

The Ark of the Covenant – Where is it?

Many historians speculate that because the Babylonians destroyed the Temple of Solomon, they also took the Ark back to the city of Babylon. Most of these proponents propose that the Ark was eventually destroyed along with other artifacts from the temple, and the gold was melted down and made into coins for their treasury. Yet it is difficult to believe that the Babylonians would have destroyed it, if indeed they even captured it. Moreover, various other theories have been proposed throughout history as to its final destiny.

The Ark is not mentioned among the Temple vessels carried into exile (606, 597 and 586 BC) or returned from Babylon under Cyrus' 536 BC decree (2 Ki.25:13–17; 2 Chr. 36:18; Jer. 52 17–11; Ezr. 1:7–11; Dan. 1:2). It disappeared during the span that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and finally destroyed the city as well as the Temple (588–586). Further, the Jewish writings clearly state that the Ark was not in the second temple of Zerubbabel (completed and dedicated in 516 BC, Ezr. 6:16).¹

The Ark – still under the Temple Mount?

Certain tracts in the Jewish Talmud dealing with temple laws, practices, and rituals allude to the creation of more than one Ark; the second being made as a decoy to protect the original. It claims that certain articles of the temple furnishings, including the true Ark, remain in a secret vault underneath the temple mount in Jerusalem.²

However, it is deemed highly unlikely that the Ark would have been left under the temple mount where any future treasure hunter could easily find it. How could its location remain undiscovered? Jerusalem continued open for excavation and plundering for hundreds of years after its fall to the

¹ Yoma 5:2; Josephus, *War* v.5.5.

² *Mishnah*, Tractate Shkalim reads: "A priest in the Second Temple saw a section in the floor which was different from the other floors and he understood that in this place there was an entrance to an underground tunnel and he came and shared it with his friend. Before he could finish sharing what he had seen with his friends, he died. They then knew very clearly that that was the place where the Ark of the Covenant was hidden."

According to Maimonides, Solomon foreknew that the Temple would be destroyed at some point in the future and built a deep secret cave for it beneath the Temple mount (Maimonides, *The Book of Temple Service*, 17 and Tractate Yoma, 53b). Centuries later, King Josiah supposedly hid the Ark in this secret vault (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 3, (Keter Pub. House Ltd: Jerusalem, Israel, 1971) p. 465).

Romans in AD 70, and treasure seekers have long since unearthed the area below the Temple. The Ark is not under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The Solomon-Queen of Sheba-Ethiopia Legend

Various sects of Ethiopians believe that the Ark has been kept under guard in its city of Axum for many centuries. This legend claims that it was brought there by Prince Menelik the First, supposedly the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Now Solomon did know that the dissolution of his kingdom was inevitable after his death (into Judah and Israel; he died in 975 BC) because he had angered the LORD by turning from following Him in earnest – even though God had twice appeared unto him.

Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as...thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: *but* I will rend it out of the hand of thy son (1 Ki. 11:9–12).

Therefore, as the legend goes, Solomon told Menelik to remove the Ark from the Temple so that it would remain safe after the division of his kingdom. Intriguing as this may be, we shall soon see that the legend of Menelik I is not consistent with the biblical record.

Rehoboam–Pharaoh Shishak-Tanis and the Ark

Still others speculate that after the division of Solomon's kingdom, his son Rehoboam, King of Judah, gave the Ark to the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak in 971 BC (Sheshonk I, first king of the 22nd dynasty—ascended the throne c.991 BC³) in order to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem by the Pharaoh's armies (1 Ki. 14:25–28; 2 Chr. 12:2–12, cp. 1 Ki. 11:40).

³ Accession dates for Sheshonk range from 993 to 945 BC. The learned Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson gave 981 (*Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, Vol. 1, 1883, p. 91). Near the close of his 21st year, this Pharaoh had a great bas-relief memorial made on the walls of the temple of Amon at Karnak. On it, he names 133 cities of the kingdom of Judah as having been taken by him during his invasion (see: 1 Kings 14:25–28).

Assuming his invasion was made the year *before* his inscription at Karnak, we merely add 20 to 971 (the 5th year of Jeroboam) and obtain 991 BC as his most likely year of accession. Those who date Shishak's (Sheshonk) incursion near 945 BC have accepted the Assyrian eponym data over that of the Hebrew Old Testament.

...in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, with twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. So Shishak King of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all (2 Chr. 12:2-4, 9).

Many historians believe that the Egyptians took the ark and hid it underground in the city of Tanis, the seat of Shishak's dynasty and the place of his burial. Supposedly, over time its location was lost.

Because Scripture records that Shishak "took all" the articles of the temple, many researchers have concluded that the Ark was among the spoils taken to Egypt. However, about 145 years after Judah's conflict with Shishak, the temple was again looted— this time by Jehoash, King of Israel (826 BC). The Jehoash account makes no specific mention of the Ark but says (as at the encounter with Shishak) that "all" the gold and silver as well as "all" the vessels found in the house of the LORD were removed to Samaria (2 Ki. 14:13-14). Yet, as we shall see in the section below, the Ark was still in the kingdom of Judah's Temple in 623 BC, (Josiah's 18th year: 2 Ki. 22:3, 23:23; 2 Chr. 34:8, 35:1-3), long after the 971 BC Shishak invasion.

