

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 158

The Fate of the Ark of the Covenant

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Episode Summary

The Ark of the Covenant is well-known because of the popular Indiana Jones movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. That pop culture film offers just one of over a dozen theories on what happened to the Ark of the Covenant. The question arises because the ark is not one of the artifacts taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in the biblical account of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, nor is it listed among the temple treasures returned to Israel in Ezra 1, the account of the release of the captive Judeans. This episode surveys the more interesting and important theories as to the fate of the ark.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 158: The Fate of the Ark of the Covenant. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you?

MH: Pretty good. Business as usual, but a pretty productive week. Heading toward the end of the distance ed. thing, so that's wonderful to even contemplate. I've got a trip coming up here, too. People can see what the main event is in Florida by going to the website (drmsh.com) and the main time is going to be at Calvary Chapel Surfside. That's in Indian Harbor, Florida. That's going to end about 5:00 or 5:30, then I'm going to go out to get some dinner and hopefully not talk (laughs) because I'll be talking all day. But we've appended another meeting on top of that. So the same evening, I'm going to go a few minutes away to another Calvary Chapel Church. This one is called South Coast Calvary Chapel. It's on Croton Road, and I think we're going to try to start that at 7:00. But I'm only going to go there for like an hour or hour and a half. Both of these places have read a lot of *Unseen Realm* content, and at this second one they're doing some sort of Bible study and they've hit Genesis 6, so I'm going to go and present Genesis 6 that evening. So it's the same evening, just a little bit later. That has not made it on the website and it's also not in the newsletter. We just finalized that two days ago. I will stick it on the website today, but other than that, this is the first that it's been announced. An appendage, a second meeting.

TS: Awesome. The more Mike Heiser we can get, the better.

MH: (laughs) I think that's what they're thinking because they're only a few minutes apart. I'm betting that the people who are going to the one thing are going to stay and travel over to the other. I don't know anything about their capacity/space. I just said I'd show up after I take a couple hours to not talk.

TS: If there's a case to be made for transhumanism or cloning or whatever, if we could just duplicate you, that would be worth it right there I guess.

MH: I'd settle for the "beam me up" kind of thing. That would be great.

TS: Did you at least watch *Raiders of the Lost Ark* for this episode?

MH: No, I've probably watched it 8 or 9 times. I don't think I'm in double-digits on this one. I've only ever watched two movies in double digits, but we're close.

TS: I think we've covered that in a past episode. Remind us which of those... *Princess Bride*, right?

MH: *Princess Bride* is one and *Empire Strikes Back*.

TS: Those are two good ones to watch.

MH: Although I did see *Guardians of the Galaxy* this last week.

TS: I haven't seen it yet, so don't tell me. Don't spoil it. La, la, la... don't tell me. I loved the first one and I'm excited for the second one.

MH: I won't say anything. I think you'll be entertained, though. I'll just say that.

TS: Well, Mike, I'm excited about this episode. Ever since you mentioned it several months ago, I put it down and said we'd definitely have to do this. I think everybody's interested in this topic.

MH: This is a favorite subject. I remember teaching in Bible college and whenever I had History of Israel or something, we'd set aside a day to do Ark of the Covenant stuff. What I'm going to try to do today is try to stay serious. We're going to have to hit some of the silly stuff, but I'm going to try to stick with the serious views of what the fate of the Ark of the Covenant was, and/or the most well-known—the ones that deserve attention. I put it that way because there are over a dozen theories on what happened to the Ark of the Covenant and some are more deserving of attention than others. If you want to get a broader perspective, if you subscribe to the newsletter, I have uploaded a few articles that I'll mention today while we go through this material. One of them is by John Day

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and it's entitled "Whatever Happened to the Ark of the Covenant?" It's from the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, which is a book. It's an edited volume and this is one of the chapters in it. So you can get a PDF of the chapter if you subscribe to the newsletter. You go up to the protected/private folder and it will be in there. When I hit some other things that I've uploaded I'll let you know. But that one gives a decent overview of even more items than we'll touch on here. And, of course, I'm going to be throwing in a lot of other stuff that isn't in that article, but that's a good resource.

We might as well jump in, in no particular order. We're just going to go through the different theories and I'll explain what the thinking is and then talk about problems that the theory has and why it's either not accepted or why some people are still on the bandwagon and what-not.

View 1: Samaritan View

The first one is what we'll call (for lack of a better name) the Samaritan View. That is just what it sounds like. The Samaritans, these (for lack of a better term) half-breed Jews in the north (in Samaria), from which the Samaritan community derives. The Samaritans believed that the Ark of the Covenant never reached Jerusalem or the temple at all. It wasn't even in the temple of Solomon. You might scratch your head and say, "What in the world is that all about?" They obviously want to have the Ark of the Covenant and the temple on Mount Gerazim, which is the holy mountain to the Samaritans, and not Mount Zion (Jerusalem). So they have articulated this view. I'm trying to be charitable here. No scholar actually takes this seriously, for reasons that I think will become obvious as we talk about it.

The idea here is that after the conquest under Moses and Joshua and toward the end of the book of Judges, we have Eli the priest (a character in the book of Samuel). The theory is that Eli created a rival cult center/holy place other than what would become Jerusalem in the time of David. In this rival cult center/holy place, Eli had a fake ark and a fake tabernacle and fake vessels—the whole bit. He concocted all this and had replicas made so they could use them at his alternate cult center. Supposedly, a high priest named Uzzi hid the real Ark and the tabernacle furniture and all its vessels in a cave on Mount Gerazim. As the Samaritans believe the Ark will remain hidden there until true worship is restored on Mount Gerazim because, "Hey, that's where it should be because we're Samaritans." So you can kind of see right away... There's actually no literary/archaeological/textual evidence for any of this. However, Josephus actually alludes to the idea. There were Samaritans, obviously, in the first century (and earlier). Josephus reports in one place that during the time of Pontius Pilate (we'll just call it the mid-30's A.D.) a Samaritan in the community there promised to lead a procession of people to Mount Gerazim and show them this stuff—the Ark and the other vessels where "Moses had deposited them." That's odd wording since, according to the Torah, Moses never got to the promised land. So

how could he get to Mount Gerazim and put the Ark and all this other stuff there if the Torah has him never entering the promised land? So right away that's a problem. You could say Josephus is just wrong or he's kind of dopey. But that's a pretty major point, so that's a little dubious. You could say that the alleged Samaritan priests that Josephus is writing about said that for propaganda purposes, like trying to convince people who were ignorant that Moses really did come into the promised land and hid the Ark there on Mount Gerazim because Moses was really a Samaritan, too. Again, it's contrived all the way across the board. Other than Josephus' mention of this random Samaritan saying, "Hey, I can show you guys the Ark," there is nothing that refers to any element of this view directly. So no scholar takes it seriously. A lot of the Samaritan material (including their Pentateuch) is medieval. There are fragments at Qumran that reflect a Samaritan Pentateuch reading, so it's probably much older. But as far as their religious documents and their historical accountings of anything, it's all eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth century. So this one really lacks coherence and lacks data. What else can you say?

View 2: The Ark was removed from the temple by Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt.

10:00 The second view is a little more serious. That is the idea that the Ark was removed from the temple by Shishak, who is referred to as "Pharaoh of Egypt" in the Bible when he presumably (and there's a reason I'm saying it this way that I'll get to in a moment) invaded Jerusalem according to 1 Kings 14:25-27. I'm going to read you that passage.

²⁵ In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem.²⁶ He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made,²⁷ and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house.

Presumably, right there is the account: Pharaoh Shishak goes to Jerusalem, loots the place, so on and so forth. Well, just hang on. If you did re-watch *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, this is the view the movie takes. There's a particular conversation with Indiana Jones at the University of Chicago and they refer to Shishak taking the Ark and taking it to Tanis. Tanis was the capitol city of the Egyptian Pharaoh that most scholars believe is the counterpart to Shishak. That Pharaoh's name is Shoshenq. It sounds sort of the same. There's a problem, though, that we'll get to with this possible correlation, but just stay with me now. We've got Shishak coming down there (whoever that was), invading Jerusalem, takes the Ark, takes it to Tanis and, of course, according to the movie it gets buried in a sandstorm

because God is really ticked off and it's just waiting there for Indiana Jones to discover it.

