RAIDERS OF THE LOST MENORAH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe, "Speak to Aharon and tell him that when he lights up the Menorah, the seven lamps should give off light towards the face of the Menorah." (Bamidbar 8:1-2)

On the 17th day of Tammuz, in the year 3830/70 CE, the Roman legions entered Jerusalem and laid siege to the city. Three weeks later, on the 9th of Av they destroyed the Second Temple and had already killed over one million Jews. Another 90,000 were led by Titus back to Rome to become slaves, leaving behind only a small community of Jews in Eretz Yisroel under the leadership of Rebi Yochanan ben Zakkai.

Aside from the many atrocities that the Romans committed against the Jewish people, one was the pillaging of sacred Temple property. The very symbol of this is not in Israel, but in Rome: the Arch of Titus. Like most triumphal arches this one celebrates a victory of war, and in this case, Rome's crushing of the Jewish revolt that resulted in the destruction of the Temple.

Inside the arch is a bas relief sculpture showing the Roman army carrying the spoils of war down through the streets of Rome. The most notable item is a large menorah being carried down the Via Scara, and it is believed that the actual menorah is stashed in the secret tomb of Alric the Goth at the bottom of the Busento River.

Little did the Romans know at that time that they had created their own historical smoking gun. Thus, according to an article that appeared in the January 27, 1996 Jerusalem Post, Israel's Minister of Religious Affairs, Shimon Shetreet, some 1,926 years later since Titus absconded with the Menorah, asked Pope John Paul II to help him locate the Menorah, and to arrange for its return to the Jewish people. To date the request has yet to be fulfilled.

However, which menorah are we talking about? Certainly not the Menorah that Moshe Rabbeinu had Betzalel build in the desert, for the Talmud explains:

A man may not make a . . . menorah like the design of the Menorah. He may, however, make one with five, six or eight [branches], but with seven he may not make it even though it might be of other metals. Rebi Yosi bar Yehudah says, "Also of wood he may not make it because that is how the Chashmonaim made it." They said to him, "Is that a proof? It consisted of metal staves overlaid with tin. When they became richer they made one of silver, and when they became even richer they

made one of gold! (Avodah Zarah 43a)

Thus, we see that by the time the Chashmonaim re-took the Temple and were able to resume lighting the Menorah, it was not the Menorah with which the Jewish people had first entered Eretz Yisroel. That Menorah, apparently, had been long gone, and the one that the Romans stole and carried back to Rome after the destruction of the Temple, was the Menorah that the Chashmonaim had built later on in history. Valuable yes, but not the miraculous Menorah that had been built for the Jewish people by G-d Himself.

What happened to that Menorah?

It's a mystery. However, it does say:

Antiochos brazenly entered the Temple [in 169 BCE] and stole as much gold and silver as he wanted. He entered the Holy Temple and removed the holy vessels, the gold Altar, the Menorah, the Table for the Panim bread, the Paroches [curtain], and the gold ornamentation with which the front of the Temple was decorated. (History of the Jewish People, The Second Temple Era; Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1982; p. 63)

However, as shall see, this still does not answer the question regarding the original Menorah made by Moshe Rabbeinu.

SHABBOS DAY:

The Menorah was made out of a single piece of beaten gold. Everything from its base to its flower was made of a single piece of beaten gold, precisely according to the vision G-d showed Moshe. (Bamidbar 8:4)

The Talmud, in reference to a statement made in the Mishnah regarding the Yom Kippur Service in the Temple, asks:

To what does this refer? If you say to the First Temple, did they have the Paroches? Rather, it must refer to the Second Temple. But, did they have the Aron? It is taught in a Brisa: When they hid the Aron they hid with it the jar of manna, the container of Shemen HaMishchah (Anointing Oil), Aharon's staff that blossomed, and the container in which the Philistines had placed gifts for the G-d of Israel, as it says, "And take the Ark of the L-rd and place it into the wagon; and the articles of gold, which you shall return to Him as a trespass-offering, and place it in a box beside it . . ." (I Shmuel 6:8). Who hid them? Yoshiahu, king of Yehudah (3285-3316/475-444 BCE). What did he see to do it? He found a posuk, "G-d will drive you and your king whom you will place over you to a nation you do not know . . ." (Devarim 28:36), so he hid them . . . (Yoma 52b)