Josiah and the Ark of the Covenant

In Talmudic times, there was a widespread tradition that the Ark was hidden by Josiah (*Mishna*, Shekal 6:1-2; *Talmud*: Yoma 52b, 53b-54a; Horayoth 12a).⁴ Irrespective of this and despite the two preceding accounts regarding Ethiopia and Tannis, the Ark appears again in the biblical narrative when King Josiah ordered the return of the Ark of the Covenant to the temple. Again, this occurred in Josiah's 18th year (623 BC) – over two hundred years after the pillage of the temple by Jehoash (826 BC – 623 = 203) and 348 years after the pillage by Shishak (971 BC – 623 = 348 years).

And [Josiah] said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: (2 Chr. 35:3)

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 465 and The *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*, 500 AD, English Translation, Published by: Judaica Press and Davka Corporation, (CD-ROM, 2001).

This 2 Chronicles 35:3 Scripture renders the legends of the Ark's present location as being in either Axum, Ethiopia (Grant Jeffrey) or Tanis, Egypt (Raiders of the Lost Ark) entirely impossible as both place the hiding of the Ark several hundred years *before* the reign of King Josiah. Moreover, the Ark was the central feature of the Temple during the reign of Josiah (640 to 609 BC) and his reinstatement of the worship of Jehovah.

Furthermore, back when the Philistines captured the Ark and placed it in the temple of their god Dagon, their entire country suffered great affliction (1 Sam. 5 and 6). God's judgment on the Philistines was so severe that after seven months the people urged their priests to find a proper, reverential way to return Ark to Israel (1121 BC).

Although, due to Israel's idolatry, God allowed the pagan Philistines to capture the Ark, they were not able to abide its presence. Moreover, it logically follows that similar judgments would have befallen any country that removed the Ark of God from Israel.

Accordingly, neither Babylon – the embodiment of world idolatry – nor Egypt would have been left unscathed by the Ark's presence. Undoubtedly, if these countries had captured it, the account would have been as notable as the earlier removal by the Philistines. Yet there is no scriptural record of such an event.

An old well-known Bible commentary gives the following regarding the Ark's location before King Josiah of Judah returned it to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Some think that it had been ignominiously put away from the sanctuary by order of some idolatrous king, probably Manasseh, who set a carved image in the house of God (2 Chr. 33:7), or Amon; while others are of opinion that it had been temporarily removed by Josiah himself into some adjoining chamber, during the repairs on the temple.⁵

Regardless, after King Josiah had repaired the Temple, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt went up toward the ford at Carchemish on the Euphrates River against the king of Assyria. At that time (609 BC), the king of Judah went out to do battle with the Egyptians in the valley of Megiddo. Godly Josiah was fatally wounded by Pharaoh Neco's archers, and when his body was brought back to Jerusalem the prophet Jeremiah lamented his death (2 Chr. 35:22-24).

⁵ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary: Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, (1871), New edition 1977 by Hendrickson Pub. (Ark).

The Mt. Nebo Legend and the Ark

According to a legend in the non-canonical book of Second Maccabees, the 2:1–8 verses state that before the destruction of Solomon’s temple (586 BC) by the Babylonians, Jeremiah hid the Ark in a cave at the base of Mount Nebo (or Mt. Sinai?) in the Pisgah range near the River Jordan. Located on the east side of the Jordan, this is the same mountain from which Moses had viewed the land of Israel just before he died (Deu. 34:1–7). Maccabees states:

...that the prophet [Jeremy], being warned of God, commanded the tabernacle and the ark to go with him, as he went forth into the mountain, where Moses climbed up, and saw the heritage of God. And when Jeremy came thither, he found an hollow cave, wherein he laid the tabernacle, and the ark, and the altar of incense, and so stopped the door. And some of those that followed him came to mark the way, but they could not find it. Which when Jeremy perceived, he blamed them, saying, As for that place, it shall be unknown until the time that God gather his people again together, and receive them unto mercy. Then shall the Lord show them these things, and the glory of the Lord shall appear, and the cloud also, as it was showed under Moses, and as when Solomon desired that the place might be honorably sanctified.

Second Maccabees as well as other Apocryphal works⁶ are retained in modern Catholic “Bibles” as

⁶ The spurious books of the Apocrypha are mainly the product of the last three centuries BC, a time during which written prophecy had ceased. They were accepted as part of the sacred literature by the Alexandrian Jews and, with the exception of the Second Book of Esdras, are found interspersed throughout the ancient copies of the Septuagint. The godly Jews under Ezra rejected the Apocrypha as having been inspired by the LORD when they formed the Old Testament canon. Josephus (c. AD 100) confirms that these books were not considered as “divine” in his day. He informs us that the canon was closed c. 425 BC [*Against Apion*, I, 8].