This Shishak theory was proposed by serious scholars in the nineteenth century. Two of the bigger names here are Mowinckel, who is very famous for his work on form criticism in the Psalms, and Julian Morganstern, who's a bit of an odd duck in certain of his conclusions, but he's actually one of my favorites. He has a very long piece on Psalm 82 and he's into Israelite religion stuff. He's not afraid to go into the sort of arcane side of these things. So I kind of like Morganstern. He liked this theory and adopted it in the early twentieth century. Mowinckel adds, though, that he thought the Ark was replaced with a replica after it was taken by Shishak. And so Mowinckel actually adds this idea that after Shishak takes the real Ark and it winds up in Tanis, the Israelites make a fake one and that's what they use in the temple until 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar destroys everything.

This view, though, despite this late nineteenth century/early twentieth century support by some substantial scholars... Today this view is mostly rejected by scholars for a number of reasons.

1. The 1 Kings reference that I actually read doesn't specifically mention the Ark. If we go back to it:

²⁶ **He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything.**

People would say, "Well, everything included the Ark." You could say that, unless the "everything" clause there refers to the king's house because that's what it follows and it doesn't refer to the temple. So there's ambiguity in the text and the Ark, of course, is not specifically mentioned.

2. The second reason why some scholars don't get too excited about this one is because Shishak's own account of this trek into Judah doesn't mention the Ark at all. Here's where we get to the reasons for my hesitation. Not only does Shishak's own account (which has survived in Egyptian material) not mention the Ark, it doesn't mention Jerusalem—the capitol—in the list of his conquests. So if the Pharaoh Shishak is indeed the Egyptian guy Shoshenq, if you go to Shoshenq's preserved itinerary (it's a carving that has survived all this time)... If you assume that Shishak is Shoshenq and you go read Shoshenq's record of what he does in Judah, Jerusalem isn't even in the list. So that's a huge disconnect, if again, these two guys are the same.

I'm going to muddy the waters here. This doesn't help the theory; this basically would demolish the theory. It already has problems because if you assume a Shishak/Shoshenq correlation, Shoshenq's record of his

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conquest doesn't say anything about Jerusalem or the Ark. That's a huge problem for this view. But there are some scholars that don't believe that Shishak and Shoshenq should be identified with each other. Now, practically everyone does, and this is... If it's not the number one lynch-pin that links the Egyptian chronologies with the biblical chronology, it's pretty close to the top. But it has serious problems and you almost never hear about the serious problems that it has.

I used to be into biblical chronology. I decided I wanted to keep my sanity and Israelite religion was a little more interesting, but I used to be really into biblical chronology and all the problems that there are in the systems. It's one of the reasons why I got a warm fuzzy watching *Patterns of Evidence* because *Patterns of Evidence* (about the Exodus) was using the work of David Rohl, and Rohl is very good at pointing out problems and other possibilities for the Exodus. He goes a little too far in other areas, which is unfortunate because that makes people turn away from what I think they ought to be looking at here, but this is another one of these areas.

I'm going to recommend an article. Again, if you subscribe to the newsletter (and please do because you get extra stuff like this), there's an article that's going to be in the folder by John Bimson. It's called "Shoshenq and Shishak: A Case of Mistaken Identity?" It's from the *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 6. That journal is no longer produced, but you can find a lot of their volumes online. I'm going to save you the effort and just put this in the folder. It's a really good article and I'm just sort of flabbergasted why people so blindly accept a Shishak/Shoshenq correlation. To be honest with you, the answer is that people need it. People need it to construct a biblical chronology, but it has significant problems. The mention of Jerusalem and not mention of Jerusalem is just one of them. There are other serious problems when you correlate Shoshenq's account with the biblical account and try to line them up. It's not that "oh, there's a few problems here and we're just going to take the biblical one and be done with it." A lot of people do that. The problems are actually more serious than that. They are quite contradictory. They're not just contradictory in one or two places, it's like two different things. So that's an issue, and I bring it up here because if there is a disconnect here, then this view of the Ark that the movie takes is just done for. Frankly, I think even if you take the correlation it's done for because Shoshenq does not list the Ark or Jerusalem. That's a huge problem.

3. Let's just talk about it a little bit more. Let's just sort of assume that Shoshenq goes down there and he's fiddling around at the temple. Some scholars think that the treasures mentioned in 1 Kings 14 would not have been left in the Holy of Holies. Again, this is an argument from silence, and this is a familiar pattern. Basically, everything we say here in the

whole episode is going to be an argument from silence because nobody really knows what happened to the Ark. Some would say, "Look, the Ark wasn't captured. Yes, we believe Shishak is Shoshenq. Shoshenq shows up down there and he goes into the Holy of Holies and he doesn't find the Ark because surely the priests would have removed the Ark and hidden it somewhere when they knew the city was threatened." Sure, that's an argument from silence. That lets you keep the Ark in Jerusalem for later, for Nebuchadnezzar. But that's just what it is—an argument from silence.

4. Others would object and say that if the Ark was really taken, you would expect some note in the Hebrew Bible to that fact. After all, when the Ark gets taken by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4-5), nobody is afraid to mention that. So if the Ark was taken again, why would we conclude that the biblical writers wouldn't want to write about that? They wrote about it the first time. I think that's a good point. You would just expect certain things and you don't get them.
5. Another wild card in this that matters is Isaiah 37:16. Listen to this verse. This is about Hezekiah, a familiar character living during the time of Isaiah (the eighth century B.C.—the 700's B.C.). I'll start in verse 15.

¹⁵ **And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD:**

¹⁶ **"O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.**

Then he goes into his prayer. It's about Sennacherib. You notice what Hezekiah says? He addresses the God of Israel as "enthroned above the cherubim." Is this a reference to the Ark? It's true that the Ark and God do get described this way in other passages, so if this is the case, then in the 700's (which is considerably after the time of Shishak, who was around 920 B.C.)... So basically 150 to 200 years later, Hezekiah is praying to "the Lord enthroned above the cherubim." That would suggest to many that Hezekiah knows that the Ark is still there and, of course, he assumes that the Lord is there. That would also undermine the idea that Shishak took the Ark. You just hit walls almost no matter which side of this you try to argue because we're dealing with a paucity of data. There's really no way to know exactly what to do now. As I've already mentioned, some would say that Hezekiah is there praying to the Ark but that's a fake ark, a replica. The priests built a new one after Shishak took it out. Again, there's no evidence for that. That's an argument from silence, but that's what you're going to hear if you try to do some research on this debate. "Well, that was a fake and the priests aren't telling him... Hezekiah doesn't really know." Okay, again, argument from silence.

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Let me throw another monkey wrench into it. In case someone wants to try and say, "Okay, the Isaiah 37:16 reference addressed to 'the Lord enthroned above the cherubim' isn't referring to the Ark. It's referring to the giant cherubim of the temple, not the Ark." You might hear somebody say that. There's a problem with that because there's nearly identical phrasing to this "enthroned above the cherubim" in Exodus 25:22, which (of course) is Mosaic. It's a description of the mercy-seat (the lid of the Ark). Another similar phrase is found in 1 Samuel 4:4. We know the Ark is there. That's when the Philistines capture it.

⁴ So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.

The exact phrase is used in 1 Chronicles 13:6.

⁶ And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim that belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD who sits enthroned above the cherubim.

There you have the same reference in David's time. I would say it's really unlikely that this phrase could be isolated to the two giant cherubim just to argue that the Ark was no longer in the Holy of Holies. That seems to be really special pleading. Then again, that's the nature of this whole subject: arguments from silence, special pleading, guesswork. That's what you've got.

How about another monkey wrench? Curiously, though, with all the talk of the glory and the glory-throne in Ezekiel (we just went through the whole book of Ezekiel), there is no unambiguous mention of the Ark in Ezekiel, but the glory is presumed to still be in the Holy of Holies of the temple prior to 586 B.C. when it's destroyed. Ezekiel 8:4 says:

⁴ And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.

If we start back at the beginning of chapter 8, Ezekiel was taken to the temple, so that's where he's seeing the glory of God. You also have Ezekiel 9:3 with similar language:

³ Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house.