Thus, we see that at least 21 years prior to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and destruction of the First Temple (423 BCE), Yoshiahu HaMelech had the foresight to prepare for the possible desecration of the holy Temple vessels and he placed them out of harm's way. Mysteriously, though

the Talmud accounts for the Ark, the container of manna, the Anointing Oil, Aharon's miraculous staff, and the Philistine box, it does not list the Menorah, among other things.

Nevertheless, there is good reason to assume that it was part of the special inventory list of holy items to be saved for the future and final Temple. As to which Menorah the Jewish people used until the actual time of destruction, we already know that Shlomo HaMelech had other menorahs built for the Temple since the beginning of its construction. And, if the Aron HaKodesh and the other implements crucial for the daily Temple procedure could be removed from the service as a special measure of that time, then certainly the original Menorah could be replaced by a substitute, just as the Chashmonaim had done in their time.

And there they wait, hidden from the eyes of all mankind, until the time that Heaven deems fit to reveal them once again. Thus, the Talmud states:

Rav Nachman said that the Chachamim said that it was hidden in the compartment where the wood was stored. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said that this is taught in a Mishnah: A kohen was once working and saw that one of the floor stones was different from the others. He went to go and tell others, but he had not yet finished speaking when he died. From that time onward it was known with certainty that the Aron was hidden there. What was he doing? Rav Chelvo said that he was working with an axe. It was taught in the school of Yishmael that once two blemished kohanim were busy removing rotten wood when the axe of one of them slipped off into that place, and a fire came out and consumed him. (Yoma 54a)

Apparently, the time had come to confirm the whereabouts of the hidden Aron, but not to recover it. History was not ready for it, or any of the other Temple vessels hidden together with the Aron HaKodesh. And, if the time wasn't right when a temple stood, then how much more so would the time not be right when a temple does not stand!

All that would happen is that they would end up in some museum on public display, which was, and is not their purpose in Creation. Indeed, most of the hidden vessels were only visible to the kohanim during the service, and the Aron HaKodesh was accessed only once a year on Yom Kippur. They were never meant to be on display, and will never be archeological show pieces.

In fact, it is really quite amazing when you think about it. Eretz Yisroel is a tiny land filled with so much history that makes it an archeologist's paradise. You would think that, by now, with all the digging that goes on in this country, we would have found the Aron HaKodesh by now, if in fact it is still here. Indeed, I was told there is an archeologist looking for it right now in Egypt, and legends roam about that it was hidden in one place or another.

It reminds one of the small jar of oil that the Chashmonaim found with which they were able to re-kindle the Menorah after their miraculous victory over the Greeks. Though the enemy had looked for every last jar and broke the seal of all of the ones they found, defiling them, they somehow overlooked the most important one of all: the one that traced its history back through time to

Ya'akov Avinu and the Ohr HaGanuz.

Well, that's Hashgochah Pratis for you. No one who is not fitting finds anything he is not supposed to find, and no one finds something before its time. Thus, you can be sure that when someone does find the Aron HaKodesh or the Menorah, or any of the original and holy Temple vessels, it will be because the time has come, meaning that redemption is not far away, with the third and final Temple on its heels. It can be no other way, which is why what follows next is really quite significant at this time in history.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

And I will give to her vineyards from there and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. (Hoshea 2:16-17)

While current events in Israel and around the world vie for our attention, the following is, perhaps, background information as to why:

