

Lesson 8 – Where is the Ark of the Covenant?

Background

Exodus 25:10–22 (ESV)

¹⁰ “They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it...

Why is this unsolved?

In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple. There is no record of what became of the Ark in the Books of Kings or Chronicles.

What Does Scripture Say?

Exodus 25:10–22 - God gives Moses instructions for the construction of the ark

Exodus 37:1–9 - Account of the building of the ark and reiterates God’s instructions

Deuteronomy 10:1–5 - Function as the storage place for the tablets of the law

Joshua 3:7–17 - Crossing of the Jordan River

Joshua 6:1–21 - Fall of Jericho

1 Samuel 4:1–11; 5:1–12 - Capture of the Ark by the Philistines

1 Samuel 6:1–7:2 - The Ark Returned to Israel (Kiriath-jearim)

2 Samuel 6:1–23 - The Ark Brought to Obed-edom and then Jerusalem by David / Uzzah Dies

1 Kings 8:1–11 - The Ark Brought into the Temple Upon Completion by Solomon

2 Chronicles 35:1–6 - Final Mention of the Ark’s Location (Reign of Josiah)

Hebrews 9:1–5 - Manna and Aaron’s Staff Stored in Ark of the Covenant

Revelation 11:19 - The Ark in Heaven

Where Did it Go?

- In the book of 2 Maccabees (Apocrypha) the author records that the Jeremiah hid the Ark and the altar of incense in a cave. But his followers neglected to mark the cave, so its location was lost. According to this book, Jeremiah then prophesied that God would reveal its location at the proper time (2 Maccabees 2:1–8).
- The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims that the Ark rests in a chapel in the small town of Aksum, in their country's northern highlands. They say it arrived nearly 3,000 years ago and has been guarded by a succession of monks who, once anointed, are forbidden to set foot outside the chapel grounds until they die. Per a representative of their church, "Queen Sheba visited King Solomon in Jerusalem three thousand years ago, and the son she bore him, Menelik, at age 20 visited Jerusalem, from where he brought the ark of the covenant back to Aksum. It's been in Ethiopia ever since."
- Some have speculated that Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt took the Ark as part of his conquest of Jerusalem in the fifth year of King Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:25–26). This theory was also presented in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. (~926 BC)*
- Some have speculated that King Jehoash (Northern Kingdom) took the Ark when he looted the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 14:13–14) after the defeat of King Amaziah. (~790 BC)*
- The most likely scenario is that the ark was destroyed or looted at the time of the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem. The biblical account records that Nebuchadnezzar removed all of the treasures of Yahweh's house and destroyed the remaining items in the temple (2 Kgs 24:13 – 586 BC).

**Both of these events happened before the final mention of the location of the Ark during the reign of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35:1-6 (~649–609 BC).*

Has Anyone Found It?

Explorer Ron Wyatt claimed to have found the Ark in 1982 in a cave outside of the city of Jerusalem. He claimed to have found it beneath the hole that was used to hold up the cross of Jesus, and His blood dripped onto the mercy seat during the earthquake that occurred at the time of His death.

What Really Matters

Acts 17:24–25 (ESV)

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

What Does the Bible Say?

God gives Moses instructions for the construction of the ark.

Exodus 25:10–22 (ESV)

¹⁰ “They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. ¹² You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. ¹³ You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴ And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. ¹⁵ The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. ¹⁶ And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

¹⁷ “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 breadth. ¹⁸ And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. ¹⁹ Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. ²⁰ The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. ²¹ And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. ²² There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

Account of the building of the ark and reiterates God’s instructions.

Exodus 37:1–9 (ESV)

¹ Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ² And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. ³ And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. ⁴ And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold ⁵ and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. ⁶ And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ⁷ And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, ⁸ one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.

Function as the storage place for the tablets of the law

Deuteronomy 10:1–5 (ESV)

¹ “At that time the LORD said to me, ‘Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of wood.’ ² And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.’ ³ So I made an ark of acacia wood, and cut two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. ⁴ And he wrote on the tablets, in the same writing as before, the Ten Commandments that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me. ⁵ Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had made. And there they are, as the LORD commanded me.”

Crossing of the Jordan River

Joshua 3:7–17 (ESV)

⁷ The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. ⁸ And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’ ” ⁹ And Joshua said to the people of Israel, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.” ¹⁰ And Joshua said, “Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. ¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. ¹² Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. ¹³ And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.”

¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

Fall of Jericho

Joshua 6:1–21 (ESV)

¹ Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. ² And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. ³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

⁶ So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." ⁷ And he said to the people, "Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD."

⁸ And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. ⁹ The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁰ But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout." ¹¹ So he caused the ark of the LORD to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp.

¹² Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. ¹³ And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁴ And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

¹⁵ On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city. ¹⁷ And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. ¹⁸ But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. ¹⁹ But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." ²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. ²¹ Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

Capture of the Ark by the Philistines

1 Samuel 4:1–11 (ESV)

¹ And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. ² The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about **four thousand men** on the field of battle. ³ And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? **Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.**” ⁴ 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. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

⁵ As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. ⁶ And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, “What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, ⁷ the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “A god has come into the camp.” And they said, “Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. ⁸ Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. ⁹ Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. ¹¹ And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

1 Samuel 5:1–12 (ESV)

¹ When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. ³ And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, **Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD.** So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, **Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold.** Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. ⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

⁶ The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. ⁷ And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, “**The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god.**” ⁸ So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” They answered, “**Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.**” So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. ⁹ But after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic, and **he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that**

tumors broke out on them.¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people."¹¹ They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there.¹² The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The Ark Returned to Israel

1 Samuel 6:1–7:2 (ESV)

¹ The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. ² And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place." ³ They said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you." ⁴ And they said, "What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?" They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. ⁵ So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. ⁶ Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed? ⁷ Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them. ⁸ And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way ⁹ and watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm, but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us; it happened to us by coincidence."

¹⁰ The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. ¹¹ And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. ¹² And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh. ¹³ Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it. ¹⁴ The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there. And they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵ And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the box that was beside it, in which were the golden figures, and set them upon the great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the LORD. ¹⁶ And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron.

¹⁷ These are the golden tumors that the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron, ¹⁸ and the golden

mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and unwallled villages. The great stone beside which they set down the ark of the LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh.

¹⁹ And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck seventy men of them, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow. ²⁰ Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?" ²¹ So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you."

¹ And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. ² From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem / Uzzah Dies

2 Samuel 6:1–23 (ESV)

¹ David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. ³ And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, ⁴ with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.

⁵ And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. ⁶ And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. ⁷ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. ⁸ And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. ⁹ And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" ¹⁰ So David was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. ¹¹ And 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.

¹² And it was told King David, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. ¹³ And when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. ¹⁴ And David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart. ¹⁷ And they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place, inside the tent that

David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. ¹⁸ And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts ¹⁹ and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

²⁰ And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" ²¹ And David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD—and I will celebrate before the LORD. ²² I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." ²³ And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

The Ark Brought into the Temple

1 Kings 8:1–11 (ESV)

¹ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. ² And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. ³ And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. ⁴ And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. ⁵ And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. ⁶ Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. ⁷ For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. ⁸ And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day. ⁹ There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

Final Mention of the Ark's Location

2 Chronicles 35:1–6 (ESV)

¹ Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. ² He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the LORD. ³ 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.”⁴ Prepare yourselves according to your fathers’ houses by your divisions, as prescribed in the writing of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son.⁵ And stand in the Holy Place according to the groupings of the fathers’ houses of your brothers the lay people, and according to the division of the Levites by fathers’ household.⁶ And slaughter the Passover lamb, and consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the LORD by Moses.”

Manna and Aaron’s Staff Stored in Ark of the Covenant

Hebrews 9:1–5 (ESV)

¹ Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Items in the Temple were Copies of the Heavenly Things

Hebrews 9:23 (ESV)

²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The Ark in Heaven

Revelation 11:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Where Did it Go?

Jeremiah

2 Maccabees 2:1–8 (NRSV)

Jeremiah Hides the Tent, Ark, and Altar

2 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, ² 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. ³ And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts.

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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."

