

# The Hidden Ark

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This little study is written as an answer to a question submitted by one of our readers who had read with interest the account of the appearing of the law of God in the heavens soon after the beginning of the earthquake and hailstorm of the seventh plague.

This reader is obviously conversant with a certain teaching in circulation which teaches that the ark of God, hidden since the days of Jeremiah, will be brought forth in the time when the judgment of the living has begun.

In no sense of the word do we see any light in this teaching, and we know that the questioner does not either, but rather wondered how this appearing of the law, which in Old Testament times was located in the ark, may have a bearing on the case in question.

The statements upon which this theory is based are as follows:

## **Spiritual Gifts, vol. 4, p. 114-115:**

Because of Israel's transgression of the commandments of God, and their wicked acts, God suffered them to go into captivity to humble and punish them. Before the temple was destroyed, God made known to a few of His faithful servants the fate of the temple, which was the pride of Israel, and which they regarded with idolatry, while they were sinning against God. He also revealed to them the captivity of Israel.

These righteous men, just before the destruction of the temple, removed the sacred ark containing the tables of stone, and with mourning and sadness, secreted it in a cave where it was to be hid from the people of Israel, because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them.

That sacred ark is yet hid. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.

This statement refers to that time when the Babylonians were coming to overthrow Jerusalem and the temple and to take the Israelites into captivity. It is repeated in *Prophets and Kings*, p. 453, and *The Story of Redemption*, p. 195.

**Manuscript Releases, vol 8. p.100 (#122, 1901):**

“And He [Christ] gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written by the finger of God.”

Nothing written on those tables could be blotted out. The precious record of the law was placed in the ark of the testament and is still there, safely hidden from the human family.

But in God's appointed time He will bring forth these tables of stone to be a testimony to all the world against the disregard of His commandments and against the idolatrous worship of a counterfeit Sabbath.

**The Review and Herald, March 26, 1908:**

There are abundant evidences of the immutability of God's law. It was written with the finger of God, never to be obliterated, never to be destroyed. The tables of stone are hidden by God, to be produced in the great judgment day, just as He wrote them.

**The Review and Herald, January 28, 1909:**

When the judgment shall sit, and the books shall be opened, and every man shall be judged according to the things written in the books, then the tables of stone, hidden by God until that day, will be presented before the world as the standard of righteousness. Then men and women will see that the prerequisite of their salvation is obedience to the perfect law of God. None will find excuse for sin. By the righteous principles of that law, men will receive their sentence of life or of death.

A brief summary of the facts contained in these statements would be as follows:

Back in the days of Jeremiah, as the days of Jerusalem were drawing to a close, a number of faithful souls, under the direction of the Lord, took the ark and carefully hid it. It remains hidden and preserved until this day. But there is coming a

time when it is to be brought out as a witness to all men of the immutability of the law of God. That time is yet future, if for no other reason than the fact that it has not yet been discovered and brought out into the light.

God has appointed a specific time when the law is to be brought out into the light again, and it is to be the great judgment day:

“When the judgment shall sit, and the books shall be opened, and every man shall be judged according to the things written in the books.”

From these facts certain conclusions have been drawn and circulated by some. They have taught that, for the people of God, here is the sure and the certain sign which will appear to tell them of the commencement of the judgment of the living. Their argument is that the ark and the tables of stone are to appear when the books are opened at the sitting down of the judgment.

These words, to their minds, have referred to the investigative judgment of the righteous, which is to take place before the close of probation. They know, of course, that these books for this judgment opened in 1844, when the investigative judgment of the righteous actually began with the judging of the righteous dead.

Strictly speaking, according to their identification of the judgment here mentioned, upon which identification the whole application of these statements depends, the ark should have been brought forth in 1844, for it was then that the books were opened in the judgment of which they are thinking. But the ark was not discovered and brought forth then. That is an historical fact of which no amount of reasoning can make any change.

So firmly fixed in their minds is the concept that the judgment spoken of is the judgment of the righteous, prior to the

coming of Christ, that they have to *conclude* that the statement applies to the commencement of the judgment of the living.

If the judgment here spoken of is the judgment of the righteous, then there would be some basis for the conclusions drawn. But is it referring to the investigative judgment of the righteous, which is concluded at the close of probation?

To find the answer to this question we have but to read carefully the statements themselves to see which judgment is being referred to. As surely as there is a judgment of the professed people of God, just as surely there will be a different judgment as well at a very different time in eternity.

Let us turn again to the statement under consideration to note carefully the specifications of the judgment referred to. As we do this we shall have not the least difficulty in determining which judgment is being spoken of:

“When the judgment shall sit, and the books shall be opened, and *every man shall be judged* according to the things written in the books, *then* the tables of stone, hidden by God until that day, will be presented before the world as the standard of righteousness.”