The first of the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, and the famed Copper Scroll (made of pure copper) was found at Qumram in 1952. The Copper Scroll, written in Hebrew, is the inventory of the holy treasures of Solomon's First Temple, treasures which were hidden before the destruction of that Temple by the Babylonians, and treasures which have not been seen since. The Copper Scroll tells us that a silver [alabaster?] chest, the vestments of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest), gold and silver in great quantities, the Tabernacle of the L-rd, and many treasures were hidden in a desolate valley, under a hill, on its east side, forty stones deep. The Mishkan was a portable Temple for the Ark of the Covenant. The writings in the Copper Scroll were confirmed 40 years later in the 1990s through an ancient text found in the introduction to Emek HaMelech (Valley of the King) a book published in 1648 in Amsterdam, Holland, by Rabbi Naftali Hertz ben Ya'akov Elchanan. The book's introduction included ancient records which Rabbi Hertz called the Mishnayos. Hertz used the term Mishnayos, since the text of the Mishnayos is missing from the Mishnah, which is the first section of the Talmud . . . The "missing" mishnaic text in the Mishnayos is called the "Massaches Keilim," written in twelve chapters. Each chapter of the Mishnayos describes vessels which were hidden under the direction of Yirmiyahu the Prophet by five holy men (Shimor HaLevi, Chizkiah, Tzidkiyahu, Chaggai the Prophet, and Zechariah the Prophet), seven years prior to the destruction of Solomon's First Temple, because the dangers of the Babylonian conquest were imminent. The Mishnayos describing this hiding was then written in Babylon during the Babylonian Captivity. In 1952, two large marble tablets were found in the basement of a museum in Beirut, stating they were the words of Shimor HaLevi, the servant of HaShem, and the writing on the tablets is the entire missing text of Massaches Keilim including reference to the Copper Scroll. The first chapter of the Mishnayos describes the vessels that were hidden, including the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle of the L-rd, i.e., the Mishkan, the Tablets of Moshe, the altar (with cherubim) for the daily and seasonal sacrifices (the ushebtis), the Menorah, the Kalal (copper urn) containing the Ashes of the Red Heifer (ashes from a red cow sacrificed under Moshe, necessary for ritual purification of the priests), and

numerous vessels of the kohanim. The second chapter of the Mishnayos states that a list of these treasures was inscribed upon a copper tablet. This is the Copper Scroll found at Qumran. Work in the 1990s showed that in 1896, almost one hundred years previous, Solomon Schechter at Cambridge University in England had acquired 100,000 pages of ancient Hebrew texts from the genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. A copy of the Tosefta (supplement to the Mishnah) was found in these texts, including the text on Keilim (vessels). This Tosefta is the same text as cited by Rabbi Hertz as his source for the Mishnayos. We thus have the hiding of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle of the L-rd verified by four separate sources: 1) the Marble Tablets of Beirut; 2) the Copper Scroll; 3) the ancient sacred texts of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, now at Cambridge University, England; and 4) the Mishnayos of Rabbi Hertz.
(http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Ark-of-the-Covenant)

Enter archeologist Vendyl Jones, in search of the lost Ark. The following is excepted from an article that was serialized in the Jewish Herald Voice Newspaper, Houston, TX in May 2000.

Circa 1960, Jones read about the Copper Scroll with its list of Holy Treasures including the Mishkan with great interest, and by reference, the Ark of the Covenant. His mind was immediately struck with the idea that this was one of the "records" spoken of in Macabbees II that he had thought about for so many years! Thus began a personal quest that was to change his life.

On September 18, 1968, one year after starting on the Stechool/Haas team, Jones located the River of the Dome and the Cave of the Column, the two key landmarks listed in the Copper Scroll. For 10 years thereafter, Jones essentially "laid the Scroll on the ground" and deciphered and located many more of its key reference points. It was not until 1977 that he began his first excavation at the Cave of the Column (privately funded by Larry and Louise Henneman.) For the next 10 years, Jones and his volunteer excavation teams ignored the taunts of academicians, only to come up empty-handed. However, by 1988, Jones had been able to identify and locate 32 of the reference points mentioned in the Copper Scroll.