Shishak

1 Kings 14:25–27 (ESV)

²⁵ In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. ²⁶ He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made, ²⁷ and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house.

King Jehoash

2 Kings 14:13–14 (ESV)

¹³ And Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for four hundred cubits, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. ¹⁴ And he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.

Babylonian Conquest

2 Kings 24:10–13 (ESV)

¹⁰ At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. ¹¹ And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it, ¹² and Jehoiachin the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself and his mother and his servants and his officials and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign ¹³ and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all

the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold.

ARK OF THE COVENANT (אֲרוֹן בְּרִית, *aron berith*). A golden chest that contains the covenant tablets. It served both a practical and a symbolic purpose, and was instrumental in both rituals and miracles. The Israelites believed the ark of the covenant was symbolically Yahweh's throne—representing His very presence on earth.

The Hebrew word for “ark” (אֲרוֹן, *'rwn*) designates a chest or coffin. However, the Bible makes a clear designation between the ark of the covenant and a common chest. While the most common name for the ark is “ark of the covenant,” it is also referred to as “the ark of God,” “the ark of might,” “the holy ark,” and “the ark of testimony” (or simply “the testimony”).

Survey of the Ark in Scripture

The Ark in the Pentateuch

The ark of the covenant is first mentioned in Exodus, where it is presented as the location from which Yahweh promises to speak to Moses, as a king speaks to his advisor from a throne. Three chapters contain details of the ark's construction (Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 756):

- In Exodus 25 Yahweh gives Moses instructions for the construction of the ark.
- In Exodus 35 Moses repeats Yahweh's instructions for the construction of the ark to the people.
- Exodus 37 contains the account of the building of the ark and reiterates Yahweh's instructions.

Construction of the Ark. According to Exodus 25, 35, and 37, the ark was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. There were also rings connected to the chest where carrying poles could be inserted. The cover was called the mercy seat. The mercy seat was a solid piece of gold with two affixed cherubim. The ark was instructed to be two and a half cubits (approximately 4.5 feet) long, one and a half cubits (2.25 feet) wide, and one and a half cubits tall. While no weight is listed in the Bible, the ark has been estimated to weigh as much as 288 pounds (Derby, “The Gold of the Ark,” 253–56).

Like the rest of the tabernacle's furnishings, the ark was constructed from goods donated according to Yahweh's command (Exod 25:2–9; 35:20–29). The ark appears to have been personally fashioned by Bezalel (Exod 37:1–9), though it is he may have only overseen the construction (see Exod 35:30).

Appearance in Numbers. The ark appears without introduction or explanation in Num 10:33–35. This passage records that the ark of the covenant went before the scouts “to seek out a resting place for them” (Num 10:33 ESV) and that at those times, Moses prayed, “Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you” (Num 10:35 ESV). Noth believes Numbers originally contained an account of the construction of the ark that was later combined with the book of Exodus during the formation of the Pentateuch. In his view, this explains the ark's sudden appearance (Noth, *Numbers*, 79–80).

Function in Deuteronomy. Discussions of the ark in Deuteronomy 10 and 31 concern its function as the storage place for the tablets of the law. Fretheim, noting that Deuteronomy does not depict the ark as holy or as the place where Yahweh sits, suggest that the author of

Deuteronomy only addressed the tradition of the ark out of necessity, but consciously reinterpreted it through demythologization (Fretheim, “The Ark in Deuteronomy,” 4–6). Wilson argues that Deut 10:8 implies a divine presence in recording the Levites stood and ministered to Yahweh immediately before lifting and transporting the ark (Wilson, “Merely a Container?”).

The Ark in the Conquest Narratives

The ark features prominently in Joshua’s narrative of the crossing of the Jordan River. In Joshua 3, the priests who carry the ark still the waters, enabling the Israelites to pass into the land of Canaan over dry land. Joshua instructs 12 Israelite men to “Pass on before the ark of the Lord” and erect 12 stones as a memorial of the river crossing. Rösel suggests the author of Joshua combined two originally separate traditions, using the miracle at the Jordan River to explain the standing stones at Gilgal (Rösel, *Joshua*, 60).

The ark holds a less prominent role in the fall of Jericho (Josh 6). According to the Lord’s instructions, “Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark” on the march around the city (Josh 6:4 ESV). The ark continues to represent Yahweh’s presence, but Rösel argues that the priests’ act of blowing the shofar appears to cause the collapse of the city walls (Rösel, *Joshua*, 95).

Joshua 8 records that Joshua wrote a copy of the law of Moses on Mount Ebal while all of Israel stood with the ark, which represents God’s presence.

The Ark in 1 and 2 Samuel

First Samuel 4:7–8 records that when the Israelites bring the ark of the covenant into battle, the Philistines exclaim that “gods have come into the camp” (1 Sam 4:7 NRSV) and recognize them as the same “gods” who caused disease and pestilence in Egypt (1 Sam 4:8). Personifications of the plagues elsewhere in Scripture and the Ugaritic god list may provide insight into the Philistines’ exclamations here. For example, Psalm 78:48 refers to Resheph (רֶשֶׁפֶן, *resheph*, “thunderbolts”) and Barad (בָּרָד, *barad*, “hail”) afflicting the Egyptians’ livestock. Likewise, Habakkuk 3:5 refers to Deber (דֶּבֶר, *dever*, “pestilence”) and Resheph (רֶשֶׁפֶן, *resheph*, “plague”) going before and following after Yahweh. In the Ugaritic god lists, Resheph is equated with Nergal, the god of pestilence, who is associated with the divine Lamma, a composite creature similar to the cherubim (del Olmo Lete, 73; Lipiński, *Resheph*, 88). The Philistines may have viewed the two cherubim above the ark as representations of these deities.

Capture of the Ark. First Samuel 5:1 records that the Philistines captured the ark and took it to the temple in Ashdod, where it caused Dagon’s statue to topple and break and afflicted the city with a plague of mice. When the Philistines send the ark to other cities, they become similarly afflicted. These incidents reflect the plagues of Egypt and encourage the identification of Resheph and Deber as the cherubim atop the ark. The Philistines return the ark to the Israelites along with gold offerings, and the ark ends up in Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam 7:1–2).

Movement of the Ark. In 2 Samuel 6, David orders the Israelites to fetch the ark from Baale-judah (i.e., Kiriath-Jearim). After Uzzah touched the ark en route and was killed, David “was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David” (2 Sam 6:7 ESV) and left it in the care of Obed-Edom. Upon witnessing the blessing Obed-Edom received “because of the ark of God,”

David brings the ark into Jerusalem. The account of the procession of the ark in 2 Sam 6 is mirrored closely by a Babylonian religious ritual. According to the annals of Assurbanipal, as the army carries the statue of Marduk into Babylon, there is rejoicing, playing of musical instruments, and the offering of sacrifices at regular intervals (Miller & Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 24).

First Chronicles 13 provides a parallel account of the retrieval of the ark from Kiriath-Jearim. Noting that the Chronicler's account reflects 2 Sam 6 nearly verbatim, Klein suggests the Chronicler used a vorlage that included 2 Samuel as its principal document (Klein, *1 Chronicles*, 329). However, Klein further notes that the Chronicler reinterprets history significantly when he argues that Saul's failure as king was a result of failing to seek Yahweh—demonstrated by his refusal to retrieve the ark from Shiloh (Klein, *1 Chronicles*, 331). First Chronicles 15 and 16 provide greater detail of the movement of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David.

The Ark Narrative. In 1878 Wellhausen theorized that 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6 originally belonged to the same source, the “Ark Narrative” (Campbell, *The Ark Narrative*, 1). While there is still a general consensus that 1 Sam 4–6 is a unified composition, scholars no longer believe that 2 Sam 6 belongs to this narrative. Two significant discrepancies between the two sources include (McCarter, *II Samuel*, 183):

- The location of the ark changes from Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam 7:2) to Baalah (2 Sam 6:2)
- The name of the priest changes from Eleazar (1 Sam 7:1) to Uzzah (2 Sam 6:3).