That implies that the cherubim on the lid of the Ark are still there in the temple in Ezekiel's day. This is prior to when the temple is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. So that language really does suggest that the Ark is still there. "The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub." You say, "Ezekiel's just having a vision. You can't peek inside!" Sure, that's true. So then is Ezekiel wrong? Is he lying? Is God hoodwinking him? Again, this is the kind of stuff that you have to say just to get the Ark out of there before 586 B.C. I think that gives you a flavor for what you're dealing with here.

25:00 A related consideration to all of this is the date of the writing of 1 Kings. We're still under the Shishak view because the Shishak view is 920 B.C. and trying to argue that the Ark is not there when Nebuchadnezzar shows up. That's the whole point of the Shishak view. We're trying to deal with phrases about the Ark or the cherubim or the seat on the cherubim or the Lord enthroned... do they indicate the Ark or not? All of this is going to come back as we go through the different views because all of this language matters for whether you think these phrases point to the Ark or don't point to the Ark, or whether they point to a replica of the Ark. It's a muddled mess.

1 Kings 8:8 says this. This is the ceremony when Solomon is dedicating the temple, when they bring everything into the temple. Beginning in verse 6, it says:

⁶Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.

Right away that undermines the Samaritan view, but they don't really care.

⁷For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. ⁸And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day.

This is a description of Solomon's time, but 1 and 2 Kings was written well after Solomon's time. Nearly all scholars have 1 and 2 Kings written after the 586 B.C. exile. For why that is, I'm going to quote David Howard here in his book *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, which is a book I certainly recommend. Howard says this:

The phrase "to this day" or "until now" occurs fourteen times in 1 & 2 Kings. Each of these speaks of some event causing a state of affairs that continued until the

time of writing. Most of these could easily have been written by the final author of 1 & 2 Kings some time after 561 B.C., but they do not give any further clue as to the time of writing. Two of the references are somewhat problematic, as they would seem to point to an earlier, pre-exilic time. The first is in 1 Kings 8:8, which states that the poles for carrying the ark that was in Solomon's Temple were still there "to this day." The statement presupposes that the Temple was still standing, which it was not after 586 B.C. This is either a statement from the "Book of the Acts of Solomon" (11:41) [MH: a book that has now been lost] that was carried over unchanged into the final form of the book, or it is a much later addition. The statement is not found in the original Greek versions, which lends credence to the latter suggestion.

Isn't that interesting—it's not in the Septuagint. A little rabbit-trail here. This is not necessarily an issue of inerrancy, either, as whoever wrote 1 Kings would merely want to portray the Solomonic temple with the Ark in it. That's just what you would do because that was the historical circumstance. Here's the point of bringing 1 Kings 8 up: there's a parallel to it in 2 Chronicles 5:9, which says basically the same thing:

⁹And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day.

The logic here is that 1 and 2 Chronicles was written long after the temple had been destroyed. For sure, Chronicles was written after the exile, after the temple was destroyed, because the last recorded event in 2 Chronicles is the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C., which permitted the Jews to return from exile. So 1 and 2 Chronicles is definitely late, and here you have 2 Chronicles saying the poles of the Ark are in the temple "to this day," and it's clearly written after the temple is destroyed. So some would say that it's wrong, it's historically incorrect, we don't have inerrancy, and this whole thing. But that's an overstatement. The argument is that the author of 2 Chronicles is somehow being deceptive or he's just stupid. That's silly because no Jewish reader would be ignorant of the fact that the temple had been destroyed. So somebody reading 1 and 2 Chronicles when it comes hot off the presses after the exile... they're not going to read 2 Chronicles 5:9 and think, "You're an idiot! You're a moron! *You're lying to me!* The poles aren't there anymore. There is no temple." No, they're not going to think any of that stupid stuff. They're going to know that the writer is just writing what he wrote because it's a parallel. It's lifted from 1 Kings and 1 Kings is a record of the Solomonic era—his time period. End of rabbit-trail.

The point here is that 1 Kings 8:8 and its reference to the poles in the Ark that shows up in a book... Catch me: The reference in 1 Kings 8:8 to the poles in the Ark that shows up in a book written *after* the temple is destroyed... That can't be

used to establish a chronology of the Ark remaining in the temple or surviving the temple because the chapter records events at a previous time in Solomon's own day. It doesn't matter when the book was written because it's a retrospective comment. So 1 Kings 8:8 is not really any help to establishing Ark survival in any respect.

What do we have here? Let's just pause. I'm going to cover nine views. We're two views in. (Don't panic—most of them are a lot shorter than this.) This idea that the Ark was removed from the temple by Shishak in 920 B.C. Well, we've got significant problems with that. If Shishak is Shoshenq, then Shoshenq doesn't mention the Ark or the temple in his own Egyptian records, and you'd think since that's the biggest prize it would be mentioned. So we've got a significant problem here. Even biblically, the Ark isn't specifically mentioned. So this view is very weak. What we did in discussing this view was talk about certain phrases in certain verses that people will use for this view to say that the Ark is gone, or to rebut this view that the Ark is still there. And we're going to see those same phrases and verses used in views that we'll cover from this point on. Because if you're arguing that the Ark is taken out of the temple before Nebuchadnezzar gets there—and everyone who has a theory of Ark survival has to argue that because we know the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. So to avoid the Ark being destroyed you have to get it out of the temple before Nebuchadnezzar gets there. Everyone who has a view on this has to have it out there, and then these verses become a battleground—these references to "the Lord enthroned above the cherubim," "the glory rising above the cherubim." These verses become arguments for either saying, "Nope. The Ark is still there" or "No, these phrases don't refer to the Ark-proper, they refer to the giant cherubim," or "we have a replica here." That's what you've got. That's what you're dealing with in most of the theories of Ark survival because the issue is getting it out of the temple before Nebuchadnezzar shows up in 586 B.C. So we've introduced you to these phrases and the verses as we've discussed view number 2—the Shishak view, which is the movie view.

View 3: Jehoash removed the Ark.

On to number 3. Some would say the Ark was removed by the Israelite king, Jehoash. This is an obscure one, but it deserves mention because it's actually biblical. Jehoash was a king of Israel. Remember the monarchy splits after Solomon dies into northern and southern parts—the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom. Jehoash was a northern king who invaded Jerusalem during the reign of Amaziah in about 800-802 B.C. This is recorded in 2 Kings 14:13-14. It says this:

¹³ And Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for four hundred cubits, from the Ephraim Gate

to the Corner Gate. ¹⁴ And he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.

He goes back to the Northern Kingdom. Again, there is no specific mention of the Ark. And since there's no specific mention of the Ark, people are going to say, "That's because the Ark was still there. The Ark was not touched. We know the Ark is there because of language in Ezekiel about the glory on top of the cherubim or about Hezekiah in the 700's (100 years later) where he's praying to "the Lord who's enthroned above the cherubim." The Ark is still there. And again, it's hard to not accept this language because it's the language used of the Ark when there's no question about the Ark being there. And if that's the case, then Jehoshaphat didn't take it. Also, if that's the case it's there when Nebuchadnezzar shows up. And that's the rub because to save the Ark (to have it surviving to today) you've got to get it out of there before Nebuchadnezzar destroys the temple.

View 4: The Ark was removed by faithful priests and/or Yahweh-worshiping kings during the reign of Manasseh.

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On to view number four. We're going to take four and five here together. Five is one that if you're into the Ark of the Covenant, you're going to recognize this one right away. View number four is that the Ark was removed by faithful priests and/or faithful Yahweh-worshiping kings of Judah during the reign of Manasseh. Number five (related to this) is that the Ark winds up in Ethiopia. Again, if you're into the Ark of the Covenant stuff, you're going to recognize the Ethiopia stuff. We're going to take these together because they're related. All of these views... If you think faithful priests took it out during the reign of Manasseh, if you think some kings took it out because of apostasy, or you think Manasseh himself took it out (that's going to be view number 6)... A lot of this revolves around apostasy. The idea is you have a godly king or faithful priests... The king candidates are usually Ahaz or Hezekiah or Josiah or some unnamed priests, and the idea is that they feared apostate worship occurring in the temple, so to avoid the pollution of the Ark (the most holy object) they took it out. That's the idea. Manasseh is accused of moving an image of Asherah into the Holy of Holies. I say it that way deliberately—"accused"—because the verse reference there may or may not support that. We're going to get to 2 Kings 21:7 in a moment, but you get the idea. So either Ahaz or Hezekiah or Josiah or some unnamed priest is fearing that the people that might inherit the throne or other people (maybe the priesthood)... "We've got theological compromise here and we've got to get the Ark out of here before people start polluting the sacred object." That's the idea—one of those people.

