

Your QUESTIONS About Prophecy ANSWERED Part 3

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WHERE IS THE ARK OF THE COVENANT?

A few months back I received an e-mail publicizing the attendance of an internationally known televangelist at a conference in Jerusalem where for the first time a special model of the Ark of the Covenant was unveiled. The e-mail went on to say this was a definite sign that we were in the "last days." Of course the e-mail was playing on the interest many Christians have in the rebuilding of the temple, but why all the hype about the Ark of the Covenant?

Students of prophecy know from the study of scriptures that during the Tribulation the temple will be defiled with the *abomination of desolation* brought by the Antichrist. Daniel is the first to prophesy this event when he writes that in middle of the Tribulation a prince "shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering." (Daniel 9:27 see also 12:11) Jesus confirms that this defilement will take place when He tells His disciples, "Therefore when you see the '*abomination of desolation*,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Mt 24:15, 16)

In order for the *abomination of desolation* to take place, several events need to take place. First, the Jewish people have to be in control of their homeland. According to many scholars this is the key sign of the times. None of the other major prophecies of the last days can take place without the Jewish people back in the Land. Second, the Jewish people have to be in control of Jerusalem including the Temple Mount. While Jerusalem is presently under the

control of Israel, the Temple Mount is not. It is under the control of a Muslim Caliph. The third event that has to take place before the *abomination of desolation* is the temple has to be rebuilt.

Understanding this sequence of events has led many to take a great deal of interest in the rebuilding of the temple now that the Jewish people are returning to their homeland. Some have gone so far as to lend moral support (like the televangelist mentioned above) and even financial help to those striving to rebuild the temple. I guess you could say these folks are trying to help God along as He fulfills prophecy. But the question we need to ask is, does the rebuilding of the temple and the *abomination of desolation* require that the Ark of the Covenant be found? As Christians have studied and discussed the rebuilding of the temple, they have often gone off on two related tangents.

The first tangent is the need to find a "red heifer" to make the ashes for purification in temple worship. (Numbers 19:1-10) Over the years, rumors have abounded about finding the perfect heifer. In 1996 as a result of a program developed with the help of Christian ranchers from Texas, a red heifer was born in Israel. For three years, prophecy speakers excitedly talked about "Melody" as they waited to see if she qualified. Sadly, at the end of the third year it was discovered that she had too many white hairs. So the search goes on for the perfect red heifer which would allow, through the purification of ashes of the red heifer, Jews to once again be allowed go on the Temple Mount to worship and

build a temple.

Imagine the international turmoil that finding a "perfect" red heifer would bring in light of today's world

tensions. Here is what a Boston University history professor said about finding a verified red heifer, "We could be starting a war. If this is a real red heifer, and strict Orthodox rabbis have declared her worthy of sacrifice, then a lot of Jews in Israel will take that as a sign that a new phase of history is about to begin. The Muslims are ready for jihad anyway, so if you have Jews up there doing sacrifices, talk about a red flag in front of a charging bull." (National Review Online 04-11-2002)

The second tangent concerning rebuilding the temple which many are excited about is the Ark. More specifically, the interest or excitement is in the present location of the Ark and the various efforts to try to locate it.

Last summer a Jewish newspaper published the following headline: "An unnamed Kabbalist has granted blessing to famed archaeologist 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." (Arutz Sheva-May 20, 2005) This story was picked up by other media outlets around the world. Again, those interested in the finding of the Ark were wondering "Is this it?" Dr. Jones later agreed that he had received the blessing, but was misquoted as to when the Ark would be found. He had only remarked it would be special if the Ark could be found before the Tisha B'Av Fast which is the anniversary of the destructions of the



Aerial view of the Temple Mount where the next temple will be built.
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first two temples. The problem is he doesn't have financing to do the necessary drilling at this time.

Dr. Jones believes the Ark, along with the temple menorah, was buried by Jeremiah in a hidden eighteen-mile long cave that goes from the Temple Mount out into the Judean Wilderness. The description of the exact location is believed to be recorded in the Copper Scroll which is part of the Dead Sea Scroll find. The writing on this scroll is not only cryptic but much of the text has been damaged through mishandling and age. After thirty years of research and testing of hypotheses, Dr. Jones now believes he knows the location of the Ark and is now trying to raise the funds to do the drilling.

Another more recent theory on the Ark is that it is hidden in some secret hiding place under the Temple Mount. This theory holds the Ark was hidden by Solomon in a secret place under the temple. This secret place was designed and built by Egyptians hired by Solomon, experts in building secret chambers in the pyramids. This may also explain Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian woman. Solomon supposedly revealed this hiding place in the Song of Solomon. Those who hold this theory believe that very soon someone will be given wisdom from above, like Solomon, to reveal the code to finding the hiding place. The major problem with this theory is that King Josiah tells the Levites to return the holy Ark to the house that Solomon built. (2 Chronicles 35:3) For some reason the Levites had removed the Ark from the Holy of Holies and now they were told to return it by King Josiah. This was over 300 years after Solomon built the Temple.

Another theory on the location of the Ark is that it was taken to Ethiopia. Still another says that it was taken up into heaven. Of course, many believe it was destroyed when the temple was destroyed in 586 BC.

While we do not know what happened to the Ark of the Covenant, a discussion of the subject does raise a number of questions.

1. Would God allow this holy object representing His throne to be destroyed by an unbelieving earthly king? Maybe the Ark no longer represented His throne after His glory left the Temple just before it was destroyed.
2. If the Ark was hidden why was it not brought out of hiding at the temple's rebuilding? Surely someone from the returning captives would have had some knowledge of where it was hidden.
3. If God had the Ark hidden, why?

A final question we need to raise is whether Christians should be excited about finding the Ark and should they help support efforts in trying to find it. One has to admit that finding the Ark of the Covenant would be a major archaeological discovery, but is its finding a necessary event to fulfill the prophecies of the Tribulation temple? Does the Ark of the Covenant have to be found for the future *abomination of desolation* to take place?

First, we have to understand what happened in the first *abomination of desolation*. In chapter 11, Daniel gives us an amazing prophecy on what was

going to happen to the Medo-Persian and Greek empires. In that prophecy, Daniel wrote that a king from the north would go south to do battle with his enemy of the south. This king will be intercepted by a third army which defeats him. On his way back north, this defeated king goes through the "holy covenant" (Jerusalem) and "forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the *abomination of desolation*." (Daniel 11:31) Bible scholars through the ages have believed this king was none other than Antiochus Epiphanes. From this we can assume what Antiochus did foreshadowed what would happen in the last days.

According to tradition, he put a statue of a pagan god in the Holy of Holies and sacrificed a pig on the holy altar. This is called an *abomination of desolation*. Jesus predicted in Matthew 24 that another *abomination of desolation* would happen in the future. Please note: the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 AD but didn't desecrate it as Antiochus did.

Now that we know the details of this abomination, does the Ark have to be in the Holy of Holies of the last days temple in order for the desolation

prophecy to be fulfilled? We only need to examine the temple in the days of Antiochus. According to all historical evidence and tradition, the Holy of Holies was empty. There was no Ark of the Covenant. The priesthood and the temple rituals were a functioning reality without the Ark. Therefore, we can conclude the Ark does not have to be found before the next temple is built.

The history of the Ark is an interesting study. It would be very exciting if the Ark were found. But remember it is no longer the dwelling place of God. Now the Holy Spirit dwells in we who believe. (1 Corinthians 6:19) As a result, our bodies have become the true temple where now God dwells.

-Larry Jaffrey