Miller and Roberts point out that 1 Samuel does not require 2 Samuel to make sense; thus, it is plausible that the narrative originally ended with 1 Samuel (Miller & Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 35).

The Ark Following the Completion of Solomon's Temple

In 1 Kings 8, Solomon moves the ark from the city of David to the newly completed temple. Sweeney argues that this account serves to connect Solomon's actions to David's activity with the ark as recorded in the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 131). Sweeney points to the account's connections to the Priestly source and suggests that additions were made by “a Priestly editor interested in establishing links between the Deuteronomistic History of the movement of the ark into the temple and an early Pentateuchal narrative concerning the construction of the ark and its symbolism as YHWH's presence in the wilderness” (Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 131).

Second Chronicles 5 provides a parallel account of moving the ark to the temple. In this account, the ceremony concludes with a theophany in which the glory of Yahweh fills the temple like a thick cloud (2 Chr 5:13–14). Second Chronicles 35:3 briefly records that the Levites were relieved of their duty of carrying the ark because the ark would no longer leave the temple. Klein notes that the Bible contains no clear indication that the ark was moved from the temple (Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 519).

The Ark in the Psalms and Prophets

The only mention of the ark in the Psalms appears in Psa 132, which discusses the transport of the ark to Jerusalem and the institution of Yahweh worship in Zion (Hossfeld & Zenger, *Psalms*

3, 457). Hossfeld and Zenger believe the psalm is likely post-exilic and is certainly post-Deuteronomistic (Hossfeld & Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 459).

In the prophetic writings, Jeremiah 3 prophesies a future time when the ark will no longer exist due to the universal dominion of the God of Israel. Allen argues that the prophecy makes sense in the context of the eschatological tradition where Yahweh reigns over all the earth and His presence is no longer confined to the ark (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 58).

The Fate of the Ark

The fate of the ark of the covenant is unknown. Biblical descriptions of the second temple and post-exilic works contain no references to it. The closest reference to the disappearance of the ark is Jer 3:16, which refers to a time when “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” (ESV). Day notes that throughout history, some interpreters have seen this verse as a hint that the Ark had already been taken or that there were plans to remove the ark in preparation for the Babylonian invasion (Day, “Whatever Happened to the Ark,” 260). It is more likely that Jeremiah was envisioning a future world in which Yahweh reigned supreme over the nations with the city of Jerusalem as His eternal throne (Jer 3:17). In this case, there would be no use for the ark, which served as a mobile throne for the semi-nomadic Israelites (Enstrom & Van Dyk, “What Happened to the Ark?,” 51–53).

The disappearance of the ark is frequently attributed to Nebuchadnezzar’s sacking of the temple prior to the Babylonian exile. However, the accounts of the Babylonian invasion do not explicitly mention the fate or treatment of the ark. Other events may be associated with the disappearance of the ark:

- King Jehoshaphat’s looting of the temple (2 Kgs 14:13–14)
- Pharaoh Shishak’s conquest of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25–26)

Ahaz (2 Chr 28:24) and Athaliah and her sons (2 Chr 24:7) also removed or damaged items from the temple, suggesting they may be connected with the ark’s disappearance (see Ehrlich, “The Disappearance of the Ark”). However, 2 Chronicles 35:3 and references to the ark in the book of Jeremiah indicate that the ark remained in the temple at least until the time of Josiah’s reign. This suggests that Shishak, Jehoshaphat, Ahaz, or Athaliah were not involved in the disappearance of the ark.

The most likely scenario is that the ark was destroyed or looted at the time of the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem. The biblical account records that Nebuchadnezzar removed all of the treasures of Yahweh’s house and destroyed the remaining items in the temple (2 Kgs 24:13). If the Babylonians considered the ark valuable, they may have preserved it. However, the ark was not listed among the temple treasures carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in Ezra 1:7–11. The absence of the ark from this list has led many to believe that it was never taken to Babylon (Enstrom & Van Dyk, “What Happened to the Ark?,” 52). For this reason, Day concludes that the ark was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Day, “Whatever Happened to the Ark,” 261–65).

Nonbiblical works, such as Rabbinical teachings and works based on Samaritan and Ethiopian tradition, offer legends concerning the fate of the ark. In the 20th century, archaeologists ran expeditions to find the lost ark. The endeavor to retrieve or learn the fate of

the ark will likely continue until conclusive evidence is found (Enstrom & Van Dyk, "What Happened to the Ark?", 54–59).

The Function and Ancient Near Eastern Context of the Ark

The various functions and features of the Israelites' ark of the covenant have parallels in the religious items and customs of the ancient Near East.

Ark as a Throne

As part of the ark's construction, the Israelites were to build two "cherubim of gold." The cherubim were to be positioned facing each other with their wings outspread at opposite ends of the ark's covering or the "mercy seat" (Exod 25:18–20). Their placement finds parallels in Egyptian iconography, which often depicts two sphinxes flanking the sun, representing the chief deity (Hornung, *Tal der Könige*, 133). Similarly, in Mesopotamia, colossal *lamassu* (winged human-headed bull) statues guard the way to sacred places (Danrey, "Winged Human-Headed Bulls," 135). Strawn notes that composite creatures perform a similar duty in other cultures of the region (Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*, 221–22).

Later biblical verses depict Yahweh as sitting upon the cherubim or their wings with His feet resting on the ark (1 Chr 28:2; Pss 99:5; 132:7; Roberts, "Enthronement Festival," 108). Keel notes that depictions of royal chairs that match this description have been found throughout Canaan and Phoenicia, attesting to the widespread use of the "cherubim throne" (Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 169–71).

Ark as a Storehouse

While 1 Kings 8:9 indicates that the ark contained only the stone tablets of the covenant, the author of Hebrews records that the ark also contained an omer of manna and Aaron's staff (Heb 9:4). The use of the ark as a storehouse for the covenant finds parallels elsewhere in the ancient Near East; ancient peoples housed important documents in sanctuaries under the supervision of the gods. In some cases, they placed documents under their deities' feet (de Vaux, "Les Chérubins," 121). Art from ancient Assyria and Ugarit shows deities standing on rectangular pedestals about the same size as the ark according to the descriptions in Exod 25:10 (de Vaux, "Les Chérubins," 119).

The Ark in Warfare

The Israelites' carrying the ark into battle (e.g., 1 Sam 4; Josh 6) reflects the common ancient Near Eastern practice of carrying divine images or representations for support. Fuchs notes that in Assyria, "the gods, in the form of standards showing their images, accompanied the soldier on the march; they rested with him in the same field camp; and they fought side by side with him. To this purpose, each standard had its own chariot on which it could be mounted. In battle, the god stood in his vehicle and charged, visible to all" (Fuchs, "Assyria at War," 386).

Cuneiform sources from the Old Babylonian period (1950–1650 BC) also attest to the ancient practice of armies seizing their enemies' divine images (compare 1 Sam 4:11; Miller & Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 13). The loss of divine images could be devastating for morale, as ancients believed that the loss of a divine image resulted in the loss of divine favor (Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 160).

Ancient Assyrian records provide an account of a foreign power returning gods to the enemy. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon is recorded as having “inscribed the power of Ashur and his own name on the Arab gods before he returned them” (Miller & Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 16). In contrast with the biblical story, where the Philistines return the ark because of its overwhelming power, Esarhaddon returns the divine images to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the enemy’s gods.

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Keepers of the Lost Ark?

Christians in Ethiopia have long claimed to have the ark of the covenant. Our reporter investigated

"They shall make an ark of acacia wood," God commanded Moses in the Book of Exodus, after delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. And so the Israelites built an ark, or chest, gilding it inside and out. And into this chest Moses placed stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, as given to him on Mount Sinai.

Thus the ark "was worshipped by the Israelites as the embodiment of God Himself," writes Graham Hancock in *The Sign and the Seal*. "Biblical and other archaic sources speak of the Ark blazing with fire and light...stopping rivers, blasting whole armies." (Steven Spielberg's 1981 film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* provides a special-effects approximation.) According to the First Book of Kings, King Solomon built the First Temple in Jerusalem to house the ark. It was venerated there during Solomon's reign (c. 970-930 B.C.) and beyond.

