rod had blossomed and bore ripe almonds; the others had not. A command thus was issued that Aaron's rod was to be placed in the ark as a warning against further rebellion (17:10).

There are divinely appointed levels of authority today—in society, in the home, and in the church. Aaron's rod speaks even today, warning those who would flout the authority of those so recognized by the Lord.

Objective Law

During the Patriarchal era of biblical history, God spoke to some via prophets, and the instruction of the divine spokesman constituted a source of moral and religious obligation for those to whom such was revealed.

Apparently others, though, were judged by how they responded to the inner urgings of their conscience. Paul alluded to such in his epistle to the Romans. Therein he argued that the Gentiles, who possessed no written law, had a conscience, which, to a degree, would accuse or excuse them (see Rom. 2:14-15). They were to be sensitive to that divinely designed moral instrument, the soul, that has a sense of right versus wrong.

The Hebrews had a written law (the Ten Commandments of which was the core). The lesson for Christians is that we too have a codified body of sacred law that lifts us to a higher level of religious responsibility than did the pagans of antiquity.

To ignore that law, as many do—under the guise that we are now under grace and not under law—is a fatal mistake (see Rom. 4:15; 8:2; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 1:25; 2 Jn. 9).

The Covering of Mercy

As noted earlier, there was a covering over the ark called the mercy-seat. There are several facts relating to this object that are of paramount importance.

First, it was above the mercy-seat that Jehovah promised to focus his presence on behalf of Israel (Ex. 25:22).

Second, it should be remembered that just below were the tables on which the commandments were written.

Third, these tables stood as a constant reminder that no Israelite could be justified by perfectly observing of the law (see Gal. 3:10), thus all stood condemned.

Fourth, in a manner of speaking, the mercy-seat shielded the view of the holy God from the condemnation of the law.

Fifth, the mercy-seat was sprinkled with blood by the high priest yearly on the day of atonement, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the nation (Lev. 16:11ff). It was this ritual, performed “year by year” (Heb. 10:3), that enabled Jehovah to preserve his justice yet extend his mercy until the death of Christ should occur, thus providing a permanent redemptive system (Heb. 9:24ff).

This is why the mercy-seat was designated as the “propitiatory” (Heb. 9:5; see ASVfn). It served, in effect, as a visual aid, an object lesson, pointing to the reality of the sacrifice of Jesus, whose blood provides the ultimate and final atonement for sin.

It might be helpful at this point if we would expand somewhat upon the term “propitiation.” Behind the English word is a family of kindred Greek terms. There is, for example, the noun, *hilasmos*, rendered “propitiation” and applied to the role of Jesus (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

Similarly, the related word, *hilasterion*, is used by Paul. The apostle declares that Christians have been “justified freely by his [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through the faith, in his blood” (Rom. 3:24-25).

When men yield to the conditions of “the faith,” i.e., the gospel system, the atoning effect of Jesus’ blood allows God’s justice to be satisfied (cf. Isa. 53:11) and pardon extended. How wonderful that is!

THE ARK OF COVENANT

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.

What happened to the Ark of the Covenant?

What happened to the Ark of the Covenant is a question that's fascinated theologians, Bible students, and archeologists for centuries. In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah of Judah ordered the caretakers of the Ark of the Covenant to return it to the temple in Jerusalem ([2 Chronicles 35:1-6](#); cf. [2 Kings 23:21-23](#)). That is the last time the ark's location is mentioned in the Scriptures. Forty years later, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem and raided the temple. Less than ten years after that, he returned, took what was left in the temple, and then burnt it and the city to the ground.

So, what happened to the ark? Was it taken by Nebuchadnezzar? Was it destroyed with the city? Or was it removed and hidden safely away, as evidently happened when Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt raided the temple during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam? ("Evidently" because, if Shishak had managed to take the Ark, why did Josiah ask the Levites to return it? If the Ark was in Egypt—à la the plotline of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—the Levites would not have possessed it and therefore could not have returned it.)

Interestingly, [Revelation 11:19](#) mentions the ark as being in heaven: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm." This verse has led some to speculate that the ark was taken up to heaven to be preserved there. But the ark that John sees in his vision of heaven is probably not the same ark that Moses constructed. We know that the articles in the tabernacle were "copies of the heavenly things" ([Hebrews 9:23](#)) and that the sanctuary itself was but "a copy and shadow of what is in heaven" ([Hebrews 8:5](#)). [Revelation 11](#) deals with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which ushers in a final round of judgments upon the earth. John's glimpse of the ark is probably meant as a reminder that God has not forgotten His people, that He is present with them.

The non-canonical book of 2 Maccabees reports that just prior to the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah, "following a divine revelation, ordered that the tabernacle and the ark should accompany him and...he went off to the mountain which Moses climbed to see God's inheritance [i.e., Mt. Nebo; cf. [Deuteronomy 34:1](#)]. When Jeremiah arrived there, he found a room in a cave in which he put the tent, the ark, and the altar of incense; then he blocked up the entrance" (2:4-5). However, "Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the path, but they could not find it.

When Jeremiah heard of this, he reproved them: 'The place is to remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy. Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord will be seen in the cloud, just as it appeared in the time of Moses and when Solomon prayed that the Temple might be gloriously sanctified'" (2:6-8). It is not known if this secondhand (see 2:1) account is accurate; even if it is, we will not know until the Lord comes back, as the account itself claims.

Other theories concerning the whereabouts of the lost ark include Rabbis Shlomo Goren and Yehuda Getz's claim that it is hidden beneath the temple mount, having been buried there before Nebuchadnezzar could steal it away. Unfortunately, the temple mount is now home to the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic holy site, and the local Muslim community refuses to allow it to be excavated. So, we cannot know if Rabbis Goren and Getz are correct.

