

THE FAMOUS ARK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Make an ark of acacia wood, two-and-a-half cubits in length, one-and-a-half cubits wide, and one-and-a-half cubits in height. (Shemos 25:10)

By now the ark is famous. I'm not sure how many people knew about the Aron HaBris before the movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," but certainly a lot more know about it now that the movie has been made. And the closing scene of the movie says it all, as it is stored in a CIA warehouse amongst thousands of other crated items: it is meant to be hidden from man, even if he has already found it, too powerful a weapon to fall into the wrong hands.

Whether or not light actually did emanate out from the Ark of the Covenant and destroyed the enemies of the Jewish people in battle is not the issue, or the reason why it has yet to be found and revealed. Rather, it is powerful for another reason, and the Arabs have barred access to an underground chamber in which it may sit for this very reason: it is incredible testimony to the events of Har Sinai, and its discovery will herald Yemos HaMoshiach.

First a little history. The original Ark was made in Moshe Rabbeinu's time by Betzalel, and housed in the Mishkan throughout the 40 years in the desert. It contained the Luchos HaBris, upon which were written the Ten Commandments, as well as Aharon's rod that budded (Bamidbar 17:25), and the jar of mann that was stored away for future generations (Shemos 16:33). God communicated with Moshe "from between the two cherubim" on the Ark's cover (Shemos 25:22).

As they traveled throughout the 40 years in the desert, and at the crossing of the Jordan, the Aron preceded the people, and was the signal that it was time to pack up camp and move on (Yehoshua 3:3). At the crossing of the Jordan, the river went dry as soon as the feet of the kohanim carrying the Aron touched its waters, and it remained that way until the kohanim left the river, after the people had passed over (Yehoshua 3:15-17).

In the capture of the walled city of Jericho, the Aron was carried round the city once a day for seven days, preceded by the armed men and seven kohanim sounding seven shofars (Yehoshua. 6:4-15). On the seventh day the seven kohanim sounding the shofars before the Aron encompassed the city seven times and with a great shout, Jericho's wall fell down flat and the people took the city (Yehoshua 6:16-20).

After the defeat at Ai, Yehoshua poured out his heart before the Aron (Yehoshua 7:6-9). When he read the Torah to the people between Har Gerizim and Har Eival, they stood on each side of the

Aron, which was later set up by Yehoshua in the Mishkan at Shiloh.

The Aron is next spoken of as being in the Mishkan at Shiloh during Shmuel's apprenticeship under Eli (Shmuel 1:3:3). After the settlement of the Jewish people in Canaan, the Aron remained in the Mishkan at Gilgal for a season before being removed to Shiloh until the time of Eli (Yirmiyahu 7:12), when it was carried into a battle against the Philistines. However, the Jewish people were not victorious, and the Aron was taken by the Philistines (Shmuel 1:4:3-11), only to be sent back seven months later, because of events that occurred.

It is incredible that the Aron HaBris could be captured by gentiles, especially as immoral as the Philistines. Perhaps it foreshadowed how the Divine Presence would eventually go into exile with the Jewish people, something that the Jewish people never thought could happen as long as they had the Temple. This incident taught otherwise, and was a warning, because, as we see, the Aron HaBris could take care of itself amongst a hostile nation; could the Jewish people as well?

In a later battle against the Philistines, the Jewish people were again defeated, and the Aron was again captured (Shmuel 1:4:3-5). This time, the news of its capture was at once taken to Eli, who fell upon hearing it, and died. His daughter-in-law, giving birth to a son at the time, named him Ichabod, which means, "Where is glory?" in reference to the loss of the Aron.

The Philistines took the Aron to several places in their country, and at each place misfortune befell them (Shmuel 1:5:1-6). At Ashdod it was placed in the temple of Dagon, and the next morning Dagon was found bowing before it. The statue was put back into place, but on the following morning it was again found prostrate and broken. And, the people of Ashdod were afflicted with hemorrhoids, and a plague of mice occurred. The people of Gath and of Ekron were affected by boils (Shmuel 1:5:8-12).

After the Aron had been amongst them for seven months, the Philistines, on the advice of their diviners, returned it to the Jewish people at that time. They accompanied its return with an offering consisting of golden images of the hemorrhoids and mice with which they had been afflicted.

