

Today's Church Has Lost Its Spiritual Ark of the Covenant

It was a time of great spiritual decline and moral decay in ancient Israel. Eli, the obese high priest, was 98 years old and blind, physically and spiritually. His corrupt sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were "sons of Belial" who "knew not the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12, KJV). "Belial," a biblical term meaning "worthless or wicked fellows," is also a title of Satan (2 Cor. 6:15). Eli's sons disgraced the priesthood and provoked God's wrath by their greed and immorality. When Israel was true to God, they were invincible; when they strayed, they were vulnerable. The same is true for us.

After 4,000 men died in combat against the Philistines, Israel took the ark of the covenant with them in the next battle for good fortune. They suffered a devastating defeat—30,000 men died, including Hophni and Phinehas, plus "the ark of God was taken" (1 Sam. 4:11, MEV). When Eli heard his sons were dead and the ark was stolen, he fell off his seat, broke his neck and died. Then his daughter-in-law went into premature labor and died birthing a son she fittingly named Ichabod, meaning "the glory is departed from Israel." What happened to Israel can happen to a country, a church or even an individual.

Losing the ark meant losing God's presence and favor, for which there is no substitute. The ark of the covenant was the most sacred piece of furniture in the world and the most precious treasure in Israel. It was a visible icon of the invisible God! There are over 200 references to the ark in the Bible proving its prominent role in Israel's history. The ark represented God's tangible presence among His people and was, in essence, God's throne on earth. It was housed in the holy of holies, an inner sanctuary of Moses' tabernacle, as the centerpiece of Israel's camp. A pillar of cloud by day and fire by night hovered over it to signify the "*shekinah*"

glory—a Hebrew term that means “the one who dwells.” In transport or battle, the ark was carried on the priest’s shoulders in either the front or center of the tribes (Num. 10:33-36; Josh. 3:13-17, 6:6-20). The whole camp of Israel revolved around the ark just as we should around God. So long as they honored and obeyed God, their enemies scattered before them.

God gave Moses a blueprint to build the ark on Mount Sinai (Ex. 25:10-22). Every detail has spiritual significance. The rectangular, wooden box overlaid with gold was rather small (feet long, feet wide, feet tall). But great things often come in small packages, and “little is much if God is in it.” The wood speaks of the human nature; the gold speaks of the divine nature (both in Christ and in us). It had a golden crown (border) around the top, which speaks of the kingship of Christ and the royalty of believers. Four golden rings on the corners speak of taking the four Gospels to the four corners of the globe. Two staves (poles) were used for transport, a reminder that we are pilgrims heading home. Two golden cherubim (angels) were mounted on top facing each other with their wings touching. The cherubim, always connected with God’s presence and holiness, remind us “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Ps. 34:7).

The solid-gold lid of the ark was called the mercy seat. Notice it was not a judgment seat. God told Moses, “You shall put the mercy seat above upon the ark . . . I will meet with you there, and I will meet with you from above the mercy seat” (Ex. 25:21-22a). The high priest sprinkled it with blood seven times on the Day of Atonement, annually symbolizing the total removal of sin. The Ark contained the two tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten Commandments. Once the blood was applied, instead of seeing Israel through the broken Law, God saw them through the blood, the same way He sees us now. The term “propitiation,” used three times to describe Christ,

comes from the Greek word *hilasterion*, which means “atoning sacrifice or mercy seat.” So Jesus is our substitute and mercy seat, granting us acceptance from and access to the Father (Rom. 2:25; 1 John 2:1, 4:10).

Upon capture, the Philistines placed the ark in their temple of Dagon, a god of grain and fertility (1 Sam. 5). Many today make this same mistake, presuming the God of the Bible is just one of many other equal gods. The next day Dagon, a half-fish, half-man idol, was lying prostrate before the ark. They set the idol back up. but the next day. Dagon fell on his face again, his head and hands severed. That was God’s way of saying “I am the one true God and will not dwell in the same temple with idols.”

The ark moved around various Philistine cities for seven months, but it only produced trouble. The same Bible that brings blessings to believers warns of curses to unbelievers. Eventually, Israel reclaimed the ark, which David later put in his tabernacle in Jerusalem. Then Solomon placed it in his magnificent temple, and God’s glory returned to Israel.

The ark is a fitting type of Christ since the fullness of God dwelled in Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9). However, it can also be a type of the church. Just as that sacred chest held the book of the Law, the Ten Commandments, a golden bowl of manna and Aaron’s rod that budded, so we contain God’s Word and the life and power of the Holy Spirit. One major difference is the ark was only God’s temporarily dwelling place; we are God’s eternal dwelling place via the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 1 Cor. 3:16).

So, whatever happened to the ark? After the destruction of Solomon’s temple in 586 B.C., it vanished from biblical history. We do know neither Indiana Jones nor the Nazis found it as depicted in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Jewish tradition says Jeremiah or King Josiah hid it in a cave to prevent desecration. Others believe the Babylonians looted it.

The last time it is mentioned is in heaven (Rev. 11:19), but is that the same ark or a heavenly prototype of an earthly replica? Did God cherish the ark so much He raptured it? Its fate remains a mystery.

The church, due to compromise, has lost some of God's glory, but we can reclaim it. The enemy has tried to steal our most prized possession, but it can be restored through repentance and prayer. What was true in ancient Israel is true for America, the church and individuals. Let's reclaim the lost ark in our own lives and ask God to restore the glory to His church once again! {eoa}

Ben Godwin is the author of four books and pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church. To read more articles, visit his website at [and](#) take advantage of his 4-book bundle for \$25.