Then it vanished. Much of Jewish tradition holds that it disappeared before or while the Babylonians sacked the temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

But through the centuries, Ethiopian Christians have claimed that the ark rests in a chapel in the small town of Aksum, in their country's northern highlands. It arrived nearly 3,000 years ago, they say, and has been guarded by a succession of virgin monks who, once anointed, are forbidden to set foot outside the chapel grounds until they die.

One of the first things that caught my eye in Addis Ababa, the country's capital, was an enormous concrete pillar topped by a giant red star—the sort of monument to communism still visible in Pyongyang. The North Koreans built this one as a gift for the Derg, the Marxist regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991 (the country is now governed by an elected parliament and prime minister). In a campaign that Derg officials named the Red Terror, they slaughtered their political enemies—estimates range from several thousand to more than a million people. The most prominent of their victims was Emperor Haile Selassie, whose death, under circumstances that remain contested, was announced in 1975.

He was the last emperor of Ethiopia—and, he claimed, the 225th monarch, descended from Menelik, the ruler believed responsible for Ethiopia's possession of the ark of the covenant in the tenth century B.C.

The story is told in the *Kebra Negast* (Glory of the Kings), Ethiopia's chronicle of its royal line: the Queen of Sheba, one of its first rulers, traveled to Jerusalem to partake of King Solomon's wisdom; on her way home, she bore Solomon's son, Menelik. Later Menelik went to visit his father, and on his return journey was accompanied by the firstborn sons of some Israelite nobles—who, unbeknown to Menelik, stole the ark and carried it with them to Ethiopia. When

Menelik learned of the theft, he reasoned that since the ark's frightful powers hadn't destroyed his retinue, it must be God's will that it remain with him.

Many historians—including Richard Pankhurst, a British-born scholar who has lived in Ethiopia for almost 50 years—date the *Kebrä Negast* manuscript to the 14th century A.D. It was written, they say, to validate the claim by Menelik's descendants that their right to rule was God-given, based on an unbroken succession from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. But the Ethiopian faithful say the chronicles were copied from a fourth-century Coptic manuscript that was, in turn, based on a far earlier account. This lineage remained so important to them that it was written into Selassie's two imperial constitutions, in 1931 and 1955.

Before leaving Addis Ababa for Aksum, I went to the offices of His Holiness Abuna Paulos, patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which has some 40 million adherents worldwide, to ask about Ethiopia's claim to have the ark of the covenant. Paulos holds a PhD in theology from Princeton University, and before he was installed as patriarch, in 1992, he was a parish priest in Manhattan. Gripping a golden staff, wearing a golden icon depicting the Madonna cradling an infant Jesus, and seated on what looked like a golden throne, he oozed power and patronage.

"We've had 1,000 years of Judaism, followed by 2,000 years of Christianity, and that's why our religion is rooted in the Old Testament," he told me. "We follow the same dietary laws as Judaism, as set out in Leviticus," meaning that his followers keep kosher, even though they are Christians. "Parents circumcise their baby boys as a religious duty, we often give Old Testament names to our boys and many villagers in the countryside still hold Saturday sacred as the Sabbath."

Is this tradition linked to the church's claim to hold the ark, which Ethiopians call *Tabota Seyen*, or the Ark of Zion? "It's no claim, it's the truth," Paulos answered. "Queen Sheba visited King Solomon in Jerusalem three thousand years ago, and the son she bore him, Menelik, at age 20 visited Jerusalem, from where he brought the ark of the covenant back to Aksum. It's been in Ethiopia ever since."

I asked if the ark in Ethiopia resembles the one described in the Bible: almost four feet long, just over two feet high and wide, surmounted by two winged cherubs facing each other across its heavy lid, forming the "mercy seat," or footstool for the throne of God. Paulos shrugged. "Can you believe that even though I'm head of the Ethiopian church, I'm still forbidden from seeing it?" he said. "The guardian of the ark is the only person on earth who has that peerless honor."

He also mentioned that the ark had not been held continuously at Aksum since Menelik's time, adding that some monks hid it for 400 years to keep it out of invaders' hands. Their monastery still stood, he said, on an island in Lake Tana. It was about 200 miles northwest, on the way to Aksum.

Ethiopia is landlocked, but Lake Tana is an inland sea: it covers 1,400 square miles and is the source of the Blue Nile, which weaves its muddy way 3,245 miles through Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt to the Mediterranean. At the outlet where the water begins its journey, fishermen drop lines from primitive papyrus boats like those the Egyptians used in the pharaohs' days. I

glimpsed them through an eerie dawn mist as I boarded a powerboat headed for Tana Kirkos, the island of the ark.

Slowly the boatman threaded his way through a maze of tree-covered islands so dense that he began to wonder aloud whether we were lost. When, after two hours, we suddenly confronted a rock wall about 30 yards high and more than 100 yards long, he cried, "Tana Kirkos" with obvious relief.

A fish eagle circled and squawked as a barefoot monk clad in a patched yellow robe scurried down a pathway cut into the rock and peered into our boat. "He's making sure there are no women aboard," my translator said.

The monk introduced himself as Abba, or Father, Haile Mikael. "There are 125 monks on the island, and many are novices," he said. "Women have been banned for centuries because the sight of them might fire the young monks' passions."

Another monk, Abba Gebre Maryam, joined us. He, too, wore a patched yellow robe, plus a white pillbox turban. A rough-hewn wooden cross hung from his neck, and he carried a silver staff topped by a cross. In response to my questioning, he elaborated on what Abuna Paulos had told me:

"The ark came here from Aksum for safekeeping from enemies well before Jesus was born because our people followed the Jewish religion then," he said. "But when King Ezana ruled in Aksum 1,600 years ago, he took the ark back to Aksum." Ezana's kingdom extended across the Red Sea into the Arabian peninsula; he converted to Christianity around A.D. 330 and became hugely influential in spreading the faith.

Then Abba Gebre added: "The baby Jesus and Mary spent ten days here during their long exile from Israel." It was after King Herod ordered the death of all boys under the age of 2 in Bethlehem, he said. "Would you like to see the place where they often sat?"

I followed him up a wooded path and onto a ridge where a pair of young monks were standing by a small shrine, their eyes closed in prayer. Abba Gebre pointed to the shrine. "That's where Jesus and Mary sat each day while they were here."

"What proof do you have that they came here?" I asked.

He looked at me with what appeared to be tender sympathy and said: "We don't need proof because it's a fact. The monks here have passed this down for centuries."

Later, Andrew Wearing, a religious scholar at the University of Sydney, told me that "the journey by Jesus, Mary and Joseph is mentioned in only a few lines in the Book of Matthew—and he gives scant detail, though he does state they fled into Egypt." Like its former parent institution the Orthodox Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox faith holds that the family spent four years in western Egypt, Wearing said, in the Nile Valley and the Nile Delta, before returning home. But western Egypt is over 1,000 miles northwest of Lake Tana. Could Jesus, Mary and Joseph have traveled to Tana Kirkos? There's no way to know.

On the way back to the boat, we passed small log huts with conical thatched roofs—the monks' cells. Abba Gebre entered one and pulled from the shadows an ancient bronze tray set on a stand. He said Menelik brought it from Jerusalem to Aksum along with the ark.

"The Jerusalem temple priests used this tray to collect and stir the sacrificial animals' blood," Abba Gebre went on. When I checked later with Pankhurst, the historian said the tray, which he had seen on an earlier visit, was probably associated with Judaic rituals in Ethiopia's pre-Christian era. Lake Tana, he said, was a stronghold of Judaism.

Finally, Abba Gebre led me to an old church built from wood and rock in the traditional Ethiopian style, circular with a narrow walkway hugging the outer wall. Inside was the *mak'das*, or holy of holies—an inner sanctum shielded by brocade curtains and open only to senior priests. "That's where we keep our *tabots*," he said.