The Aron was left in the field of Yehoshua of Beit Shemesh, and the people there offered sacrifices. But, when out of curiosity the men of Beit Shemesh looked at the Aron, 70 of them died (Shmuel 1:6:19). As a result, they sent it to Kiryat Yearim, where it was placed in the house of Avinadav, whose son Eliezer was sanctified to keep it. The Aron remained there for 20 years.

At the beginning of his reign, Dovid HaMelech returned the Aron from Kiryat Yearim to Jerusalem amidst great rejoicing. Along the way, Uzziah, one of the drivers of the cart upon which the Aron was being carried, put out his hand to steady the Aron, and was killed by God for touching it. Dovid HaMelech, in fear, left the Aron in the house of Oved-Edom the Gittite for three months (Shmuel 2:6:1-11).

After hearing that God had blessed Oved-Edom because of the presence of the Aron in his house, Dovid HaMelech had the Aron brought to Jerusalem by the Levi'im, while he himself danced before

God. Once inside Jerusalem, Dovid put the Aron in the Mishkan he had prepared for it, offered sacrifices, distributed food, and blessed the people and his own household (Shmuel 2:6:17-20).

It was later placed by Shlomo HaMelech in the Bais HaMikdosh he had built (Melachim 1:8:6-9). The Holy of Holies was prepared for the Aron, and when the Temple was dedicated, the Aron, containing only the Ten Commandments, was placed inside. That is where it remained until shortly before the destruction of the First Temple, and the first exile of the Jewish people into Babylonia.

Once the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and plundered the Temple, the location of the Aron HaBris became a mystery. Many simply assumed that the Aron was taken away by Nebuchadnezzar and destroyed. It certainly was not around when the Jewish people subsequently returned to their land 70 years later and built the Second Temple.

However, there is a reference to a document that says that the prophet Yirmiyahu, being warned by God, took the Aron, the Mishkan, and the Incense Altar, and buried them in a cave on Har Nevo, informing those of his followers who wished to find the place that it should remain unknown "until the time that God should gather His people again together in mercy" (Maccabees 2:2:4-10)

Modern excavations near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem have discovered the existence of tunnels. However, digging beneath the Temple Mount itself is heavily restricted, especially since the Arabs built a wall barring any underground access from the Jewish side, for obvious reasons. Over the last decade, if not longer, they have been busy destroying all archeological evidence of a Jewish temple on the site.

For, according to Jewish tradition, Shlomo HaMelech, when building the Temple, had the Aron HaBris put on a platform which could be lowered down into a tunnel system if the Temple was ever overrun. In 423 BCE, though Nebuchadnezzar's troops destroyed the temple and carried off Temple treasures, there is no mention of the Aron anywhere, probably because it was lowered into the cave system below and hidden away by the Levi'im.

There are some prominent rabbis today who claim to have seen the room in which the Aron is hidden, just before the Arabs sealed off the area with their wall. The Arabs have claimed to have done this to protect their own places of worship above ground, but it is obvious that the finding of the Aron would be a big blow for the other major religions, including their own, immediately verifying the Torah's version of history, and the Jewish people as the Chosen People.

Contrary to what some people may think, Harrison Ford did not really go looking for the Aron HaBris, and he certainly did not find it. Furthermore, we can safely assume that it is not hidden today in some huge warehouse owned and monitored by the American Government in some restricted area in the United States. That is Hollywood's make-believe version of the story.

Rather, it is probably hidden under the Temple Mount, as the Talmud said it is:

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 mann, the container of Shemen HaMishchah-Anointing Oil, Aharon's staff that blossomed, and the container in which the Philistines had placed gifts for the God of Israel, as it says, "And take the Ark of God 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 ." (Shmuel 1:6:8). Who hid them? Yoshiahu, king of Yehudah (3285- 3316/475-444 BCE). What did he see to compel him to do this? He found a verse: "God 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)

Furthermore, it says that once a kohen happened to stumble on a loose floor stone in the Temple, but before he could tell anyone, he mysteriously fell and died. It was not yet time to reveal the Aron HaBris, so those who knew where it was were denied the opportunity to reveal it. It belongs to another level of reality, and when it comes time for that level of reality to take over and become our reality, the Aron HaBris will be found and revealed.

However, according to Yirmiyahu, that time is when God gathers in His people to Eretz Yisroel in mercy. Certainly that has been happening over the last 70 years, and especially over the last decade. At the same, talk has increased regarding the location of the chamber in which the Aron HaBris sits and waits for the moment in time that it, once again, will prove to the world that God alone is God, and the King of all kings.

May it happen quickly in our time.

Text

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