

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was one of the most famous pieces of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The Ark was kept in the Holy of Holies inside the Temple. No one was allowed to enter that room except for the High Priest. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat in order to make atonement for the sins of the people. (The mercy seat was the top portion of the Ark – the part that had the images of angels.) The Holy of Holies did not contain any candles or artificial light; instead it was lit by the glory of God. When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies he came into the presence of God Himself.

As you can see, the Ark was a very special thing – and a very holy thing. It was kept in the holiest room in the Temple and was where God manifested His glory. Because of this, God had a host of special rules regarding how the Ark was to be handled. The consequences of breaking these rules and profaning the Ark were very severe – and that is what I want to talk about.

There was a time when the nation of Israel came to see the Ark as a sort of good-luck charm. I Samuel 4:1-3 tells us that when Israel lost a battle against the Philistines they decided to take the Ark into battle with them. They were confident that somehow the Ark would wield magical powers that would make the Philistines lose. Instead of looking to God they looked to the Ark itself – and they lost badly. The Philistines captured the Ark and excitedly brought it to the temple of their god Dagon. However, that turned out to be a mistake:

I Samuel 5:2: “When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the

morrow, behold, **Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord.** And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

4 And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and **the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold;** only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day."

The Philistines' intent was to show that their false god Dagon was superior to the God of the Ark – but that's not how things turned out. After the first night they found their idol face down before the Ark. After the second night Dagon was face down once again – but this time his head and hands were cut off. The God of the Ark was winning, and the false god Dagon was not faring very well.

So the Philistines decided to start moving the Ark around. Everywhere the Ark went it brought disaster:

I Samuel 5:6: "But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and **he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods,** even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

7 And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, **The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us:** for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Is-

rael be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.

9 And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, **the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction:** and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, **They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.**

11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, **Send away the ark of the God of Israel,** and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

12 And **the men that died not were smitten with the emerods:** and the cry of the city went up to heaven.”

As you can see, it didn't take very long for the Philistines to begin panicking whenever they saw the Ark of God coming their way. The hand of God was against them, and those who weren't killed were tormented. The Ark caused the Philistines so much trouble that after seven months they decided to send it back to the Israelites.

But the story is not yet over. When the Philistines sent the Ark back it arrived at Bethshemesh. However, instead of treating it with reverence, the men of that city decided it would be a great idea to open up the Ark and see what was inside it. This proved to be a fatal mistake:

I Samuel 6:19: “And he smote the men of

Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.”

Fifty thousand people died because they decided to open up the Ark and look inside it. They violated God's commandments regarding how to handle the Ark, and they paid for it with their lives.

After this happened the men of Bethshemesh decided that they were done with the Ark and told the men of Kirjathjearim to come and get it. They came and got it, and it remained with them for twenty years.

Eventually King David decided to move the Ark back to where it belonged. However, instead of following the instructions God gave for moving the Ark, he decided to have it moved on an ox cart instead. This was another fatal mistake:

2 Samuel 6:6: “And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, **Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.**

7 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and **there he died** by the ark of God.”

The Ark was supposed to be carried on poles by the priests. It was *not* supposed to be carried on an ox cart. When it was transported by oxen, the cart shook and the Ark became unsteady. When Uzzah reached out and grabbed the Ark in order to steady it, he was struck dead on the spot. God struck him dead because he had violated the rules regarding the Ark's handling: the Ark was a very holy thing and men were *not* allowed to touch it.

When this happened David stopped the procession and the

Ark stayed at the house of Obbedom for three months. David then tried to move the Ark again, and this time he followed God's instructions – and everything went fine.

Today there are a number of people who are eagerly searching for the Ark of the Covenant. If it was found it would certainly be hailed as one of the greatest discoveries of all time – but I can say with assurance that it will never be found. The Bible tells us exactly where the Ark is currently located, and it's not anywhere on Earth. The Ark has been moved elsewhere:

Revelation 11:19: “And **the temple of God was opened in heaven**, and there was seen in his temple **the ark of his testament**: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.”

Where is the Ark? In Heaven. It's *not here on Earth* – which means that all of those Ark-seekers are never going to locate it. God has put it out of mankind's reach.