The *tabots* (pronounced "TA-bots") are replicas of the tablets in the ark, and every church in Ethiopia has a set, kept in its own holy of holies. "It's the *tabots* that consecrate a church, and without them it's as holy as a donkey's stable," Abba Gebre said. Every January 19, on Timkat, or the Feast of the Epiphany, the *tabots* from churches all over Ethiopia are paraded through the streets.

"The most sacred ceremony occurs at Gonder," he went on, naming a city in the highlands just north of Lake Tana. "To understand our deep reverence for the ark, you should go there."

Gonder (pop. 160,000) spreads across a series of hills and valleys more than 7,000 feet above sea level. On the advice of a friendly cleric, I sought out Archbishop Andreas, the local leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As Andreas ushered me into a simple room in his office, I saw that he had the spindly frame and sunken cheeks of an ascetic. Despite his high position, he was dressed like a monk, in a worn yellow robe, and he held a simple cross carved from wood.

I asked if he knew of any evidence that the ark had come to Ethiopia with Menelik. "These stories were handed down through the generations by our church leaders, and we believe them to be historical facts," he told me in a whisper. "That's why we keep *tabots* in every church in Ethiopia."

At noon the next day, Andreas, in a black robe and black turban, emerged from a church on a slope above Gonder and into a crowd of several hundred people. A dozen priests, deacons and acolytes—clad in brocade robes in maroon, ivory, gold and blue—joined him to form a protective huddle around a bearded priest wearing a scarlet robe and a golden turban. On his head the priest carried the *tabots*, wrapped in ebony velvet embroidered in gold. Catching sight of the sacred bundle, hundreds of women in the crowd began ululating—making a singsong wail with their tongues—as many Ethiopian women do at moments of intense emotion.

As the clerics began to walk down a rocky pathway toward a piazza at the center of town (a legacy of Italy's occupation of Ethiopia in the 1930s), they were hemmed in by perhaps 1,000 more chanting and ululating devotees. At the piazza, the procession joined clerics carrying *tabots* from seven other churches. Together they set off farther downhill, with the trailing throng swelling into the thousands, with thousands more lining the road. About five miles later, the priests stopped beside a pool of murky water in a park.

All afternoon and through the night, the priests chanted hymns before the tabots, surrounded by worshipers. Then, prompted by glimmers of light sneaking into the morning sky, Archbishop Andreas led the clerics to celebrate the baptism of Jesus by playfully splashing one another with the pool's water.

The Timkat celebrations were to continue for three more days with prayers and masses, after which the tabots would be returned to the churches where they were kept. I was more eager than ever to locate the original ark, so I headed for Aksum, about 200 miles northeast.

Just outside Gonder, my car passed Wolleka village, where a mud-hut synagogue bore a Star of David on the roof—a relic of Jewish life in the region that endured for as long as four millennia, until the 1990s. That was when the last of the Bet Israel Jews (also known as the Falasha, the Amharic word for "stranger") were evacuated to Israel in the face of persecution by the Derg.

The road degenerated into a rutted, rocky pathway that twisted around the hillsides, and our SUV struggled to exceed ten miles per hour. I reached Aksum in darkness and shared the hotel dining room with United Nations peacekeepers from Uruguay and Jordan who told me they were monitoring a stretch of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border about an hour's drive away. The latest U.N. bulletin, they said, described the area as "volatile and tense."

The next day was hot and dusty. Except for the occasional camel and its driver, Aksum's streets were nearly empty. We weren't far from the Denakil Desert, which extends eastward into Eritrea and Djibouti.

By chance, in the lobby of my hotel I met Alem Abbay, an Aksum native who was on vacation from Frostburg State University in Maryland, where he teaches African history. Abbay took me to a stone tablet about eight feet high and covered in inscriptions in three languages—Greek; Geez, the ancient language of Ethiopia; and Sabaeen, from across the Red Sea in southern Yemen, the true birthplace, some scholars believe, of the Queen of Sheba.

"King Ezana erected this stone tablet early in the fourth century, while still a pagan ruler," Abbay told me. His finger traced the strange-looking alphabets carved into the rock 16 centuries ago. "Here, the king praises the god of war after a victory over a rebel people." But sometime in the following decade Ezana was converted to Christianity.

Abbay led me to another stone tablet covered with inscriptions in the same three languages. "By now King Ezana is thanking 'the Lord of Heaven' for success in a military expedition into nearby Sudan," he said. "We know he meant Jesus because archaeological digs have turned up coins during Ezana's reign that feature the Cross of Christ around this time." Before that, they bore the pagan symbols of the sun and moon.

As we walked on, we passed a large reservoir, its surface covered with green scum. "According to tradition, it's Queen Sheba's bath," Abbay said. "Some believe there's an ancient curse on its waters."

Ahead was a towering stele, or column, 79 feet high and said to weigh 500 tons. Like other fallen and standing steles nearby, it was carved from a single slab of granite, perhaps as early as the first or second century A.D. Legend has it that the ark of the covenant's supreme power sliced it out of the rock and set it into place.

On our way to the chapel where the ark is said to be kept, we passed Sheba's bath again and saw about 50 people in white shawls crouched near the water. A boy had drowned there shortly before, and his parents and other relatives were waiting for the body to surface. "They say it will take one to two days," Abbay said. "They know this because many other boys have drowned here while swimming. They believe the curse has struck again."

Abbay and I made our way toward the office of the Neburq-ed, Aksum's high priest, who works out of a tin shed at a seminary close by the ark chapel. As the church administrator in Aksum, he would be able to tell us more about the guardian of the ark.

"We've had the guardian tradition from the beginning," the high priest told us. "He prays constantly by the ark, day and night, burning incense before it and paying tribute to God. Only he can see it; all others are forbidden to lay eyes on it or even go close to it." Over the centuries, a few Western travelers have claimed to have seen it; their descriptions are of tablets like those described in the Book of Exodus. But the Ethiopians say that is inconceivable—the visitors must have been shown fakes.

I asked how the guardian is chosen. "By Aksum's senior priests and the present guardian," he said. I told him I'd heard that in the mid-20th century a chosen guardian had run away, terrified, and had to be hauled back to Aksum. The Neburq-ed smiled, but did not answer. Instead, he pointed to a grassy slope studded with broken stone blocks—the remains of Zion Maryam cathedral, Ethiopia's oldest church, founded in the fourth century A.D. "It held the ark, but Arab invaders destroyed it," he said, adding that priests had hidden the ark from the invaders.

Now that I had come this far, I asked if we could meet the guardian of the ark. The Neburq-ed said no: "He is usually not accessible to ordinary people, just religious leaders."

The next day I tried again, led by a friendly priest to the gate of the ark chapel, which is about the size of a typical suburban house and surrounded by a high iron fence. "Wait here," he said, and he climbed the steps leading to the chapel entrance, where he called out softly to the guardian.

A few minutes later he scurried back, smiling. A few feet from where I stood, through the iron bars, a monk who looked to be in his late 50s peered around the chapel wall.

"It's the guardian," the priest whispered.

He wore an olive-colored robe, dark pillbox turban and sandals. He glanced warily at me with deep-set eyes. Through the bars he held out a wooden cross painted yellow, touching my forehead with it in a blessing and pausing as I kissed the top and bottom in the traditional way.

I asked his name.

"I'm the guardian of the ark," he said, with the priest translating. "I have no other name."

I told him I had come from the other side of the world to speak with him about the ark. "I can't tell you anything about it," he said. "No king or patriarch or bishop or ruler can ever see it, only me. This has been our tradition since Menelik brought the ark here more than 3,000 years ago."

We peered at each other for a few moments. I asked a few more questions, but to each he remained as silent as an apparition. Then he was gone.

"You're lucky, because he refuses most requests to see him," the priest said. But I felt only a little lucky. There was so much more I wanted to know: Does the ark look the way it is described in the Bible? Has the guardian ever seen a sign of its power? Is he content to devote his life to the ark, never able to leave the compound?

On my last night in Aksum, I walked down the chapel road, now deserted, and sat for a long time staring at the chapel, which shone like silver in the moonlight.

Was the guardian chanting ancient incantations while bathing the chapel in the sanctifying reek of incense? Was he on his knees before the ark? Was he as alone as I felt? Was the ark really there?

