

The Ark of the Covenant, Will It Be Found?

(A statement prepared in 1962 by R. L. Odom, *Index* editor, and updated
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In examining the teachings of the Spirit of Prophecy to answer queries concerning the hidden ark of the covenant and the tables of the law of God, it is essential that we keep in mind the fact that there have existed "two" arks of the covenant--one in the earthly sanctuary, and one in the heavenly sanctuary--and that in "each of them "there has been kept a set of tables of stone on which the Decalogue has been inscribed. Both of these arks and both of these sets of the divine law have been hidden from the gaze of men. Therefore, it is necessary to find out which of the two sets of the tables of the Ten Commandments will be brought forth to the view of the inhabitants of the earth in the future.

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The Decalogue on Tables of Stone in the Heavenly Sanctuary

The Ten Commandments have been written on tables of stone and kept in the ark of the covenant of the heavenly sanctuary as well as on tables of stone and preserved in the ark of the covenant of the earthly sanctuary. Such is taught in the following Ellen G. White statements:

"I was then bidden to take notice of the two apartments of the heavenly sanctuary. . . . The veil was lifted, and I looked into the second apartment. I saw there an ark which had the appearance of being of the finest gold. As a border around the top of the ark, was most beautiful work representing crowns. In the ark were tables of stone containing the ten commandments."--EW 251, 252.

"The Lord gave me a view of the heavenly sanctuary. The temple of God was open in heaven, and I was shown the ark of God covered with the mercy seat. Two angels stood one at either end of the ark, with their wings spread over the mercy seat, and their faces turned toward it. This, my accompanying angel informed me, represented all the heavenly host looking with reverential awe toward the law of God, which had been written by the finger of God.

"Jesus raised the cover of the ark, and I beheld the tables of stone on which the ten commandments were written."--LS 95.

"But the Lord gave me a view of the heavenly sanctuary. The temple of God was opened in heaven, and I was shown the ark of God. . . . Jesus raised the cover of the ark, and I beheld the tables of stone on which the ten commandments were written."--1T 76.

In describing a view given her of the heavenly sanctuary and Christ's closing work of ministration in the most holy place, Ellen White says:

"It was represented to me that the remnant followed Jesus into the most holy place and beheld the ark and the mercy seat, and were captivated with their glory. Jesus then raised the cover of the ark, and lo! the tables of stone, with the ten commandments written upon them."--EW 255.

"The ark containing the law of God, the altar of incense, and other instruments of service found in the sanctuary below, have also their counterpart in the sanctuary above. In holy vision the apostle John was permitted to enter heaven, and he there beheld the candlestick and the altar of incense, and as 'the temple of God was opened,' he beheld also 'the ark of His testament' (Revelation 11:19)."--4SP 261.

"In the temple in heaven, the dwelling place of God, His throne is established in righteousness and judgment. In the most holy place is His law, the great rule of right by which all mankind are tested. The ark that enshrines the tables of the law is covered with the mercy seat, before which Christ pleads His blood in the sinner's behalf."--GC 415.

"The ark in the tabernacle on earth contained the two tables of stone, upon which were inscribed the precepts of the law of God. The ark was merely a receptacle for the tables of the law, and the presence of these divine precepts gave to it its value and sacredness. When the temple of God was opened in heaven, the ark of His testament was seen. Within the holy of holies, in the sanctuary in heaven, the divine law is sacredly enshrined--the law that was spoken by God Himself amid the thunders of Sinai and written with His own finger on the tables of stone."--GC 433, 434.

The Original Set is Kept in the Ark in Heaven

The set of tables of the Ten Commandments kept in the ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary is the great "original", while the set kept in the ark in the earthly sanctuary is a transcript or copy of the one above. Such is the teaching set forth in the following statements from the Spirit of Prophecy:

"Sacrilegious minds and hearts have thought they were mighty enough to change the times and laws of Jehovah; but, safe in the archives of heaven, in the ark of God, are the original commandments, written upon the two tables of stone. No potentate of earth has power to draw forth those tables from their sacred hiding place beneath the mercy seat."--7BC 972 (ST, February 28, 1878).

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

the ark of God in heaven; and on the cover of this ark, right above that law, is the mercy seat. Jesus stands right there before that ark to mediate for man."--1BC 1109.