Now, Josiah is typically a favorite candidate for this—in the rabbinic writings, anyway. Randall Price (whose name I've mentioned before and we've

interviewed Randall on the podcast) accepts this idea. He thinks that Josiah took it out. But other than him, the Josiah view has basically been rejected by every scholar who's legit. You'll find it in sort of amateur speculations on the internet, but nobody really buys this and it's because of the problems just generally with the idea that the Ark was taken out for these reasons at this time.

What are the obstacles? Again, there's no biblical passage that actually says the Ark was removed by anyone at any time. Isaiah 37, again (if that's a reference to the Ark), then it's in there at least into Hezekiah's reign. That would rule out his father, Ahaz. If you've got the Ark language in Ezekiel about the glory that was above the cherub moving to the threshold... if that's to be considered factual, the Ark is still there in Ezekiel's day. So that rules out Hezekiah and anybody else. This is why you have these problems.

Other than silence and these sort of obvious problems with this cherubim-language, there are some other issues, too. If the presumed setting for this removal is the reign of Manasseh (and that's kind of how everybody sort of moves because Manasseh was so awful), it should be noted that 2 Kings 21:7 doesn't actually say that the Asherah that Manasseh put into the temple was actually put into the Holy of Holies. Let me read you the verse:

⁷ And the carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the Lord said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever.

So it's certainly moved into the temple, but it actually doesn't say that Manasseh moved the Asherah into the Holy of Holies. So some would argue, "Look, if the priesthood felt this way but Manasseh didn't actually put it in the Holy of Holies, then the priests probably looked at this and thought the Ark was safe. It's not defiled because it's by itself in there." So Manasseh, regardless of what he did... He was a fiend, but he's not guilty of this particular thing that he often gets accused of. On the other side, there are scholars who think that the verse can describe (or should be interpreted) as though Manasseh did pollute the Holy of Holies. But I've got to be honest with you. It just doesn't say that. I would need it to say more to really accept that. Again, maybe it's immaterial. It's only a possibility. Deuteronomy 16:21, interestingly enough, has a command against setting up an Asherah next to Yahweh's altar. That's not in the Holy of Holies, it's next to Yahweh's altar. So if Deuteronomy (this would be contrary to Mosaic authorship) was written at the same time as 1 and 2 Kings (and most critical scholars believe that... it's called the Deuteronomistic History—the belief that Deuteronomy through 2 Kings was written all the same time as a continuous history)... If that's the case, then the command in Deuteronomy 16:21 might be the reference point for what Manasseh actually did. In other words, when Manasseh moves the Asherah into the house of the Lord, he puts it next to the

altar and you were just supposed to sort of figure that out and know it. It doesn't say "Holy of Holies," but because of the command in Deuteronomy, the idea is that Manasseh would have violated this particular command in what he did, and so that's where he put the Asherah. Ultimately we don't know, but that's just the way it is with this whole talk.

40:00

I'll add one more thought on the Josiah idea. Again, Randall has in one of his books (I don't know if he still believes it because his book is a little older), but he took (or takes) this view. When it comes to the Josiah view, I find it personally really hard to believe that such a pious deed would go completely unmentioned in the biblical account about Josiah because the biblical account about Josiah basically glorifies the guy. He is the best of the Judahite kings after the monarchy splits. So if he did this, it just seems incredible that this wouldn't get mentioned to his credit. But there is nothing here.

View 5: The Ark was taken to Ethiopia.

That takes us to another variation of this, and that is (for lack of a better term) the "Graham Hancock" view. Hancock, since he believes in Ark survival, wants the Ark out of the Holy of Holies before Nebuchadnezzar gets there. He does think the time of Manasseh is the right for this because Manasseh was so awful. If you're really into Ark stuff, you may have read Hancock's best-selling book, *The Sign and the Seal*. It's about the history of what happened to the Ark. This is part of what Hancock argues. I have an article-length review of Hancock's book (*The Sign and the Seal*). It was written in the 1990's. This was the first conference paper I ever gave at an academic convention. I gave a paper-length review of Hancock's *Sign and Seal*. It's titled "Moses as High Priest and Sorcerer?" I've got to be honest with you about where I'm at on Hancock generally. We've corresponded with each other on email and I've helped him do some research recently on something about Zechariah Sitchin. He's very cordial, very nice, very likeable. He knows how I feel. His book, *Sign and Seal*, is a mixture of wonderful stuff and ridiculous speculation. I can't really endorse it. I kind of want to because there's a lot of good stuff in it, but it just goes downhill in a number of places. There are serious problems with it. Having said that, I want to take you through his view. Some of the things I'm going to say might give you the impression that I think Hancock is hiding evidence. I'm not going to say that. I can't say that for sure. I don't think it's sleight-of-hand. I think he just misses things and his research just lapses or gets sloppy at points. He has a number of non sequitur conclusions, but we're not going to get into them. He wants to link the Ark with the Opet Festival in Egypt and that just doesn't work. It's based on false etymologies all over the place, and that's really what my article is about.

Anyway, Hancock argues that the Ark was removed during Manasseh's reign. That's pretty normal. And then it was moved to Elephantine, where there was a Jewish colony. This is a little island in the Nile, way down from the delta. The Ark, he believes, was moved to Elephantine because there was a Jewish colony

there. Archaeologists know this. There was also a temple there at that colony. Hancock makes it sound like the temple was constructed according to the dimensions of Solomon's temple. I'm going to give you a source that shows that's not actually the case, but I'm trying to just give you his argument here. So he says there's a temple there, they move the Ark to this island with a Jewish colony, they put it in the temple, and that's where it stays safe. The implication is that faithful worship of Yahweh was conducting at this colony in this alternative temple and eventually, Hancock argues that the Ark was transported up the Nile (the Nile flows south to north) into Ethiopia, where it stayed and where it still is. Why Ethiopia? Well, the real answer is because of Solomon. The theory (and Hancock didn't come up with this notion, this is a very long-standing legend in ancient or at least medieval Ethiopian material... we don't have anything older than the sixth century A.D. for this, which is pretty old but it's not antiquity or the biblical time period)... So Hancock is getting this core idea from Ethiopian material. The key figure here is Solomon.

45:00

Here's how the theory goes, if you've never heard it. The theory is that the Queen of Sheba was from Ethiopia and when she visited Solomon, he gave her, according to 1 Kings 10:13, "all that she desired." Which, it is speculated by the Ethiopians (not just Hancock), included a child. In other words, she left pregnant with Solomon's baby. This belief is entrenched in Ethiopian legend in a book called the *Kebrä Nagast*, which is translated out of Ethiopia "The Glory of Kings." It's entrenched in Ethiopian history. The *Kebrä Nagast* has as its story the queen's child is born (the son of Solomon) and she names him Menelik. All of the modern Ethiopian monarchs bore that name. The last one was Haile Selassie, who died in 1975. The throne of the Ethiopian monarchy was offered to Haile Selassie's son, Amha Selassie, in 1975 by those who had deposed his father. Amha refused the throne. The monarchy was then declared defunct by the military coup that had overthrown Haile Selassie, and Amha later died in 1997. Now, Ethiopian Jews (there are lots of Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia) are called "Falashas" (Falasha Judaism). They still practice the Mosaic Law and certain Mosaic sacrifices. Their status as practicing Jews isn't questioned, although their genetic origins from actual Old Testament Israelites is ambiguous at best. If you want to read more about this, go to Wikipedia and look up the entry on "Beta Israel" or "Falasha" and you'll get to read all about the genetic tests. So there's a strong Jewish presence in Ethiopia—that's the whole point. And the Ethiopian monarchs believed they were descended from Menelik the First, who was the son of Solomon. All the way into the late twentieth century.