The Apocrypha gradually rose in esteem within the apostate Roman Church until finally the Council of Trent (AD 1546) affirmed the canonicity of the greater part. In making this decision the Catholic Church sided with the Jews of Alexandria, Egypt in considering the Apocrypha sacred. It was in Alexandria that Mary was revered as the second person of the Trinity by the so-called “Christians”. Although Jerome rejected it, the Apocrypha has now been incorporated into his Vulgate by the Roman Catholic Church.

The only books of value among any of those in the Apocrypha are First and Second Maccabees. Although they do not belong to the OT canon, unlike the mythological, spurious Bible contradicting material found in the other extra-biblical books, the data found in Maccabees

well as the Septuagint and Vulgate. The context of 2 Maccabees reveals that the Ark’s location will not be recovered until Messiah comes in His glory with the clouds (2 Maccabees 2:7–8).

As the wording and context of this matches that of the earlier written Matthew 24:29–31, it must be concluded that the Ark’s recovery is neither related to the Jews’ return to the land of Israel after the Babylonian exile nor was it fulfilled by their return in 1948. Therefore, if the Ark actually was hidden in Mount Nebo, it will not be found until our Lord returns. Nonetheless, we shall soon show that the Ark is not hidden at this Mountain.

The Keys of the Temple thrown Heavenward?

The Apocalypse of Second Baruch states that when the Babylonians began their siege of Jerusalem (29 December 588 BC, FNJ), the priests threw the keys of the sanctuary heavenward:

Moreover, ye priests, take ye the keys of the sanctuary and cast them into the height of heaven, And give them to the Lord and say: “Guard Thy house Thyself. For lo! we are found false stewards.”⁷

This legend is found with variations in the Jewish Talmud. At one place, the Talmud says that many bands of young priests with the keys of the Temple in their hands mounted the Temple roof and cried out:

Master of the Universe, as we did not have the merit to be faithful treasurers these keys are handed back into Thy keeping.⁸

They then threw the keys up towards heaven. And there emerged the figure of a hand and received the keys from them. Jewish mystics believe that the

does seem to be a fairly reliable historical account of the Seleucid oppression of the Jews and the revolt led by the Maccabean priesthood against that tyranny and persecution (171–37 BC).

Much has been said over the years concerning the fact that the first edition of the King James Bible contained the Apocrypha. It is true that the *publisher* of the 1611 edition did insert the Apocrypha *between* the Testaments, but it was never included *within* the Old Testament text. The Apocrypha section from the Cambridge Group of the 1611 translators rendered the entire work into English but for historical purposes only – not as inspired Scripture. The 14 books of the Apocrypha were finally removed even from the space between the Testaments in the second edition.

⁷ 2 Baruch 10:18, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, R.H. Charles, vol. II (Oxford Press, 1913).

⁸ *Talmud*: Ta’anit 29a

act of throwing the keys back to God represented the loss of the correct pronunciation of the name of God, or the knowledge of Solomon.

When was the Ark Removed?

As to exactly when the Ark was removed from its resting place behind the veil, we cannot say with certainty. However, the Word of God records that the “glory of the Lord” moved into the Holy of Holies when the Ark was first brought into Solomon’s temple at its dedication (1 Ki. 8:6 and 10–11). Taken away to Babylonia in the 597 “captivity” with Jeconiah, in a vision Ezekiel witnessed this “glory of the Lord” departing from the temple to the mountain on the east of Jerusalem (Ezk. 9:3, 10:4, 10:18, 11:23).

This depicted God’s abandoning the Temple and the city into the hands of their enemy: “And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which *is* on the east side of the city” (Ezek. 11:23). Ezekiel 8:1 tells us this departure occurred on the fifth day of the sixth month in the sixth year of the “captivity” (592 BC, Saturday, August 12 Gregorian, FNJ)

Later, Ezekiel was shown a vision in which the glory of the Lord *returned* from the east into the future millennial temple: “And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.” (Ezekiel 43:4)

The “glory of the Lord” between the cherubim was a distinct feature of the Ark. When the Philistines captured the Ark and removed it from Israel, the daughter-in-law of Eli, the high priest, referred to the Ark as the glory of the Lord itself saying, “The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken” (1 Sam. 4:22).

Thus, inasmuch as the “glory” filled Solomon’s Temple when the Ark was installed within the Holy of Holies, it is submitted that when the “glory” departed (as described in Ezekiel chapters 8–11 and referenced in the preceding) the Ark was also removed.

Where was the Ark of the Covenant Taken?

So where did the Ark go? Where was it placed? Who put it there, and where is the Ark of the Covenant today? The answer is straightforward and certain. Indeed, we have no need of Jewish tracts, un-canonical books, secular works, or any other material to “throw light” on this “mystery”. Chapter 11, verse 19 of The Book of Revelation tells us the Ark’s exact location and undoubtedly reveals just who it was that placed it there.

And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament...

At last, our search is over. And where did we find the answer to our biblical enigma? We found it exactly where we should have expected to find it all along – in God’s infallible Holy Word. After all, Scripture was not given to conceal but to reveal. Selah.

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.