### Three Sitzings

There are three separate sittings of the judgment in each of which the books are opened. The first of these was in 1844, when the books were opened on the judgment of the professed people of God, and will continue as one sitting through the judgment of the dead and on to the judgment of the living. The opening of the judgment of the living is not a new and distinct sitting or a different opening of the books from that of the judgment of the dead, but simply the concluding of that work.

The next sitting of the judgment is that of the investigative judgment of all the lost, and this takes place during the mil-

lennium. Again, this period is begun by the sitting of the judgment and the opening of the books.

Thirdly, the judgment sits and the books are opened at the end of the millennium when the wicked surround the city of God and seek to capture it for themselves.

It is to one of these three that the statements which tell of the discovery of the ark and the bringing forth of the law of God apply. They do not apply to all three, but to only one in particular.

Those who teach that the ark is to be produced at the commencement of the judgment of the living do not point out the distinctions between the three sittings of the judgment and the three openings of the books. Yet this is vital to an understanding of which judgment is under consideration.

### **The First Judgment**

In the first case, it could not apply to the judgment of the professed people of God, for the books were opened on that judgment in 1844, and we know that the ark was not brought forth at that time for all the world to see the nature of their transgressions, nor was that the judgment when “every man” was judged.

The judgment of the professed people of God is not the judgment when the case of every man comes up.

#### **The Great Controversy, p. 480:**

In the typical service only those who had come before God with confession and repentance, and whose sins, through the blood of the sin offering, were transferred to the sanctuary, had a part in the service of the Day of Atonement. So in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment, the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God. The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work, and takes place at a later period. “Judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?”

The fact is clear that the case of *every man* does not come up in the judgment of the professed people of God, and, therefore, the statements do not speak of any possible appearing of the ark at the time when this judgment sat and the books were opened.

Neither can it be referring to the commencement of the judgment of the living, for the books are already open then. God does not close off the judgment of the dead by shutting the books and then reopening them for the judgment of the living. It is all one judgment which simply passes from the judgment of the dead to the living without a pause, when the right point of time has come.

This eliminates the application of the statements to the judgment of the professed people of God prior to the close of probation.

## **The Second Judgment**

We can then turn to test the second opening of the books after the advent of Christ to see if the law will be brought forth then. Obviously, it will not be this judgment either, for the wicked are all dead; therefore, the witness provided by the bringing forth of the ark and the law, which is for them in particular, will have no registration on their minds.

## **The Third Judgment**

This leaves but the final judgment at the end of the millenium, as the one when the law and the ark will be brought forth as an exhibit in the great judgment day when the lives of all men will pass in review before God. Of that judgment it is written:

### **The Great Controversy, p. 666:**

In the presence of the assembled inhabitants of earth and heaven the final coronation of the Son of God takes place. And now, invested with supreme majesty and power, the King of kings pronounces sentence upon the rebels against

His government, and executes justice upon those who have transgressed His law and oppressed His people. Says the prophet of God:

“I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God. The seductive temptations which they encouraged by indulgence in sin, the blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by the stubborn, unrepentant heart—all appear as if written in letters of fire.

This is the great judgment day, when the books shall be opened and the case of every man shall come up in review before God, and it is at this judgment that the long hidden Ark will be brought out and displayed as an exhibit in the sight of all men. Only at this time could it appear before men in its true light and thus have any real value as an exhibit.

If it was found today, it would be hailed as a wonderful discovery and would be accorded a place of great honor and respect in the world's leading museum.

But its discovery would make no difference to men's attitude to the law of God, for there is hardly a person who would deny that the law was given on Sinai in the form in which it was given. Their argument and conviction that it was all for the Jews and not for us today would remain.

## **Final Rewards**

Some may object to the identification of the judgment con-

cerned by pointing to the fact that the paragraph quoted above closes with the words:

“By the righteous principles of that law men will receive their sentence of life or death.”

It will be argued that the sentence of life for the righteous is certainly given long before this during the investigative judgment of the professed people of God. To a certain extent this is true, but this does not deny the fact in the great judgment day the sentences of life and death are finally and irrevocably meted out. This will be understood when the full purpose of that final judgment day is seen to be what it is.

The purpose of that judgment day is to settle forever the justice of God, together with every question of truth and error. During the examination of the records of the professed people of God, as a result of which the true and the faithful are given the gift of eternal life, the wicked are not present and could not challenge or protest the decisions of that court. It would not have been possible for this to be done at this time, yet the justice of God could never be satisfied if it were not done.

The same is equally true of the investigative judgment of the wicked during the thousand years. At this they will not be present to plead their case and to protest the decisions made. Again justice requires that this opportunity be given them.