Other points of interest:

- It's curious that the last Jew to receive the Gospel in the New Testament (before the first Gentile) was... guess who? The Ethiopian Eunuch. "To the Jew first, and then to the Greek." That's just a really, really interesting point of curiosity. Now, since the Ethiopian records we have only date

back to the sixth century, maybe... It's not a maybe—there *was* a Jewish colony in Elephantine. It doesn't mean that the Ark was there, but there was a Jewish presence. We talked about this in our series on the book of Acts. I do believe that the Ethiopian eunuch does play this role—that we have to make sure that all the Jews hear the Gospel first and then the Gentiles. There are certainly Jews there. But does that mean the Ark of the Covenant was there? Hancock says yeah, it does—for lots of other reasons in his mind.

- Ethiopia was once predominantly Christian with the Abyssinian Church there. It still is quite a bit Christian.
- The Book of Enoch, of course, is preserved in its entirety only in ancient Ethiopic, which is Ge'ez. It's still considered canonical by Ethiopian Christians today. So you've got a lot of circumstantial stuff connecting Jews with Ethiopia, and this becomes fodder for the Ark survival theory—not only of Graham Hancock, but also in Ethiopian, medieval texts from late antiquity onward. They believed this. They believed their monarchs were descended from Solomon. That's just a historical reality of their belief on this point.
- Supposedly (Hancock covers this material in detail) the Ark of the Covenant is now in the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Aksum, Ethiopia. You can go there to celebrate the New Year's Day festival, and there are medieval accounts of this kind of thing and early modern accounts where the "ark" is taken out of the church annually, but it's not really the Ark. People know this because people have gone there and taken photographs and written about it. It's actually something called a "tabot," which is a replica of the two tablets of the Mosaic Law which, of course, were kept in the Ark. So nobody's bringing the Ark out if it's even there. They're bringing the tabot out.
- Hancock argues that there is a medieval description by a person called Abu Salih of the Ark being taken out of the church. We're going to get to that point in a little bit because it's not really what Hancock is arguing here.

50:00

But that's the view, and there are the circumstantial points to this. So it springs from getting the Ark out of the Holy of Holies before Nebuchadnezzar shows up during the time of Manasseh. There's a Solomonic connection because the priests that take the Ark out to get it away from evil Manasseh... "Where do we put this thing, where do we... Ah! Wait a minute. Wait, wait, wait... There's a bunch of Israelites at that colony in Elephantine—down there on an island in Egypt. And we can trust them because they're descendants of Solomon. So let's take the Ark there and it'll be safe." Again, that's the view.

Let's talk about some problems with the view.

- Remember the Queen of Sheba in the story? Sheba is not Ethiopia. The identification doesn't work. Sheba is the land of Saba in the southwest Arabian Peninsula, which is modern Yemen. So that's a problem. The *Kebrā Nagast* (the Ethiopian book about the Glory of Kings, about this whole legend here) has actually received thorough critical study. It received that in 1956 in a dissertation by David Allan Hubbard, who was an evangelical. He's deceased now, but he taught at Fuller Seminary for a while. It's called "The Literary Sources of the *Kebrā Nagast*." It's a University of St. Andrews dissertation supervised by Edward Ullendorff, who was a very famous scholar of Ethiopic and ancient Ethiopian studies. I have put that dissertation in the folder for newsletter subscribers. It's available free online (you can search for it and find it) but it's in the folder. Now, Hubbard establishes with high certainty that the *Kebrā Nagast* was composed no earlier than the sixth/seventh century A.D., so it has no attachment to any provenance contemporary to the events it purports to describe. That's a problem.
- Another problem: There's no really good reason to presume that the "desire of the Queen" amounts to a pregnancy. You just have to read that into it. There's no linguistic argument to be made there. There's not even a bad etymological argument to be made there. It's pure imagination.
- There's no evidence the Ark was taken to Elephantine or was ever at Elephantine. The Elephantine papyri (we actually have papyrus material that comes from this place) say that Yahweh "dwelt at Elephantine." That's true. But there's no reference to the Ark in the papyri, and the papyri date to after the temple at Elephantine was destroyed. There's nothing there now; it was destroyed at some point. So even the papyri are not contemporary to the temple at this place. Old Testament references from texts after the Ark would have been destroyed use the "Yahweh dwelling" terminology. So the phrase that Yahweh dwelt somewhere doesn't mean that the Ark was there because that language is used in Old Testament texts that post-date the destruction of the temple.
- Excavations of the Elephantine temple found no altar, which is a curiosity. It would be a disconnect from Solomon's temple. But the altar, to be fair, may have occupied a place where the ground has now given way. Now, contra Hancock, the Jewish temple at Elephantine was quite *unlike* that of Solomon. For this, I have put another article in the folder by Rosenberg called "The Jewish Temple at Elephantine." It's from Near Eastern

Archaeology journal, a 2004 issue. He gives you some details that are clear disconnects between the Elephantine temple and Solomon's temple.

- Hancock's medieval reference does not present the full story. He doesn't give the full description that is found in Abu Salih. I'm going to read this just a little bit. It's a book on the Ark of the Covenant by Stuart Munro-Hay, and he discusses the Abu Salih record here. Page 76 of the book... I'll just read a little section of the book here.

55:00

Abu Salih resided in Egypt in the late 12th to early 13th century. He therefore probably lived during the latter part of the reign of the saintly Zagwé king Yimrehana Krestos, and the reign of Harbay [MH: **two fairly famous kings, in Ethiopian history, anyway**]... Abu Salih's record is fascinating, but it is certainly not the 'eye-witness account of the Ark' that Graham Hancock affirms: very far from it. Abu Salih's comments on Ethiopia amount to repetition of things he was told in Egypt, though his description of the 'Ark' is evidently based on some genuine information. This probably came from the Ethiopians or Egyptians involved in a cause célèbre of the time... Abu Salih's report is very valuable, all we have concerning Ethiopian sacred paraphernalia at so early a period.

Now here's the entry—the actual entry from Abu Salih—and one little comment that Stuart makes:

[Stuart]

According to Abu Salih, the Ark of the Covenant, which he referred to, in Arabic, as *tabutu al-'ahdi*, contained 'the two tables of stone, inscribed by the finger of God with the commandments which he ordained for the children of Israel':

[Abu Salih]

The Ark of the Covenant is placed upon the altar, but is not so wide as the altar; it is as high as the knee of a man, and is overlaid with gold; and upon its lid there are crosses of gold; and there are five precious stones upon it, one at each of the four corners, and one in the middle. The liturgy is celebrated upon the Ark four times in the year, within the palace of the king; and a canopy is spread over it when it is taken out from [its own] church to the church which is in the palace of the king.

Now that is the entry. What do you notice right away? The description of the ark doesn't match the Old Testament description. In fact, it's been altered. If it's the Ark, then apparently you have to believe that the

Falashas felt very free to touch it and to modify it. That's just a significant disconnect in my mind.

- Part of Hancock's defense of the Ark at Elephantine is also that the phrase "Lord of Hosts" occurs a couple times in the Elephantine papyri. Hancock mistakenly says it's frequent and it's not. It's two times. The phrase is associated with Yahweh's presence with the temple when there was an Ark, but that phrase is used dozens of times in the Old Testament in books written *after* the temple's destruction. All you've got to do is find a concordance and look up the phrase "Lord of Hosts" in Haggai, Malachai, and Zechariah. There are dozens of them. There's no Ark. There's no temple. The phrase does not point to the Ark.

So, in short, Hancock's view of the Ark's removal depends upon silence, a questionable medieval reference, inadequate knowledge of the biblical text, circumstantial details, and, of course, speculation. And the theory is not original to him. If you want more detail on this, subscribe to the newsletter, get my paper. A lot of it's about how he tries to connect the Ark to the Egyptian Opet Festival. It's the worst part of the book, based entirely on speculation and false etymologies. But, again, there's lots of stuff in the book that's really good, too.

View 6: The Ark was removed by Manasseh himself when he installed the Asherah.

The idea here of view number 6 is that Manasseh didn't want competition. "I'm going to move Asherah in there and I'm going to move Yahweh out."

