

Where Is the Ark of the Covenant Hidden?

H A R U N Y A H Y A

The Ark of the Covenant is a treasure chest revealed by our Lord in the Qur'an and which contains the property of the Prophet Moses and the Prophet Aaron. According to Islamic scholars, the most important feature of the Ark is that its whereabouts have been unknown since 587 BC, and it is generally accepted by them that it will be found by the Mahdi, an individual who will appear in the end times. (God knows best.)

The Ark of the Covenant is a subject to which attention is drawn in the hadiths (sayings of our Prophet [peace be upon him]) and in various historical sources, and is also referred to in the Qur'an, revealed by our Lord. The Torah, a divine text that was subsequently corrupted, also contains information about this chest. The Ark, regarded by Islamic scholars as heralding an age when Qur'anic moral values will prevail on earth, is described in these terms in the Qur'an:

Their Prophet said to them, 'The sign of his kingship is that the Ark will come to you, containing serenity from your Lord and certain relics left by the families of Musa and Harun. It will be borne by angels. There is a sign for you in that if you believe. (Qur'an, 2: 248)

The Ark According to Historical Sources

Considerable information about the Ark of the Covenant is to be found in historical sources. It is thought to have been manufactured on the slopes of Mount Sinai after the Children of Israel left Egypt, and contains stone slabs from the Prophet Musa and other items from the Prophet Harun.

According to historical sources, the Ark of the Covenant was carried to Jerusalem when the city was declared to be the capital of the United Jewish Kingdom in the time of the Prophet David, after that of the Prophet Aaron. It was placed in the Temple built by the Prophet Solomon, where it remained until 587 BC. In that year Jerusalem was captured by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the monarch who constructed the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Later on, the belief began to spread that the Ark, which was not seen for the next 500 years by anyone, had not been destroyed but had been buried in a secret location under the Temple by the Levites responsible for its safekeeping. After the destruction of the Temple by the Roman Governor Titus in 70 AD, it was assumed that the secret chamber had been found and that the Ark and the other holy artifacts from the Temple had been carried to Rome.

The Search for the Vanished Ark

The Ark has remained lost since 587 BC up to the present day. In addition, since the Jews believed that the Ark would only reappear after the coming of the Messiah, those who have looked for it down the years have generally been Christians, not Jews. The first recorded "Ark Excavations" on the Temple Mount were carried out by the Knights Templar in the 12th century.

No sign of the Ark was found then or more recently, and the subject has become a focus of interest for researchers in modern times.

The Ark in the Old Testament

Our Almighty Lord, Who created everything with sublime knowledge and wisdom, has revealed the existence of the Ark in both the Qur'an and the Old Testament. It is revealed in the Old Testament that one of the stone tablets was given to the Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai and that these tablets were placed into the Ark on Mount Horeb:

When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God. (Exodus 31: 18)

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. (2 Chronicles 5: 10)

The Torah also states that the Ark was later carried away by the Prophet David and installed elsewhere by the Prophet Solomon:

David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark. They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. (2 Samuel 6: 1-4)

Opinions regarding the Journey and Location of the Ark of the Covenant

The city of Jerusalem is known for being the home of the Temple erected by the Prophet Solomon and for the Ark of the Covenant. The most widely accepted view is that the sacred treasures were carried to Rome when the Temple was torn down in 70 AD. Another opinion, however, is that the Ark, which has been lost since 587 BC, was hidden in Jerusalem and that it was taken further north, in other words to Tiberias (Tabariya), or to Antioch (Hatay) or Mecca, in order to prevent it being destroyed by the Romans or other peoples, since Jerusalem was regarded as unsafe. (Our Almighty Lord knows best.)

The Ark of the Covenant in the Hadiths

As stated in the Qur'an, the Ark of the Covenant is "a sign" for the faithful (Qur'an, 2: 248), for which reason believers have looked for it down the years. The fact that it has remained lost despite all this detailed research may be an indication that it will be found in our own time, when a great many portents regarding the end times have been fulfilled. (Almighty Allah knows best.)

The end times are an age when, near to doomsday, the moral values of the Qur'an will come to prevail over all the world and will be widespread among people. The injustices, oppression, cruelty, immorality and degeneration of earlier times will be eliminated in this blessed time, and all difficulties will be replaced by plenty, abundance, wealth, beauty and peace. There will be major advances in technology, and these will be used to ensure ease and comfort for all. By the will of Allah the Ark will be a sign of this age and will herald happy days for all of mankind.

In his hadiths, God's Messenger (peace be upon him) has provided considerable information about the Ark and the spiritual entity, the Mahdi, who will find it, and has given Muslims these glad tidings.

According to the hadiths, the Ark is near Lake Tiberias. It will be found by the Mahdi in the end times and will be a symbol of his dominion, as it was of the rule of Talut (Saul). One hadith on the subject runs as follows:

The Mehdi will remove the Ark of the Covenant from Lake Tiberias. (Iqd al-Durar fi Akbar al-Imam al-Muntadhar, by Shaikh Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Damishqi, p. 51-a)

Other hadiths concerning the end times provide other place names for the location of the Ark. These separate place names may mean that the site is not known for sure and is perhaps under special protection for the Mahdi. (Almighty Allah knows best.)

The reason he will be known as the Mahdi is that he will show the way to a hidden thing. He will bring the Ark to light from a place called Antioch. (Suyuti, al-Hawi li'l Fatawa, II, 82)

The reason he will be known as the Mahdi is that he will go to one of the mountains in Sham. From there he will unearth the (true) books of the Torah and bring forth evidence against the Jews. (Suyuti, al-Hawi li'l Fatawa, II, 81)

According to commentaries on these hadiths, the fire of Zionism spurred on by some Jews will come to an end at the time of the Mahdi, and Islamic tolerance and Qur'anic moral values will spread among them. The place described as "near Lake Tiberias" in the hadiths is regarded as a figure of speech by Islamic scholars. Tiberias is near to Sham, and Sham, in accounts of the end times in the hadiths, means somewhere far-distant, far from Mecca and Medina. This figure of speech applies to Tiberias. Indeed, some commentators and researchers have taken this to indicate that the Ark may be in Jerusalem, Mecca, Tiberias, Antioch, or even in Istanbul.