Such an opportunity, both to accuse the righteous and to challenge the decisions against them, will be given at the close of the millennium, when both they and the righteous will all be present with the books of record open before them. They will find that they have absolutely nothing to say. They will see and acknowledge the justice and the mercy of God in all His dealings. They will see that the righteous are where they ought to be, while they, in turn, can only blame themselves for being where they are.



But in order for the wicked to see that God was truly just in giving eternal life to the saints, whose sinful lives are well known to the wicked, the lives of the righteous will need to be examined as well. Consider how the high priest will ask how it is that he is outside the city, while the Peter who denied his Master with foul oaths, is within.

To many this may all come as a new thought, but it is written in the Scriptures:

### **Revelation 20**

<sup>11</sup> And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

<sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

<sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

<sup>14</sup> And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

<sup>15</sup> And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

In this judgment all the books are to be opened, including the book of life in which stands the record of the lives of those within the city. None of the names or life records of those without the city will at that time be found in *that* book—the book of life.

As the examination goes forward, then those whose names are not found in the book of life are committed to destruction, while those whose names are found in that book are committed to eternal life.

It is to be understood that there will be no reversal of the decisions made previously in the investigative judgments, first

of the righteous and then of the wicked. Nor would there be any need of re-examination of the books of record here but for the fact that the justice of God must be fully satisfied, so that every lip shall confess the justice and the mercy of God.

Thus it will be that at that judgment where *every man shall be judged*, there will be meted out the final reward of eternal life on the one hand and of eternal death on the other.

## **No Sign Given**

Those who have built up the case of the appearing of the ark and of the law, as the sign that the judgment of the living has begun, have a message which has a strong appeal to the desires of the natural heart. The natural heart longs for signs and confirmations that a certain time has been reached, especially if that event marks the point of time when we will have been sealed into eternal security.

But the fact is that neither the righteous nor the wicked will know when their probation has closed. More than this, that great Bible student, the devil, who knows all the signs the Lord has for his people, will not even know that probation is closed during the time of the seven last plagues.

We will not take a great deal of space on this here but will simply direct the attention to two statements which verify these facts:

### **The Great Controversy, p. 491:**

The righteous and the wicked will still be living upon the earth in their mortal state—men will be planting and building, eating and drinking, all unconscious that the final, irrevocable decision has been pronounced in the sanctuary above.

### **The Great Controversy, p. 618:**

He [Satan] sees that holy angels are guarding them, and he infers that their sins have been pardoned; but he does not know that their cases have been decided in the sanctuary above.

If the Lord was to provide us with a sign that the judgment of the living has come, then we would know that our probation was closing, and the devil would know it too. Then these words just quoted could never have been written.

## **The Law in God's Hand**

In closing, we return to the presentation of the law which sparked off the question which sparked off this little study. So far, we have seen that the ark and the law are to be presented in the great judgment day when the cases of all are to be decided, and it has been shown that this will be at the end of the millennium.

But there is another presentation of the law of God which takes place before the coming of Jesus and after the commencement of the seventh plague.

### **The Great Controversy, p. 639:**

While these words of holy trust ascend to God, the clouds sweep back, and the starry heavens are seen, unspeakably glorious in contrast with the black and angry firmament on either side. The glory of the celestial city streams from the gates ajar. Then there appears against the sky a hand holding two tables of stone folded together. Says the prophet: "The heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is judge Himself" (Psalm 50:6).

That holy law, God's righteousness, that amid thunder and flame was proclaimed from Sinai as the guide of life, is now revealed to men as the rule of judgment. The hand opens the tables, and there are seen the precepts of the Decalogue, traced as with a pen of fire. The words are so plain that all can read them.

If the law of God, as contained in the ark, is not to be found and brought forth till the end of the millennium, then how do we explain the appearance of the two tables in the heavens at this time?

The answer is to be found in the identification of which tables are presented in each case. A careful reading of the state-

ments so far quoted will show that the law in the ark was the one given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Those particular two tables of stone were placed in the ark and hidden with it until now, and will remain hidden until the end of the thousand years. Then those particular tables of stone will be brought forth for all to see.

But those tables of stone are but the replica of the originals in heaven:

**The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1109:**

I warn you, Do not place your influence against God's commandments. That law is just as Jehovah wrote it in the temple of heaven. Men may trample upon its copy here below, but the original is kept in the ark of God in heaven...

This solves any mystery as to which law is presented in the coming time of trouble. It will not be the tables of stone given to Israel through Moses, but it will be the great original from the sanctuary in heaven, leaving the tables of stone still hidden in the earthly ark until they shall be brought forth in the great judgment day to accuse or to bless each and every man upon the face of the earth.

May each and every one of our readers find themselves on the right side of the ledger in that great, final, and climactic day.