Of course I had no way of answering any of these questions. Had I tried to slip inside in the darkness to sneak a look, I'm sure the guardian would have raised the alarm. And I was also held back by the fear that the ark would harm me if I dared defile it with my presence.

In the final moments of my search, I could not judge whether the ark of the covenant truly rested inside this nondescript chapel. Perhaps Menelik's traveling companions did take it and spirit it home to Ethiopia. Perhaps its origins here stem from a tale spun by Aksumite priests in ancient times to awe their congregations and consolidate their authority. But the reality of the ark, like a vision in the moonlight, floated just beyond my grasp, and so the millennia-old mystery remained. As the devotion of the worshipers at Timkat and the monks at Tana Kirkos came back to me in the shimmering light, I decided that simply being in the presence of this eternal mystery was a fitting ending to my quest.

Paul Raffaele is a frequent contributor to Smithsonian. His story on Congo's [imperiled mountain gorillas](#) appeared in [October](#).

Ron Wyatt's "Discovery" of the Ark

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UyqxzuSMCo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8TRoQk6WUE>

The Discovery of the Ark of the Covenant

"For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people..." Hebrews 9:19

Hebrews 9:19 says that Moses sprinkled blood and water above the book of the law in order to confirm the old covenant at Sinai. This was a type of what Christ did when He confirmed the new covenant, which He did on the cross. So just as Moses sprinkled animal blood, and water above the book of the law in the type, Christ had to sprinkle His blood and water above the tables of the law in the antitype.

The following is the account of late, amateur archaeologist Ron Wyatt and his discovery of that very thing.

In August of 1978, Ron Wyatt was walking along Gordon's Calvary Escarpment in the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, talking with a local authority about Roman antiquities. Without warning, Ron's left hand pointed to a site there and his mouth said, "That's Jeremiah's Grotto and the Ark of the Covenant is in there."

Even though these words had come from his own mouth and his own hand had pointed, *he* had not consciously said or done these things. The man with him, quite out of character, also reacted strangely. He said, "That's wonderful! We want you to excavate, and we'll grant you your permits, put you up in a place to stay and even furnish your meals!" Ron Wyatt knew that this was a supernatural event but he also knew that not all supernatural events originate from God (Revelation 16:14).

So he returned home to the US, and began to research as to whether or not the Ark could be in that area. He discovered that 2Chronicles 35:3 is the last reference to the Ark of the Covenant, and verse 19 tells us that this was in the year 621 BC, just 35 years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. It says that the Ark was in the temple at that time. When the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem, they built a siege wall around the city, not allowing anyone or anything in or out of the city.

Therefore, the Ark of the Covenant most probably remained within the Babylonian siege wall. As it was not captured by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon, we must assume that it was hidden underground. This matched perfectly with the area that Ron Wyatt had pointed to, it would have been within the Babylonian siege wall, in an underground chamber. Ron Wyatt and his two sons dug several times at that site, uncovering a wealth of information. They began by

digging straight down, at the base of a cliff face, a cliff face known to many as Golgotha. In the 1800's General Gordon recognized that the site matched the biblical description of Calvary, the site of the crucifixion of Christ. The Bible describes a tomb hewn out of rock, in a garden nearby, it was the tomb of a rich man who donated it to Jesus (Matt. 27:57-60). In the vicinity is just that, and the tomb has been hurriedly extended, suggesting that the person that lay in it, was not the person it was designed for.

In fact, General Charles Gordon, the founder of the Garden Tomb said the Ark is hidden there! The Garden Tomb has published a book in 2012 and is selling it now saying the Ark of the Covenant is in Jeremiah's Grotto in Skull Hill (on their property). "General Gordon on Golgotha - Gordon's Letters to Sir John Cowell 1883" ISBN 978-1-904459-51-4. Edited by Rosalind Meryon, The Garden Tomb Jerusalem, 2012. Gordon writes, "*Here at Skull Hill, close the Slaughter House of Jerusalem was Titus 1 to 2m. The Roman Eagle took the heart of Zion by throat, for close was the breach. Jeremiah wrote Lamentations in the cave. **The Ark of the Covenant is there.***" page 55. On page 47 Gordon says the Table of Shewbread is also in there, "*Golgotha on Hill was Jeremiah's Grotto. 1. This hill is outside gates near city where many roads pass. 2. From long time back the Slaughter House of City has been there. 3. It is N. of City. **Shewbread table is in it.***"



The first find that they uncovered were recesses cut into the cliff face, three 'bookshelf-like' cut outs. Ron's thought was that these could be the recesses that held the signs that the Romans put above the cross of Christ. In Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26 and Luke 23:38 the Bible says that the superscription was written "over" Jesus, which fits with what Ron Wyatt found. In the book of John, the Bible says that, "a title," was "put on the cross". The Greek word for "on" is "EPI". EPI can also be translated as "over" or "above". The translators in Matthew, Mark and Luke decided to translate EPI as "over", because it would have not made sense to say that a sign was put (EPI) on his head, but in John they translated EPI to mean "on" because it would make sense to put a sign **on** the cross. However, they could have translated EPI to say, "a title" was "put above/over the cross".



Further excavation revealed an altar stone protruding from the cliff face like a shelf. Ron Wyatt felt that perhaps this was the remains of a Christian altar, suggesting that the early Christians knew that this was a place of significance. The foundation to a first century building was also uncovered, which was believed to be a church, again adding more significance to the site.

At last Ron Wyatt uncovered the clinching evidence that convinced him this was the site of the crucifixion. Four cross holes cut out of the rock, one higher up than the rest on a platform and set back. The other three were in a line lower down and in front. The upper cross hole would have held the 'featured' criminal, and we know from the Biblical account that the two cross holes either side held the two thieves when Christ was crucified. In this case, only three of the four cross holes were used.

Ron's attention was drawn to the cross hole that was higher than the others. If this was the site of the crucifixion of Jesus, then this would undoubtedly be His cross hole. A square-cut stone had been placed in the cross hole, acting as a plug. It had finger grips on each side, and when Ron Wyatt removed it he noticed a large crack in the bedrock, extending from the cross hole. It looked to Ron Wyatt like an earthquake crack, and the Bible does say, in Matthew 27:51, "and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent".



It became too dangerous to continue digging down the cliff face. So, Ron Wyatt had to dig down at various angles. He soon found himself within a cave system. He worked with a small Arab man who would crawl in through the gaps that were too tiny for Ron Wyatt to easily enter. The conditions were damp, with plenty of dust and little oxygen. Sometimes Ron Wyatt had to squeeze himself through the smallest of holes. One day he asked the man to crawl in through a tiny entrance to a cave, as usual. When he had done so, he rushed out with terror in his eyes, screaming, "What's in there! What's in there!" The man hurriedly exited the cave system and refused ever to return.



Descending the 25 foot shaft into the open chamber (Photo: Ron Wyatt)



Excitedly, Ron Wyatt extended the entrance to this chamber and crawled in. He found himself crawling across rocks that were piled up almost to the roof. Growing more and more tired, Ron Wyatt began to move the rocks aside, in order to reveal what was underneath. He uncovered some dry rotted wooden boards which when he moved aside revealed animal skins. Something shiny was under the animal skins. Moving them aside, Ron Wyatt uncovered the Table of Shewbread, from the first temple. Continuing to shift aside more rocks and wood, he then found a stone casing. The lid had cracked and had been moved aside. Ron Wyatt shone his flashlight down through the crack and saw a chest of beaten gold. He knew he was looking at the Ark of the Covenant. Overwhelmed with emotion and suffering from pneumonia Ron Wyatt passed out for 45 minutes in that chamber. It was January 6th 1982, when Ron Wyatt made this amazing discovery - Exactly 3 and a half years after Ron's left hand pointed to the site and his mouth said, "That's Jeremiah's Grotto and the ark of the covenant is in there".