In April of 1988, his patience and fortitude paid off when the VJRI excavation team found a small juglet of thick oil. Intensive testing by the Pharmaceutical Department of Hebrew University concluded that the substance inside the juglet was indeed the HOLY ANOINTING OIL, now believed to be Shemen Mishchah (the oil that was used as a fragrance on the oblation for a sweet smelling savor on the sacrifices and which was also used as the Holy Oil for anointing the priests and kings of ancient Israel). This find was crucial since it was the first find of an item mentioned in the Copper Scroll!

The Rabbinic community was jubilant over the discovery, and Rabbi Menachem Burstin, the foremost Jewish authority on the botany and chemistry of the Holy Temple species and artifacts implied that it was an early sign that we were moving towards the restoration of the Holy Temple. The juglet has been on display at the Israel National Museum in Jerusalem.

On February 15, 1989, the news of this find was broken to the public by the New York Times. During the ensuing few weeks, most of the major news media including ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN carried the story on national and international TV. In October of 1989, National Geographic Magazine featured the find, followed by Omni Magazine in December of the same year. Countless other news sources worldwide carried the story for their publications.

MELAVE MALKAH:

"Therefore," says the L-rd, "I will restore them to their beginnings. I will set judges up as at the first, and counselors as in the beginning." (Yeshayahu)

On May 18, Arutz Sheva ran the following article (excerpted).

Exclusive: Kabbalist Blesses Jones to Uncover Holy Lost Ark.

An unnamed Kabbalist has granted blessing to famed archeologist Dr. Vendyl Jones, to uncover the Holy Ark of the Covenant. Jones plans to excavate the Lost Ark by the Tisha B'Av Fast this summer.

The famed archaeologist, who is the inspiration for the "Indiana Jones" series, has spent most of his life searching for the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was the resting place of the Ten Commandments written by Moshe (Moses) on Mount Sinai, and was hidden just before the destruction of the First Temple.

The Talmud says the Ark is hidden in a secret passage under the Temple Mount. Jones says that, in fact, the Ark was brought through a secret passage beneath the mount - and that same natural tunnel in fact continues 18 miles into the Judean Desert.

Throughout the many years of his quest, Jones has been in close contact and under the tutelage of numerous Rabbis and Kabbalists. Jones, who is extremely knowledgeable in Torah, Talmud and Kabbalah, has now received permission from both known and hidden Kabbalists to finally uncover the lost Ark.

Dr. Jones, who divides his time between Texas and Israel, has been here since March 9th ready to finally reveal the Ark. However, Jones has been waiting for permission from a mysterious Kabbalist, as well as for project funding to come through . . . As recently as last month, the rabbi, who only communicates via messenger, told Jones that the time was not yet right to discover the Temple vessels.

Last Thursday, Dr. Jones received a communication from the rabbi reading, "The time is right."

Dr. Jones says the discovery of the lost ark will "flip the whole world right-side-up."

"I just gotta drill a bore-hole into the chamber, drop a pin-camera in and there it is. And everything is gonna change, believe me. The Jewish people are gonna come back."

Returning to the Houston article, it continues:

During the 1992 excavation, the VJRI team discovered a hidden silo in the bedrock that contained a reddish snuff-looking material that appeared to be organic in nature. It was analyzed by Dr. Marvin Antelman, who was at the time a consultant to the Weitzmann Institute, and subsequently the pollens in the material were identified by Dr. Terry Hutter, a paleobotanist.

These tests indicated that the reddish material was a compound of nine specific spices in a highly refined state. Two additional inorganic ingredients, Karsina Lye and Sodom Salt, were found close by in the same cave, obviously ready to be mixed with the spices, to comprise the ingredients of the Holy Incense, the Ketores, listed in the Torah and the Talmud. This was the same compound burned on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Temple.

