

Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel, is with us
"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression,
and the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah 58:1

Yahweh's Law

Study Prayerfully & Study Carefully

The Ark of the Covenant

Reading:
1 Samuel Chapters 4 to 7

Introduction

To begin with let us find out what the **Ark of the Covenant** is. Most Bible students already know. Others, having seen the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, have an idea what it is. For the benefit of those who do not know what the Ark is, here are a few facts. The **Ark of the Covenant**, also called the **Ark of the Testimony**, was a wooden chest containing the **Ten Commandments**, which were written with the finger of God!

Exodus 31: 18: *"And he (God) 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.**"*

The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible (Page 41) has this to say about the **Ark**.

Quote: **"The Ark of The Covenant or Testimony** was the central object of the tabernacle. It was a chest **2.5** cubits long, **1.5** cubits broad, and the same in depth; made of acacia wood, and overlaid within and without with pure gold. A rim of molding of gold encircled it at the top.

At the bottom were 2 golden rings on each side, through which poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were put for the purpose of carrying the Ark about. It was covered by a lid of solid gold which was called the **mercy seat**.

Two cherubim of gold stood on this cover, of one piece with it, one at each end, spreading their wings on high so as to overshadow it, and facing each other, but looking down toward the mercy seat. They were symbols of the presence of Jehovah who, as King of Israel in the midst of his people, dwelt between them, and met the representative of his people there. (Exodus 25: 10 seq.; 30: 6; Numbers 7: 89; 1 Samuel 4: 4)

It was made specially as a receptacle for the testimony, which was written on the tables of stone. (Exodus 25: 21; 31: 18; Deuteronomy 10: 3, 5) and it was placed in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26: 34)

Afterward a pot of manna, Aaron's rod that blossomed, and the book of the Law were put beside the Ark (Exodus 16: 34; Numbers 17: 10; Deuteronomy 31: 26; Hebrews 9: 4) but apparently were removed during the times of confusion. (1 Kings 8: 9)

The Ark was placed in charge of the Kohathite Levites." (Numbers 3: 29-31; 4: 4-15)

1. Three Important Questions

The yearning of all mankind is for everlasting life. No one wants to die, certainly not prematurely. When faced with the coming judgment and realizing the hopelessness of his own case, one terrified jailer cried out:

Question ONE

Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Acts 16: *“And brought them out, and said, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**”*

31: *And they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.**”*

Doubtless, this is one of the most important question ever asked. And the answer is as important. **It should be memorized by every soul on earth. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”** (Verse 31)

Question TWO

What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

A parallel question of equal importance, was voiced by a young man who approached Jesus and asked:

Matthew 19: 16: *“And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, **what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?**”*

17: *And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: **but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.**”*

Question THREE

What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?

There is a third question that the peoples of the world should address and answer for themselves. It is a question that believers are faced with every day, whenever temptation rears its ugly head and wherever the spirit of evil is present. It is a question that was asked by the ancient Philistines over 3000 years ago. But it is as relevant today as it was then. The question is recorded in (1 Samuel: 5: 8). Here it is:

1 Samuel 5: 8: *“They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, **What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.**”*

2. Background

Ignorance about **Jehovah’s** law abounds. Millions of believers think it is obsolete. Some even go so far as to call it a **‘burden,’** a **‘yoke of bondage.’** Others blame all mankind's ills on its very presence. Divine laws, they say, are the root cause of mankind's troubles. **‘Get rid of religion, with its myriad moral restrictions, and the human race will be free! Free from all its hang-ups.’** Still others think that knowing everything there is to know about the religions of the world will somehow make them better people. Very few, comparatively speaking, appreciate and love the untold worth of the Almighty's commandments. Consider these ancient reactions to Yahweh's law and the subsequent events mentioned in this story: reactions being repeated by millions today.

Misjudgment:

1 Samuel 4: 1: *“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside **Eben-ezer:** and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.*

2: *And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.*

3: *And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, **Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.**”*

1 Samuel 4:

4: *“So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.*

5: *And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.*

6: *And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said,
7 ... God is come into the camp."*

The fact was, God was not in that box. Most certainly a copy of His law was. But God was not with Israel on that fateful day. It turned out to be a day of total disaster: Israel lost the battle, the Ark was captured and the high priest **Eli** and his two sons died.

The Glory of Israel:

1 Samuel 4: 19: *"And his (Eli's) daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.
20: And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.
21: And she named the child **I-chabod**, saying, **The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken**, and because of her father in law and her husband.
22: And she said, *The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."**

A Blasphemous Insult:

The victorious Philistines were jubilant. They had, so they thought, captured Israel's God in a box! How primitive and how wrong they were.