The problems here are obvious. There's no specific reference to Manasseh doing this. The verse that we read doesn't have him putting the Asherah actually in the Holy of Holies. There's a disconnect there. It's also doubtful that Manasseh would have thought this way. Apostate Israelites would have thought that Yahweh was Asherah's husband, since Yahweh and El were merged in the Israelite mind and Canaanite El and Asherah were a divine couple. If you were an apostate, you would think, "Well, this is Yahweh and Asherah. They're married; they're a couple." There would be no reason to move Yahweh (the Ark) out when you moved Asherah in. If you want to read a little bit about that, I do not have this in the folder, but I recommend Rick Hess' book, *Israelite Religions*, pages 283-290. It's certain that there were apostate Israelites who believed that Yahweh and Asherah were a divine couple. We actually have references to "Yahweh and his Asherah" from *Kuntillet Ajrud* and *Kirbet el-Qom* and a few other places. Hess discusses those inscriptions in detail in his book.

View 7: The Ark was hidden by the prophet Jeremiah.

1:00:00

View number 7 is pretty common and it takes us into some silly territory, but also some territory that might be worth thinking about. The problem in my view is the Isaiah 37 reference and, of course, the Ezekiel language about the Ark above the cherub. This view is pretty ancient. It goes back to the Second Temple period and it's preserved in a couple of Second Temple sources. One gets credited to the Jewish historian Eupolemos, whose words are recorded in the Greek history of Alexander Polyhistor, which is the mid-first century B.C. His work was entitled *On the Jews* and Polyhistor's work is preserved in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.39.5. I'm just going to read you this section here. Eusebius, again, preserving Alexander's material says:

When Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians, had heard of the predictions of Jeremiah, he summoned Astibares, the king of the Medes, to join him in an expedition. And having taken with him Babylonians and Medes, and collected a hundred and eighty thousand infantry and a hundred and twenty thousand cavalry, and ten thousand chariots, he first subdued Samaria, and Galilee, and Scythopolis, and the Jews who lived in the region of Gilead; and afterwards took Jerusalem, and made Jonachim, the king of the Jews, a prisoner. And the gold that was in the temple, and the silver and brass, they chose out and sent to Babylon, except the Ark and the tables that were in it: but this Jeremiah retained.

So there's the idea that Jeremiah got the Ark and the tablets out. *2 Maccabees* (another Second Temple source). I'm going to read verses 1-8 of *2 Maccabees* 2. This is the King James Version translation of the Apocrypha. For those of you... I'm guessing we don't have anyone who's "King James only" in the audience, but if we do, you might want to close your ears because the 1611 King James did have the Apocrypha in it. Starting in verse 1 here:

¹ It is also found in the records, that Jeremy the prophet commanded them that were carried away to take of the fire, as it hath been signified: ² And how that the prophet, having given them the law, charged them not to forget the commandments of the Lord, and that they should not err in their minds, when they see images of silver and gold, with their ornaments. ³ And with other such speeches exhorted he them, that the law should not depart from their hearts [MH: so he's sending the captives away here]. ⁴ It was also contained in the same writing, that the prophet, being warned of God, commanded the tabernacle and the ark to go with him, as he went forth into the mountain, where Moses climbed up, and saw the heritage of God [MH: That would, of course, be Mount Nebo]. ⁵ And when Jeremy came thither, he found an hollow cave, wherein he laid the tabernacle, and the ark, and the altar of incense, and so stopped the door. ⁶ And some of those that followed him came to mark the way, but they could not find it. ⁷ Which when Jeremy perceived, he blamed them, saying, As for that place, it shall be unknown until the time that God gather his people again together, and receive them unto mercy. ⁸ Then shall the Lord shew them these things, and the glory of

the Lord shall appear, and the cloud also, as it was shewed under Moses, and as when Solomon desired that the place might be honourably sanctified.

And the mountain, of course, referred to here is Nebo. So Jeremiah takes the Ark up to Mount Nebo (just east of the Jordan), and that's the Second Temple idea. There are other references to this. There's one in the Pseudepigrapha in the *Lives of the Prophets*, chapter 2, verses 11-13. That dates to the first century A.D. I'll read you that because it's a little bit different. Book 2 of *the Lives of the Prophets* is about Jeremiah.

This prophet, before the capture of the Temple, seized the ark of the Law and the things in it, and made them to be swallowed up in a rock. [MH: In other words, he hid it in a cave.] ¹² And to those standing by he said, "The LORD has gone away from Zion into heaven and will come again in power. ¹³ And this will be for you a sign of his coming, when all the gentiles worship a piece of wood.

All of these sources are three to four hundred years (really even five hundred years)... Let's just use a round number—five hundred years removed from the events in 586 B.C. They're over five hundred years removed. Again, take that with a grain of salt. They're not contemporary—not even close. So that's a problem.

There's another problem that other pseudepigraphical texts (Jewish texts from the same period) actually contradict the idea. *2 Baruch* 6 (which is first century) has Jeremiah's scribe (Baruch—the book is named after Jeremiah's scribe)... He sees an angel take the Ark and sacred vessels of the temple and swallow them. Gulp! What are we to make of that?

Jeremiah 3:16 is a factor here, to me. I've mentioned Isaiah 37:16, I've mentioned the language in Ezekiel. You could say, "Those verses do indicate that the Ark survived and was in the Holy of Holies after the time of Manasseh; it wasn't removed. But these references to Jeremiah have Jeremiah taking it out just before Nebuchadnezzar got there. So Ezekiel can be correct—he just sees a vision of the glory departing, and the glory actually departing is when Jeremiah takes the stuff out and goes and hides it." So that's how you would reconcile these things.

Again, these texts are five hundred years after the fact and we've got a few contradictory texts from the same period. But Jeremiah 3:16, to me has to be part of this discussion. This is an actual contemporary reference by the same guy—Jeremiah! And what does Jeremiah 3:16 say?

¹⁶ **And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant of**

1:05:00

the LORD." It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again.

Verse 17 is interesting, too:

¹⁷ At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.

I want you to think about those verses because what people argue on the basis of this Jeremiah idea is, "Oh, those Hassidic Jews over there, they know where it's at and they want to bring it out and rebuilt the temple!" Doesn't Jeremiah 3:16-17 just contradict that?

It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again.

In fact, we don't need it! Jerusalem is the throne of the Lord when all the nations are gathered to it. Again, that's an eschatological claim. Of course, Jerusalem... if we look at the book of Revelation, it is the throne of the Lord. It is the temple. We don't have need of these things when the Lord returns, so why we have Christians running around saying we need to go find the Ark so we can rebuild the temple... Jeremiah 3:16 sort of is a bit of a slap-down there, which is probably why it might be new to some hearing this. I think it's an important verse. When it says it shall not be missed, it implies (and this is Jeremiah writing)... Now, it doesn't say implicitly, but it *implies* that the Ark is not there. If Jeremiah is writing this after he himself escapes (because he does at the end of his book—he escapes Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar gets there and gets taken to Egypt), then apparently he believes that it's gone—that Nebuchadnezzar either took it or destroyed it. And he's saying that it shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed. If he's writing right before Nebuchadnezzar gets there, you could actually take this and say either that the Ark wasn't there already (maybe it was taken out like one of these other views) or you could say that Jeremiah knew it was gone/done for. Jeremiah knew Nebuchadnezzar was going to show up and he knew what that meant; he knew that the temple was going to be destroyed. He knew that the Ark was going to be destroyed.

So this is a verse that has to be dealt with. But at the very least, this notion that the Ark is somehow some end-times catalyst to connect with the Second Coming and then all the nations are regathered... The verse contradicts that idea! It will *not* come to mind, it will *not* be remembered, it will *not* be missed, it will *not* be made again. We don't need it because Jerusalem will be called the throne of the Lord.

By the way, when does the glory return? These references in Second Temple texts connecting the resurfacing of the Ark with the return of the glory... Well, I think Acts 2 looks suspiciously like that because it's the coming of the Spirit. If you say it's the Second Coming, then you're in Jeremiah 3:16 land. *We don't need it.*

So I think you've got some significant problems here if you're taking this view. I don't want to rehearse the other passages, but let me just throw in a couple new ones. Other than Isaiah 37:16, other than the cherub language in Ezekiel, there are some other things going on here, too. Lamentations 2:1... Boy, we actually have a reason to go to Lamentations! This is after the destruction of the city. This is why it's called "Lamentations." Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed, and here's what Lamentations 2:1 says. Catch this, this is important: It's presumed that Jeremiah is the author, and there's a really good case to made for that. If that's the case, this is going to be consistent with what I just said about Jeremiah 3:16 and it's going to be totally *inconsistent* with the Second Temple text about Jeremiah hiding the Ark.