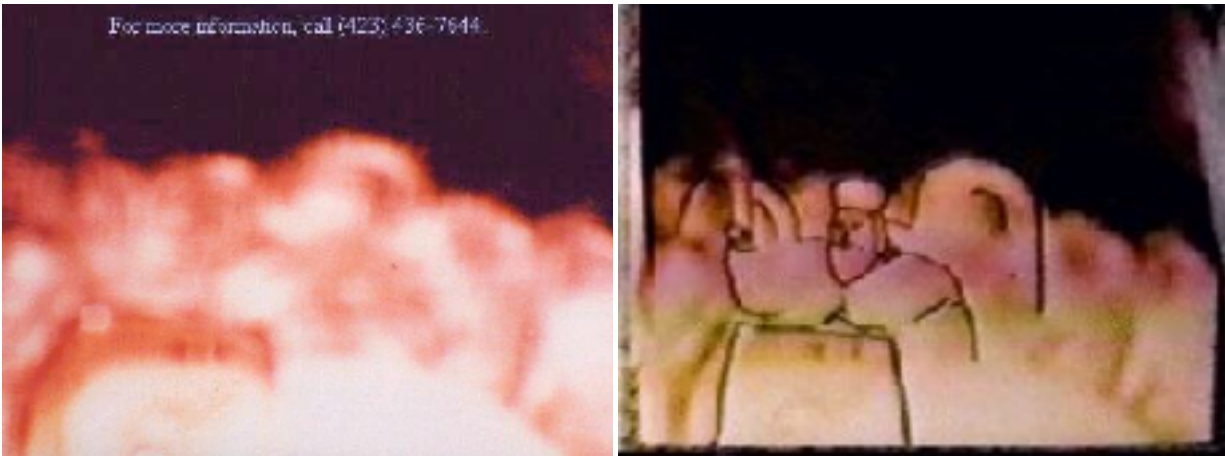
Rebecca Tourniaire notes the date of the Babylonian siege against Jerusalem. *"And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about."* (II Kings 25:1). *The date is probably accidental, right? Or is it? ...the day Ron Wyatt entered the chamber that contains the Ark of The Covenant... was in fact on the biblical 10th day in the 10th month... So what could the meaning of this be? Was it just coincidental that Ron Wyatt found the Ark on the exact same date or was there some deeper meaning? Did Ron even know the biblical date he ended up finding the Ark, or was it just January 6th to him?"* www.ThirdAngelsMessage.com

Day	Fraction of the Moon Illuminated, 1981 at Noon Eastern Standard Time					Astron. Applications Dept. U. S. Naval Observatory Washington, DC 20392-6420					Fraction of the Moon Illuminated, 1982 at Noon Eastern Standard Time				
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	
01	0.20	0.11	0.25	0.13	0.09	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.10	0.12	0.20	0.22	0.345	0.51	
02	0.13	0.06	0.17	0.07	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.17	0.18	0.28	0.30	0.456	0.63	
03	0.07	0.02	0.09	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.24	0.26	0.37	0.40	0.567	0.73	
04	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.001	0.01	0.01	0.11	0.22	0.38	0.35	0.47	0.50	0.678	0.83	
05	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.14	0.18	0.30	0.42	0.44	0.57	0.61	0.779	0.91	
06	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.20	0.27	0.40	0.52	0.54	0.67	0.71	0.8610	0.96	
07	0.02	0.10	0.02	0.12	0.18	0.32	0.37	0.49	0.61	0.64	0.77	0.81	0.93	0.99	
08	0.06	0.18	0.07	0.21	0.27	0.42	0.46	0.59	0.70	0.73	0.85	0.90	0.98	1.00	
09	0.13	0.28	0.15	0.31	0.37	0.52	0.56	0.68	0.79	0.82	0.93	0.96	1.00	0.97	
10	0.21	0.38	0.24	0.42	0.48	0.62	0.65	0.76	0.87	0.89	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.93	
11	0.31	0.50	0.35	0.53	0.58	0.71	0.74	0.84	0.93	0.95	1.00	1.00	0.95	0.87	
12	0.42	0.61	0.46	0.63	0.68	0.79	0.82	0.91	0.97	0.99	0.99	0.97	0.89	0.79	
13	0.53	0.72	0.57	0.73	0.76	0.86	0.89	0.96	1.00	1.00	0.95	0.92	0.81	0.70	
14	0.65	0.81	0.68	0.81	0.84	0.92	0.94	0.99	0.99	0.98	0.89	0.85	0.72	0.61	
15	0.75	0.89	0.77	0.88	0.90	0.96	0.98	1.00	0.96	0.93	0.80	0.76	0.63	0.51	
16	0.84	0.95	0.85	0.94	0.95	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.91	0.86	0.70	0.66	0.53	0.42	
17	0.92	0.98	0.92	0.97	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.95	0.83	0.77	0.60	0.56	0.43	0.33	
18	0.97	1.00	0.96	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.98	0.89	0.74	0.66	0.49	0.45	0.34	0.24	
19	1.00	0.99	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.96	0.93	0.81	0.63	0.55	0.39	0.36	0.25	0.17	
20	1.00	0.97	0.99	0.98	0.97	0.91	0.87	0.71	0.51	0.44	0.29	0.27	0.18	0.10	
21	0.98	0.93	0.93	0.95	0.93	0.84	0.79	0.60	0.40	0.34	0.21	0.19	0.11	0.05	
22	0.94	0.87	0.96	0.90	0.88	0.76	0.69	0.49	0.30	0.24	0.13	0.12	0.06	0.02	
23	0.88	0.80	0.91	0.84	0.81	0.66	0.58	0.37	0.20	0.16	0.08	0.07	0.02	0.00	
24	0.81	0.72	0.85	0.76	0.72	0.55	0.47	0.27	0.12	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.01	
25	0.73	0.63	0.78	0.67	0.62	0.44	0.35	0.17	0.06	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	
26	0.64	0.53	0.70	0.57	0.52	0.33	0.25	0.10	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
27	0.55	0.44	0.61	0.47	0.41	0.23	0.15	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
28	0.45	0.34	0.51	0.37	0.30	0.13	0.08	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
29	0.36	0.26	0.41	0.26	0.20	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
30	0.27	0.21	0.31	0.17	0.11	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
31	0.19	0.14	0.22	0.08	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	

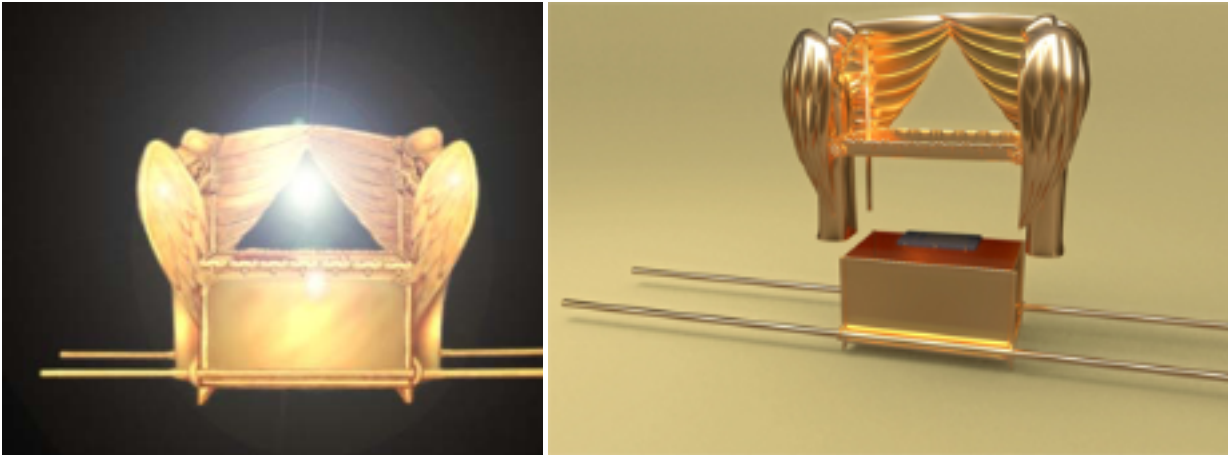
Beginning of the Hebrew month
1-10 Days of the month

Ron Wyatt tried to photograph the ark with a Polaroid, but the photos turned out foggy. He returned with a colonoscope, but again the pictures turned out foggy.