1 Samuel 5: 2: *"When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon..."* (the God of the Philistines)

Divine Punishment at Ashdod:

As you can imagine the Almighty God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel was not pleased; and He decided to teach the Philistines a lesson.

1 Samuel 5: 6: *"But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof."*

Philistine Diagnoses:

The Philistines were aghast. Multitudes around the city of Ashdod were dead or dying. They came to the conclusion that the **Ark of the God of Israel** was the cause of the problem. It was a cursed thing. It caused pain, disease and death wherever it went. It had, they thought, a spooky jinx on it. They assembled all the leading men of Philistia and considered the question, the question we are addressing this Sabbath.

"What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

1 Samuel 5: 7: *"And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.
They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, **What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?** And they answered,"*

Divine Punishment At Gath:

1 Samuel 5: 8: *"...Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto **Gath**. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.
9: And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, **the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction:** and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts."*

Divine Punishment At Ekron:

1 Samuel 5: 10: *"And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.
11: So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, **Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place**, that it slay us not, and our people:*

*for there was a **deadly destruction** throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12: And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.”*

Seven long months went by as the **Ark of Testimony** was sent from city to city, **Ashdod, Gath, Ekron**. And wherever it went, God severely punished the peoples of that place. The Philistine chiefs called their priests and diviners and once again asked that all-important question, the question that you and I and all the peoples of the earth should ask ourselves every day of our lives:

And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying,
“What shall we do to the ark of the LORD?” (1 Samuel 6:2)

3. Good Advice

Strange as it may seem, in this story some sound advice came from the Philistine priests and diviners. They recognized Yahweh's displeasure at their handling of His Ark and His law. They also knew the history of how God overthrew **Pharaoh** for his refusal to obey His orders. The Philistines were frightened. They were terrified! And this is the advice they gave:

1 Samuel 6: 6: **“Wherefore do ye harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?”**

4. Varied Reactions

The story goes on to tell that the Philistines, after testing to see if the Ark really was the cause of their problems, sent the Ark of the Covenant back to Israel. How did the Israelites react to the arrival of the Ark, which they well knew contained Yahweh's law?

A Good Response:

When the Almighty's law was brought back to Israel, many Israelites were glad. The Bible says, they **“rejoiced to see it.”**

1 Samuel 6: 13: **“And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.**
14: **And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD.”**

The field of Joshua (**Yeshua**, to be more accurate) and the **great stone** in the field both represent Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High. That's where the ark led them. All the way from the land of the Philistines, it led the way back to **Yeshua**, back to the **Rock of our Salvation!**

A Bad Response:

But many Israelites were not happy to have God's law brought back to Israel. To be sure they wanted to see the Ark. They even went so far as to examine its contents. But when they read what was on the stone tablets inside, they didn't like what they saw. They classified God's law as a **‘cursed thing,’ a ‘burden,’ a ‘yoke,’ a ‘moral collar’** restraining them from doing as they pleased! What did the Almighty do with those Israelites?

1 Samuel 6: 19: **“And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people **fifty thousand and threescore and ten** men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.”**

Twenty Years of Blessing:

The ark was then sent to the town of **Kirjath-jearim**. The men of this city realized that the Ark of the Testimony, and especially what it contained - **the law of God** - was an inestimable treasure, to be treated with the utmost

respect and to be obeyed. It wasn't something one could insult with impunity, as the men of Ashdod, Gath and Ekron had learned to their cost. It wasn't something one could inspect or look into with unholy curiosity, or examine with unclean minds. Nor was it something one could dismiss with impunity. The Ark of the God of Israel contains the sacred commandments of the Most High: commandments which are a transcript of His holy character: commandments which one day will be recognized by all living creatures as the **constitution of the mighty universe!** No doubt some of the elders of **Kirjath-jearim** were aware of these facts.

1 Samuel 7: 1: *“And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and **sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.**”*

5. A Question of Importance

Once again we will return to that third question: **“What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?”** Shall I respect it, and all that it contains? Shall I obey the Almighty's commandments? Or shall I treat them with a kind of scientific curiosity; interesting to look into, examine and study, but surely not something to be taken seriously or obeyed? Beware how you respond!