**¹How the Lord in his anger
has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!
He has cast down from heaven to earth
the splendor of Israel;
he has not remembered his footstool
in the day of his anger.**

1:10:00

The Ark is mentioned and described as "the Lord's footstool" in several passages (1 Chronicles 28:2, Psalm 99:5, Psalm 132:7). You could read this verse as saying that the Lord didn't care about the Ark. He has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger. This needs to be factored into any discussion, as well.

Let's just pull back a bit and talk about the whole idea a little bit more. I personally think it's really unlikely that Jeremiah would touch the Ark. He isn't commanded by God in any of those Second Temple period texts to hide the objects by virtue of touching them, so does he have priests or whatever? That just isn't mentioned. It would be an assumption that he felt he would live if he touched the Ark contra Uzzah (we all know that story). He wasn't one of the authorized Levites who were to transport the Ark. Even though you have these references, there are still details in what they describe (or what people think they describe) that have to be thought about. One of them is actually touching the Ark and moving it. What help did he have, and that sort of thing. There are some content omissions there.

People who have searched for the Ark on Mount Nebo (there have been a number of these)... Tom Crotser, who claimed to have taken a picture of the Ark; he said he found the Ark on Nebo and took a picture of it. You'll read about this on the internet. The picture was seen by archaeologist Siegfried Horn, who was a very famous, very respected archaeologist connected with the Seventh Day Adventists, who are really big into biblical archaeology. And Horn saw the picture and said it was a fake. It was a modern model and he saw a nail in it in the picture. So this idea has sort of become a cartoon—searching for the Ark on Nebo and other places.

Ron Wyatt claimed to have found the Ark in Jeremiah's Grotto. There's a place in the Holy Land (in Jerusalem) that's called Jeremiah's Grotto because of the folklore that this was the place where Jeremiah was held in prison. There's no way to know that, it's just a hole that gets the name. It's located underneath what is "Gordon's Calvary," so this is where the (I think totally silly) view came from that Christ's blood seeped through the ground and landed on the Ark. This is Ron Wyatt stuff and Ron Wyatt—to say the least—does not have a good reputation for being forthright. He is very prone to embellish things and just make stuff up. Randall Price, interestingly enough, has a four-page critique of Wyatt's speculations in his book *In Search of Temple Treasures*. If you want to read that, it's pages 152-156, but I'm not going to spend any more time on it here.

You have other people searching for the Ark, maybe not focusing on Nebo, but they're taking the Jeremiah story and they're looking for it somewhere else in the Holy Land. So we have some looking for Nebo, we have this Jeremiah's Grotto thing with Ron Wyatt... There was a guy for many years named Vendyl Jones who claimed to be the namesake for Indiana Jones, but I think George Lucas would contradict that. Vendyl Jones was kind of an interesting guy. He was a Baptist minister that became sort of a Christian-Jew or Jewish Christian (which is the adjective and which is the noun there?). It's a little confusing because Jones had some really odd theology to him, to say the least. But he spent his lifetime (over 30 years) snooping around at Qumran and trying to avoid the authorities looking for the Ark. He was convinced that the Ark of the Covenant was in one of the Qumran caves. He used as his real basis for that, not only the idea that Jeremiah hid it but the Copper Scroll (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls). The Copper Scroll is essentially a treasure map describing temple treasures. Jones claimed for a number of years to have found some objects mentioned in the Copper Scroll, based upon his translation. Basically, his translations for a lot of what's in the Copper Scroll don't jibe with anybody else in scholarship, so it's one of those cases with a very idiosyncratic treatment of materials to sort of prop up the view. Frankly, if the Copper Scroll mentions temple treasures... News alert! It would be treasures from the second temple, not the first temple. There's no reason to believe that there are first temple things here. The Copper Scroll does not mention the Ark.

1:15:00

Six weeks ago (so this is pretty up-to-date) there was news in some online papers... I don't know if the *Jerusalem Post* covered this or not, but some of the semi-tabloid kind of news agencies in Israel covered this. It's a new theory of the Copper Scroll and, of course, where the Ark of the Covenant is. I'll give Trey the link to the article. It shows a picture of the Copper Scroll and talks a little bit about this particular guy (Jim Barfield). He's sort of a disciple of Vendyl Jones who, again, was a Baptist preacher turned amateur archaeologist—sort of a pseudoepigrapher for the Copper Scroll, looking for the Ark. Vendyl Jones is now deceased and Barfield has sort of taken up his work. Barfield is not a trained archaeologist. He doesn't read Hebrew, either. Let me try to get the description here... He piloted helicopters in the U.S. Army. He has strong map-reading skills. Basically, he's looking from the air and he thinks he's found some anomalous things at the Qumran settlement. So the short version is he asked an archaeologist, he met with the Israeli Antiquities Authority, which is good to do. (Jones basically tried to avoid them a lot, and Jones was restricted from the country a few times because of the stuff he was doing over there.) But Barfield contacts IAA director Shuka Dorfman, talks to another archaeologist about, "Hey, look what I found! Let's go check this out!" Again, the short version is that they drill in a place where Barfield says to drill and they find something that isn't rock. They find something that was man-made where they didn't expect to find it. Barfield thinks it's a seal to a cave, in which the Ark is, of course, and other treasures. There's been no excavation. The drilling was halted. It is supposedly (from this article) "under review" and it has a few comments about Barfield like "Hey, I understand. I just want artifacts returned to the rightful authorities. Is there is something here that the Palestinians are going to claim? They were here before. It's going to be this big political brouhaha so I get it." So he's not antagonistic toward the IAA, which, again, is another good idea—to not tick off the people you're going to need permission from. But that's the state of it.

So is there something at Qumran associated with the Copper Scroll and is that something with the Ark of the Covenant? Who knows? Again, the Copper Scroll does not specifically mention the Ark of the Covenant—let's be clear there. People have been speculating about this for many years, so it could be nothing, could be something... who knows? It's just something to stay tuned to.

I bring it up here because a lot of these people running around different places in Jerusalem looking for the Ark build off the idea that Jeremiah hid it, even though Second Temple texts have it associated with Mount Nebo. Again, the idea has just sort of taken hold because some of the texts don't mention the mountain. They just say, "God says to Jeremiah, 'Go take that stuff and keep it safe.'" So they figure that Jeremiah would have thought to himself, "Hey, what better place than the pit that I spent all that time in? Let's put it down there or let's go find a cave." This is what you're dealing with. Again, there are plenty of arguments from silence, virtually no data and lots of speculation to connect data points. This is the nature of the beast.

But again, I think Jeremiah 3:16 really has to be a factor here. Jeremiah 3:16-17 is the only contemporary text we have that connects Jeremiah and the Ark. Then Lamentations 2:1 ("the Lord has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger"). These are biblical texts, and they're the only contemporaneous data we have to connect Jeremiah to the Ark. So my question would be, why don't we take these two texts seriously, which strongly suggest that the Ark is no more? Why don't we take them seriously instead of this Jeremiah-talk from five hundred years later that isn't quite consistent anyway, but it exists? Why do we prefer one over the other? I'll tell you why we would prefer one over the other. It's for several reasons: it's sexier and it factors in to what some people want to think about end-times, never minding the fact that Jeremiah 3:16 and Lamentations 2:1 don't really go well with some of these end-times scenarios. But that's just me. I would prefer the biblical material.

View 8: The Ark was taken away.

View 9. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Let's do these together. The Ark was taken away or destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. In 2 Esdras 10:22 (another pseudepigrapha text, not contemporary but still old like the Jeremiah text), it says this:

The ark of our covenant has been plundered.

Simple as that. This is also a view that you'll see in the Talmud. The Bible is, to be honest, silent. We don't have a biblical statement that clearly, explicitly says the Ark was taken or destroyed. We do have, again, Jeremiah 3:16 and Lamentations 2:1 that suggest it, but they're not explicit references. So this is where we are.