A total of 900 pounds of the Incense was eventually found. The Incense was found by excavating the mound highlighted by the mysterious "Blue Aura," an extraordinary lighting feature inside the cave mentioned in the Copper Scroll and obviously used as a descriptive landmark by those who hid the Temple Treasures. On the first plate of the Copper Scroll, line #9, it tells of the "tel kohelet" or blue mound.

With the advent of this second dramatic find of items from the Holy Temple, and its implications that Jones' Copper Scroll research was on the right track, his long-standing relationship with the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) suddenly deteriorated. The IAA decided to pull Jones' excavation license. Their reasons for attempting to shut down the excavations are still not clear to this day . . .

In 1994, Jones undertook two separate but related operations, both of which utilized high-tech screening methods to identify hidden structural features. Both operations were to achieve dramatic results:

The first was a joint operation with the Israeli Petroleum, Geology and Geophysics Institute to utilize the Institute's Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) technology on-site at the Cave of the Column. GPR involves high frequency radio emissions and computer analysis to examine the underlying bedrock and geological strata of any given area. The GPR survey confirmed the existence of a massive chamber referenced in the Copper Scroll (subsequently re-determined by Electrical Resistivity work in 1998 to be 25 feet high and 65 feet wide).

The upper portion of this large chamber (underneath the debris from the Spice Cave) is reputed to hold the Kalal containing the Ashes of the Red Heifer. Jones' Copper Scroll interpretation is, "under the spices is the purification," (i.e., under the Incense are the Ashes of purification). Then the Copper Scroll says (abridged version), "There is a very large cave on the third level viewing eastward closed by a bonded wall . . . hidden and concealed. There is the Tabernacle on the third level . . . complete . . . and hidden . . . in the last chamber on the West Side.")

Jones believes that the levels referred to are the bedding planes of the strata of which the cave is composed, which would in fact put the large chamber on the "third" level. Jones believes that this large chamber may very well be the exit of the Cave of Zedekiah that begins just east of the

Damascus gate on the north side of Jerusalem. (The entrance in Jerusalem has been totally closed.) This passage goes directly under the Temple Mount and is believed to descend to the Valley of Achor where the Cave of the Column is located (a distance of 18 miles).

While the Talmud states that "The Ark of the Covenant is hidden in a passage under the Temple Mount," Jones sees no contradiction because the passage continues from Jerusalem to the Valley of Achor. This passage is referred to in II Kings 25:4-5. Jones believes that the Cave of the Column in the Valley of Achor IS a "door of hope."

While this large chamber was confirmed by Ground Penetrating Radar at the end of the exploration season in 1994, refusal to grant dig permits and other means of interference and restrictions imposed on exploration methods by Israeli agencies slowed the work to a snails pace for several years. Though VJRI volunteers exhibited amazing stamina, moving mountains of debris and dirt with hand tools and buckets, they continually encountered solid bedrock, but could not obtain permission to use heavy equipment. And yet, as this is being written, Jones is in Israel making final preparations to drill a two inch core hole through the debris from the Spice Cave into the Large Chamber. Jones has fittingly named this project, PROJECT PETAKH TIQVAH ("Door or Opening of Hope"). If he is able to confirm a large cavern, even if it is filled with debris, it will add strong evidence to the geophysical confirmations and set the stage to allow for more direct inspection of the contents of that chamber. An open cavity would lend itself to partial observation by dropping a small but powerful camera into the opening. If the cavern is verified, but filled with debris, it will call for a large diameter descent hole. Obviously, it could be a very exciting time in Jones' long-term search.

There is more, much more, and most of it can be accessed over the Web. However, what may be in store is much more than an answer to the question, "Where is the original Menorah?" If we are in fact the generation to merit to find the holy vessels from the First Temple, including the Aron HaKodesh, we will finally have an answer to where we are.

Have a great Shabbos,
PW

Text

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