The men of Bethshemesh said:
“Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?”
(1 Samuel 6: 20)

6. Consecration

The ancient prophet Samuel then came on the scene and analysed Israel's response to Yahweh's law. A few were terrified of it and, like the Philistines, would rather it be sent away. But now the nation wanted to obey it. Perhaps some even recognized that it would, like it did those two milking cows, direct them to the **Great Stone Yeshua!** But the people didn't know what they were expected to do - or not do - or that certain conditions needed to be met before God would bless them as they so desperately wanted. The prophet Samuel spelled out these conditions. He told Israel what the Almighty expected of them. **Jehovah** wanted His people to:

- **Repent of their sins.**
- **To put their faith in the Sacrificed Lamb.**
- **To put away all forms of Pagan worship - Baal Worship!**
- **And to obey His holy commandments.**

Only when these compulsory conditions were met, could Israel expect victory over their enemies and find peace and prosperity. The story continues:

1 Samuel 7:
1: *“And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and **sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.**”*
2: *And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and **all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.***
3: *And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, **If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliveryou out of the hand of the Philistines.***
4: *Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.*
5: *And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.*
6: *And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, **We have sinned against the LORD.** And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.*
7: *And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.*
8: *And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.*

9: And Samuel took a **sucking lamb**, and offered it for a burnt offering **wholly** unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; **and the LORD heard him.**

10: And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11: And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car.

12: Then Samuel took a **stone**, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it **Eben-ezer**, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

13: So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.”

7. Where is the Ark Today?

This is a question which has intrigued Jew and Gentile for centuries: because after the destruction of Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar the Ark of the Covenant vanished from the scene. It certainly wasn't in the second Temple which was built when the exiles returned to Israel after the 70 year Babylonian captivity. The Holy of Holies in the second Temple didn't contain the Ark. So where is The Ark of the Testimony today? What happened to it?

- Many of you have seen the film **Raiders of the Lost Ark**; and how (according to Hollywood) the Ark ended up in a packing case and was unceremoniously wheeled away into the bowels of a large warehouse. Is that where the Ark is?
- Others claim that the Ark of the Testimony was taken by a son of king Solomon, who he had by the Queen of Sheba, to a place in Ethiopia: and that it is there to this day.
- Others maintain that the Ark is no more: and that being made of wood, it must have rotted away after all these centuries.
- Some of us have also seen a film about an archaeological discovery about the Ark of the Covenant being found at **Golgotha**: at the very place where our Saviour was crucified: and that traces of the Saviour's blood were on the mercy seat! An astonishing claim by any standards: and one which may turn out to be genuine.

Whatever be the truth, one thing is certain that the **Ark of the Testimony** is mentioned in the New Testament. Whether it is the **original Ark in Heaven**, which Moses saw when he was with God at Mount Sinai, or the one he had made in the desert after Israel came out of Egypt, I leave the hearer /reader to decide. But here is scriptural evidence that the **Ark of the Testimony still exists**. The following passage is taken from the last book in the Bible. It is a record of what the prophet John saw when he was banished to the island of Patmos for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1: 9: *“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the **word of God**, and for the **testimony of Jesus Christ.**”*

What did John see? The answer is, he saw world events right down to the end of this age and beyond. See **A Voice In The Wilderness - Canada** booklet **Understand the Revelation** for details of the 7 Seals and the 7th Trumpet which occurs at the end of the 7th Seal. Here is John's record:

Revelation 11:

15: *“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*

16: *And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,*

17: *Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.*

18: *And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*

19: And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the 'ark of his testament:' and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail."

And there you have it: scriptural evidence that the **Ark of the Testimony is in heaven itself**. In my opinion this is the great original which Moses saw when he was with the Almighty at Mount Sinai. This is the throne of **Yahovah the Almighty God of Israel**: a throne based on **everlasting law** and **everlasting mercy**. Not only is the **Ark of the Testimony** in existence to day, its sacred contents - the **Ten Commandments** - also still exist. They are not obsolete as so many misguided people think.

Summary

- The **Ark of the Covenant** built in the days of Moses was a gold-plated wooden box which contained the **Ten Commandments**, which were written with the *finger of God!* The solid gold lid of that box was called the **Mercy Seat**. In effect the Ark represented the throne and presence of the Almighty God, whose government is based on eternal **law** and **mercy**.
- Contempt of Yahweh's law results in disaster and death. The ancient Philistines learned this lesson at great cost to themselves.
- But the burning question they asked so long ago is relevant today.

What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?

- You will need to answer that question today and every day of your life: especially when you are faced with temptation to sin, to break the Ten Commandments. You either harden your heart and get rid of the Ark and the law it contains; or you let it lead the way to **Yeshua, the Rock of Israel!**
- The original Ark is in heaven, the Apostle John saw it. And you can be absolutely certain that within that Ark are the **Ten Commandments** written with the finger of God!
- Today is a day of decision and consecration: a day to repent and put away paganism: a day to put our faith in the **sucking Lamb**: a day to come to **Yeshua the Rock Ebenezar**.
- **What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?**
That's the question you will need to answer for yourself. Be careful how you answer it!

AMEN!

In the Son's Name — For the Father's glory.

Elder: Max W. Mader

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