Explorer Vendyl Jones, among others, believes that an artifact found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the enigmatic "Copper Scroll" of Qumran Cave 3, is actually a treasure map of sorts detailing the location of a number of precious treasures taken from the temple before the Babylonians arrived, among them the lost Ark of the Covenant. Whether or not this is true remains to be seen, as no one has yet been able to locate all of the necessary geographical landmarks listed on the scroll. Interestingly, **some scholars speculate that the Copper Scroll may actually be the record referred to in [2 Maccabees 2:1](#) and [4](#), which describes Jeremiah hiding the ark.** While this is an interesting speculation, it remains unsubstantiated.

Former East African correspondent for "The Economist," Graham Hancock, published a book in 1992 entitled *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, in which he argued that the ark had been stowed away in Saint Mary of Zion's Church in Aksum, an ancient city of Ethiopia. Explorer Robert Cornuke of the B.A.S.E. Institute, also believes the Ark may now reside in Aksum. However, no one has yet found it there. A doubtful Irish tradition maintains that the Ark is buried under the Hill of Tara in Ireland. Some scholars believe that this is the source of the Irish "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" legend. Even less believable are the claims of Ron Wyatt and Tom Crotser, Wyatt claiming to actually have seen the lost Ark of the Covenant buried under Mt. Calvary & Crotser claiming to have seen it on Mt. Pisgah near Mt. Nebo. Both of these men are held in low esteem by the archaeological community, and neither has been able to substantiate the wild claims with any evidence.

In the end, the ark remains lost to all but God. We may not find out what happened to the lost Ark of the Covenant until the Lord Himself returns.



At least 800 Ethiopians killed after defending ‘Ark of the Covenant’

By [Elizabeth Elizalde](#)

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The Church of St. Mary of Zion in Axum, Ethiopia, where the sacred Ark of the Covenant is believed to be housed. AP

At least 800 people were reportedly killed in Ethiopia as worshippers and soldiers risked their lives to protect what Christians there say is the sacred Ark of the Covenant from local militia.

Ethiopian Christians claim the Ark — the wooden chest built to hold the Ten Commandments of Moses — is being kept safe in a chapel in the holy northern city of Axum in the Tigray region.

The battle between Ethiopian soldiers and rebel fighters happened in the fall, [The Sunday Times reported](#), but it is only being reported now.

“When people heard the shooting they ran to the church to give support to the priests and others who were there protecting the ark,” Getu Mak, a local university lecturer, told The Times.

“Certainly some of them were killed for doing that.”

Little was known about the deadly siege since Tigray is cut off from the world and journalists had been blocked from entering the region.

A deacon residing in Axum told the Associated Press he helped count the bodies, gathered victims’ identification cards and assisted with burials in mass graves.

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 & more awe-inspiring than the Tablets of the Ten Commandments? No other archeological find would have greater impact on the destiny of man.

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 can't 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. It would indeed be an incalculable find!

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Jeremiah says point blank that *“the ark of the covenant of the Lord... shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be ever made again”*. [Jeremiah 3:16](#)

Why the Ark of the Covenant Will Never Be Found

I can still recall the thrill of seeing *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in the theater. A senior in high school, I had already been infected with the archaeology bug. This movie boosted my interest to a whole new level. As Providence would have it, I followed the path of Indiana Jones—at least academically. I'm still fascinated by the ark, but I no longer believe it is lost and awaiting discovery. I have Jeremiah to blame for that.

The idea that the ark of the covenant survived Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah is based on the absence of any explicit reference to the ark being among the vessels of gold carried to Babylon (2 Chr 36:5–8). Likewise, the list of items brought back to Judah after the end of the exile makes no mention the ark (Ezra 1:5–11). The simplest explanation is that the ark was among the “vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD” that Nebuchadnezzar cut to pieces (2 Kgs 24:13). No one would pay to see that movie.

From ancient times until the present day, people have resisted the idea that God would allow Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Israel's holiest object. Testifying to the power of this resistance, there are nearly a dozen theories as to how the ark survived.

Some of these theories are drawn from biblical events. Perhaps Hezekiah gave the ark to Sennacherib as part of his tribute payment (2 Kgs 18). Might it have been removed by faithful priests when Manasseh put an idol in the temple (2 Kgs 21:1–9)? Indiana Jones told millions that Pharaoh Shishak took the ark to the city of Tanis in Egypt when he invaded Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25–28). Perhaps the most intricate theory involves Menelik I, the alleged son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, taking the ark to Ethiopia. The Ethiopian royal chronicle, the *Kebra Nagast*, presents this idea so seriously that rulers of Ethiopia well into the 20th century had to prove their descent from Menelik I.

Other theories grew out of specific passages in ancient texts. Second Maccabees 2:5 records Jeremiah hiding the ark in a cave before Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. Second Baruch 6:1–9 describes the ark being supernaturally swallowed up by the earth before the invasion, tucked away until the time of Israel's restoration.

Jeremiah 3:16–17 makes all these hypotheses difficult to believe:

And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem ...

The passage plainly shows that the ark would be absent because of the exile. Jeremiah 3:16 also insists that "it shall not be made again"—wording that strongly suggests the ark would be destroyed in the impending disaster; if the ark weren't destined for destruction, talk of rebuilding it would make no sense at all. Jeremiah 3:17 reinforces this point—the ark was God's throne. He sat "between the cherubim" of the lid known as the "mercy seat" (Exod 25:18–22; Num 7:89). [But this was to change.] We read about this in Revelation 21:2–3: "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.' " A recovered ark of the covenant doesn't fit this picture—it would be a disappointment.³

³ Heiser, M. S. (2014). *[I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible](#)*. (J. D. Barry & R. Van Noord, Eds.) (pp. 99–101). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Bible Study Magazine.