1:20:00

The reason we even have the discussion is because of this ambiguity. When Nebuchadnezzar comes in to Jerusalem, does what he does (2 Kings 24:13—he destroys everything), the Ark is not actually listed. Let me just read you the verse:

¹³ **and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold.**

By the way, it does say "all" there. But, you know, sometimes "all" doesn't mean *all*. I'll grant that. Kind of an interesting comment there about the Lord foretelling. Could that be a Jeremiah 3:16 reference? I don't know! We don't have any way to be clear there, but it could be. The Ark is not specifically mentioned there, and when the exiles are allowed to return and they bring stuff back in Ezra 1:7-11, the Ark is not listed there, either. It's interesting that if you take these two verses together... 2 Kings 24:13 sounds very exhaustive. Nebuchadnezzar cut up *all* the

stuff that he brought back. Well, apparently he didn't because some of it's brought back by the Jews in Ezra 1. So maybe Nebuchadnezzar took the Ark and that wasn't a thing he destroyed or had melted down. Maybe he kept that. But wait a minute... It's not mentioned as being taken back by Ezra. You'd think if he *didn't* destroy it and then the Jews were allowed to return... If that was sitting in Babylon, the Persian king after the conquest of Babylon would have said, "Make sure you take that back because I'm going to help you build the temple." And he does! So if the Ark was sitting in Babylon, it stands to reason that the Persian king would have let them take it back. But it's not listed. Again, this is a circumstantial argument that the Ark was destroyed—either on site in Jerusalem or later in Babylon. But again, we don't have specific reference to that.

There's also no Ark in the Second Temple account of the return. Josephus writes about it. Tacitus writes about it in his *Histories*. There's a list of objects brought back in 1 Maccabees 4. The Ark is not in any of them. That's what you've got.

So to wrap up the episode, my own take here (as I think you can tell)... I will admit there's no conclusive argument to be made one way or the other as far as explicit data. That's true. That also means there's no good reason to suspect that the Ark survived. All of the theories about the Ark not being there before Nebuchadnezzar gets there are not very good arguments. They have serious weaknesses. On the other hand, we have the omission of the Ark from lists of objects, both in the Bible and in other ancient Second Temple texts—that the Ark is not among the stuff that was brought back. We have Jeremiah 3:16 and Lamentations 2:1 that suggest that God just didn't care. God allowed it to be destroyed. But he told Jeremiah, "Look, when this all wraps up and the glory returns and the nations are gathered back to Israel, nobody's going to care. Nobody's going to miss it. There'll be no talk of making another one. We're not going to worry about it because we don't need it. We'll have the Lord." I think that's the way the New Testament plays out. We don't need these objects.

So that's where I'm at. I think the most likely scenario is that the Ark was destroyed either on site or in Babylon, but I'm not going to reject every other possibility out of hand. The Qumran news from six weeks ago... Hey, that's interesting. That's the kind of thing that I would hope that people would pursue one way or the other. I have my doubts that it will ever get pursued because it's so politically charged. It's kind of like, do we have the correct location of the temple or not? Again, there are reasons to make you wonder there, even though ninety-nine percent of biblical scholars and archaeologists are going to say that's a done deal. Well, there are disconnects between what we think is the temple and some of what Josephus says, for sure. But nobody seems to care, so there you go. So I'm not suspecting that anybody's going to be digging at Qumran looking for the Ark—anybody official. Maybe somebody will be foolish and they'll get arrested, but I don't think anybody official is going to be doing this, for the same reason that I don't think anybody official is going to be talking about whether we really have the temple precincts correct here or not. It's just too

controversial—too politically charged. So I'm not optimistic, although it is something I'll pay attention to.

TS: Mike, theory number ten is that the Knights Templar have it, and if any current Templars want to reach out to me, please feel free. I think I'd make a good knight, so please...

MH: (laughing) You just want me to call you "Sir Trey." That's what you want!

TS: Hey! No, honestly, what are your thoughts on the Templars? I'm just curious overall.

1:25:00

MH: I just think a lot of what's said about them today is kind of a lot of hooey. I don't see much evidence for any kind of medieval excavation over here in North America, bringing stuff over here. I think it's part of the "Lost Tribe" stuff, which I think is pretty nonsensical, so I think the Templars actually get a bad name because of stuff like that. People who are interested in this should go to Jason Colavito's site and search for the word "Templar." He'll keep you busy for a few weeks talking about Templar mythology.

TS: What's your thoughts on the Templars? Are you a fan? Not a fan?

MH: I'm just ambivalent. I'm not into this. Yes, I've seen the movie (laughing). I did see *The Last Crusade* and really liked it. I guess it makes for a good story, but I don't have any reason to put a whole lot of eggs in that basket.

TS: I've just got one more real quick theory that I wanted to mention. The late David Flynn has a book called *Temple at the Center of Time*. In that, he talks about how Isaac Newton believed that Scriptures contained a hidden code revealing the Ark's location and that the measurements of the first temple were the key to solving that equation. It's been a long time since I read that book, but you had a relationship with David Flynn. I remember reading that book probably ten years ago (or not quite) and it connected Isaac Newton with the Ark of the Covenant. That's an entertaining read, too, so if anybody's interested in theories and fun stuff, I would highly recommend that.

MH: I haven't read the whole book. I read part of it. See, stuff like that gets ruined for me pretty quickly. I've commented on Flynn's work before. I knew Dave and really liked him. Of course, it's tragic that he's not around. What I say about Flynn some people feel is contradictory, but it's not. I don't look to any of Flynn's work to do biblical exegesis at all, but what Flynn does and did is very important. That sounds contradictory, but there's a reason why I assign importance to it aside from biblical stuff. It would take a whole episode to talk about Flynn, which is really outside the orbit of this.

When I got the book, the first thing I was looking for was the use of biblical text and he starts getting into codes and mathematics. The problem is he's doing ELS sequencing in the book—that kind of Bible Code stuff, and that is just dead on arrival because you have to pick one text—an arbitrary Masoretic Text. You're not factoring in any textual variations, you're not factoring in the oldest form of the text, which is the Qumran material, which uses plene spelling, which is *lethal* to any ELS sequencing and anything based on it. For people who are interested in this, go to biblecodemyth.com and click on the link there.

I was on Coast to Coast one time (and this was an episode that did not translate well to radio—believe me), I debated Grant Jeffrey on the Bible Code. Basically, 95% of the stuff I said, Jeffrey just didn't understand. I couldn't visually show it, but what I did was he had a book out on how Isaiah 52:13 through Isaiah 53... If you put that into a computer program and do ELS sequencing there are all these hits that point to Jesus. Well, I took his text (the text he used) and I put them into a PDF file and then underneath them I put the Qumran scrolls of the exact same passage. Then I highlighted all of the letter differences between them. Because the Qumran scribes used plene spelling. The plene spelling is they use consonants for vowels, so there are added consonants in the oldest form of the text we have that are not in the text that Grant Jeffrey and every other Bible Coder uses. It just *kills* the Bible Code. If you want to say that God encrypted information in the Biblical text, then use the oldest form of the text that we have. Use the Qumran material. Because if you're just arbitrarily picking the Masoretic Text with the little dots and dashes taken out (the medieval vowel pointing system that the Masoretes developed) it alters the text. There are 112 or 113 (something like that) letter differences in fifteen verses. Just one of them—just one letter difference—would shift the whole code if you're doing equidistant letter sequencing—the classic Bible Code stuff, which is what Flynn was doing in the part of the book that I read. I've got 112 of them in twelve verses! It just blows it to smithereens.

1:30:00

So when I read stuff like that, it just kills my interest and my enthusiasm... No, I shouldn't say that. It kills any sense that the conclusions reached here could be right. I don't think they're correct at all. But I will say (and I have altogether different reasons for saying this), I view (and viewed) what Flynn did as really, really important—but for altogether different reasons. So I'm a fan, I just don't use his work to do biblical stuff.

TS: Well, good deal. Next week, another good topical episode. It's the sin of Ham and the curse of Canaan.

MH: Oh boy. It's not quite Ezekiel 16 (laughing), but it's in the same territory. Let's just put it that way.

TS: No rating R, so...

MH: I don't think we need that for this one. We don't need to put up any disclaimers for this one. It's not quite that bad.

TS: Just like that, Mike, we're done and we appreciate it. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.