Below is the picture that turned out foggy, and to the right is a line drawing superimposed to show what Ron Wyatt saw.



The photos below are various artists impressions and models based on what Ron Wyatt described.



Several artifacts are in that cave, including the seven branch candlestick, an ephod, the wilderness tabernacle, the altar of incense and a giant sword. It did not have any inscriptions but Ron Wyatt thought it was probably Goliath's sword. Below are photos of Ron Wyatt and his wife with a scale model Ron Wyatt had made.



Ron Wyatt noticed a dried, black substance in an earthquake crack in the roof, above the Ark of the Covenant. He noticed that this black substance was also on the lid of the cracked stone casing. Obviously, this substance had dripped from the crack in the roof, and provision had been made for it to land on the Ark of the Covenant, as the stone lid had been cracked and moved aside. Ron Wyatt wondered what substance could be so sacred, that God made provision for it to land on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. He remembered the earthquake crack at the foot of the cross hole, and suddenly an awesome realization as to what had happened, came over him. Ron Wyatt traced the earthquake crack, and indeed it was the same crack as the one at the cross hole. The dried black substance in the crack was tested and proved to be blood, apparently the blood of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that when

Jesus died there was an earthquake and the rocks were rent (Matt. 27:51). A Roman soldier speared Christ in His side in order to make sure He was dead, and blood and water poured out (John 19:34). Ron Wyatt discovered that this same blood and water poured down through the earthquake crack and fell upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant.



In 1989 - exactly 7 years after Ron first discovered the ark, he was excavating at the site again to try to re-enter it. One day during that excavation Ron was feeling very down-hearted, as if God could not use him any more. He thought that he must have done something wrong and that God had decided to take him off the job. Whilst sitting at the site and contemplating the circumstances, he heard a voice that said, "God bless you in what you are doing here Ron Wyatt." More than startled, Ron Wyatt turned to face the Man. He was surprised as he wondered how anyone would know his name, and furthermore, Ron Wyatt had never told anyone else what he was doing there. Ron Wyatt replied, "Thank you, are you from around here?" and the Stranger simply replied, "No." Trying to prompt a conversation, Ron Wyatt said, "Are you a tourist?" and again the stranger replied, "No." But this time continued to say, "I have come from South Africa and am on my way to the New Jerusalem." Ron Wyatt was shocked, knowing that the New Jerusalem is a city referred to in the Bible as being in heaven.

After the man had left, Ron Wyatt asked the others in the Garden if they had seen this Man. Surprisingly they all answered, "No." but there was only one way in, and one way out of this area, through which the Man would have had to have exited. This was a great encouragement for Ron Wyatt at a time when he needed it most as he felt that God was now still blessing his work.

Ron Wyatt returned to the cave 3 more times, and since his first visit, to his absolute surprise, the cave had been completely tidied up. Four angels stood before him and he was told that the time is not yet for the world to see this discovery with their own eyes, but the time is coming when the inhabitants of the world will have a universal, religious law enforced upon them. This law will force man to break God's law, by penalty of disenfranchisement - being unable to buy or sell, (Rev. 13:17). Ron Wyatt was told that some time after this law has been passed, God will allow the tables of stone (The 10 Commandments) and a good clear video of the Ark of the Covenant to be put on public display. For more information on the proposed law download a small booklet [here](#). "It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law." Psalm 119:126.

This is the very same law that Ron Wyatt referred to in the last interview he ever gave. The full interview is available [here](#). The interviewer asks Ron, "...you took the tables of stone out, and then the angel told you something about the tables of stone?" And Ron Wyatt answers, "Yeah, he told me that it had to do with when these were to be shown to the world... when the mark of the beast law was in force, that shortly after that, was when this would take place... **it wasn't stated as the mark of the beast law, it was stated, "when the Sunday law..."**. The interviewer wanting to make absolutely sure that the angel himself said the words "Sunday Law" then confirms with Ron, "**But the angel said "Sunday law"?**" And Ron Wyatt confirms, "That's right."

Amos 3:7, *"Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."* I think every one who believes this discovery would agree, for God to reveal the Ark of the Covenant and the Tables of Stone and sample of Christ's blood is enormous, yet Amos 3:7 says God will do *nothing* without revealing it through a prophet. So if you believe this discovery and you believe Amos 3:7, which prophet do you think God told He would reveal the Ark, the blood and the Tables of Stone to?

Did you know there was a prophecy that the Ark of the Covenant was hidden in a cave in Jerusalem before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and that it would be discovered right before the end of the world and the Second Coming of Jesus, and the Tables of Stone taken out and put on public display? The lady who made the prophecy was called Ellen G. White. In 1901 (81 years before Ron Wyatt discovered the Ark of the Covenant) Mrs. White wrote;

*"And He [Christ] gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exodus 31:18.) Nothing written on those tables could be blotted out. The precious record of the law was placed in the ark of the testament and **is still there**, safely hidden from the human family. **But in God's appointed time He will bring forth these tables of stone to be a testimony to all***

the world against the disregard of His commandments and against the idolatrous worship of a counterfeit Sabbath. "Manuscript 122, "The Law", November 23, 1901. {8MR 100.3}

Notice, in the above quote, Ellen White says it is the tables of stone that were given to Moses and placed in the earthly Ark of the Covenant that will be discovered and put on public display, and not the heavenly set. Notice also that the message which accompanies the Tables of Stone is the same message that Ron Wyatt preached, that the 10 Commandments still stand including the fourth commandment - the 7th day (Saturday) Sabbath.

Ellen White also tells us that the Ark of the Covenant was hidden in a cave in Jerusalem before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar;

*"Among the righteous **still in Jerusalem**, to whom had been made plain the divine purpose, were some who determined to place beyond the reach of ruthless hands [the Babylonians] the sacred ark containing the tables of stone on which had been traced the precepts of the Decalogue. **This they did.** With mourning and sadness **they secreted the ark in a cave**, where it was to be hidden from the people of Israel and Judah because of their sins, **and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hidden. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.**" "Prophets and Kings" p453.*

Notice how Ellen White said at the time of writing it was still there, and there have never been any reports or even allegations that it has been removed from Jerusalem since 1915 when "Prophets and Kings" was written.

As we mentioned earlier, the blood on the mercy seat was tested. Human cells normally have 46 chromosomes. These are actually 23 pairs of homologous chromosomes. In each pair of chromosomes, one of the pair is from the mother and the other member is from the father. Therefore, 23 chromosomes come from the mother and 23 from the father. In each set of 23, 22 chromosomes are autosomal and one is sex-determining. The sex-determining ones are the X chromosome and the Y chromosome. Females are XX, so they can only contribute an X chromosome to their offspring, whereas males are XY, which allows them to contribute either an X or a Y. If they contribute an X, the child is female, whereas if they contribute a Y, the child is male. The fascinating finding in this blood was that instead of 46 chromosomes, there were only 24. There were 22 autosomal chromosomes, one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. This evidences that the person to whom this blood belonged to had a mother but no human father, because the normal contribution of paternal chromosomes is missing.

1John 5:8-11 says the water and the blood of Christ were in the earth at the time of writing, approximately 35 years after the cross. "And there are three that bear witness *in earth*, the Spirit, and *the water, and the blood*: and these three agree in one." Furthermore it says that this water and blood is the testimony, or witness of God to the world, testifying to us that His Son died, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: *for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son...And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life*, and this life is in his Son. "

Below is a 4 minute video of Ron Wyatt talking about the blood karyotype performed in Jerusalem

What message does God have for this world in these last days, and how has He given the key to understanding it in Hebrews 9:19? For this study, please see the Booklet and the Presentation in the Menu bar at the top of the page.

6 minute video clip below on the same subject, taken from "Testimony of the Ark" also available at ThirdAngelsMessage.com Click [HERE](#) to read the chapter about Hebrews 9:19 from the book "Confrontation" available at www.ThirdAngelsMessage.com