"They [the Adventists] had by faith followed their High Priest from the holy to the most holy, and they saw Him pleading His blood before the ark of God. Within that sacred ark is the Father's law, the same that was spoken by God Himself amid the thunders of Sinai, and written with His own finger on the tables of stone. Not one command has been annulled; not a jot or tittle has been changed. While God gave to Moses a copy of His law, He preserved the great original in the sanctuary above."--4SP 273, 274 (SR 379, 380).

"None could fail to see that if the earthly sanctuary was a figure or pattern of the heavenly, the law deposited in the ark on earth was an exact transcript of the law in the ark of heaven; and that an acceptance of the truth concerning the heavenly sanctuary involved an acknowledgment of the claims of God's law and the obligation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Here was the secret of the bitter and determined opposition to the harmonious exposition of the Scriptures that revealed the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary."--GC 435 (SR 380, 381).

"The law of God in the sanctuary in heaven is the great original, of which the precepts inscribed upon the tables of stone and recorded by Moses in the Pentateuch were an unerring transcript."--GC 434.

The Law Kept in the Earthly Sanctuary Has Been Hidden With the Ark in a Cave

The set of tables of the Decalogue which was kept in the earthly sanctuary was in the ark when it was hidden by righteous men in a cave shortly before the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in the time of Jeremiah. However, the following statements from the Spirit of Prophecy do not mention Jeremiah as personally having had a part in hiding the ark:

"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."--4SG 114, 115 (1864); 1SP 414 (1870); SR 195.

"Among the righteous still in Jerusalem, to whom had been made plain the divine purpose, were some who determined to place beyond the reach of ruthless hands the sacred ark containing the tables of stone on which had been traced the precepts of the Decalogue. This they did. With mourning and sadness they secreted the ark in a cave, where it was to be hidden from the people of Israel and Judah because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hidden. *It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.*"--PK 453 (published in 1917); emphasis supplied.

Note particularly that Ellen White stated that the ark "has never been disturbed since it was secreted."

"When the Judgment Shall Sit"

According to the Spirit of Prophecy, the time is coming when the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments are written will be brought forth to the view of the inhabitants of earth. All of the known E. G. White statements on this matter are quoted here in chronological order:

"Human theories are exalted, honored, and placed where God and His law should be. But God has not altered the thing which has gone out of His lips. His word will stand fast forever, as unalterable as His throne. When every case is decided in the courts of heaven, this covenant will be brought forth, plainly written with the finger of God. The world will be arraigned before the bar of Infinite Justice to receive sentence--a life measuring with the life of God for obedience, and death for transgression."--Ms 82, 1899. (See RH November 20, 1913 and PK 187.)

"With His own finger God wrote His commandments on two tables of stone. These tables were not left in the keeping of men, but were placed in the ark; and in the great day when every case is decided, these tables, inscribed with the commandments, will be placed so that all the world will see and understand. The witness against them will be unanswerable."--Letter 30, 1900 (19MR 265).

"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."--Ms 122, 1901 (1BC 1109).

"When God's temple in heaven is opened, what a triumphant time that will be for all who have been faithful and true! In the temple will be seen the ark of the testament in which were placed the two tables of stone, on which are written God's law. These tables of stone will be brought forth from their hiding place, and on them will be seen the ten commandments engraved by the finger of God. These tables of stone now lying in the ark of the testament will be a convincing testimony to the truth and binding claims of God's law."--Letter 47, 1902 (7BC 972).

"The holy law of the ten commandments, written on tables of stone by the finger of God, and placed in the ark, is the standard of righteousness. Before the obedient and the disobedient it will appear in the last great day, and all the wicked will be convicted. They will see that their actions proceeded from a depraved character. They will see that the part they acted served to carry on the rebellion begun in the heavenly courts. They will see all the cruelty and all the wickedness that have dishonored their Creator and brought about the wretchedness that fills the world."--Ms 5, 1904 (13MR 381).

"The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God, upon the tables of stone, which are now in the ark, to be brought forth in that great day when sentence will be pronounced against every evil, seducing science produced by the father of lies."--Letter 90, 1906 (CM 126).

"There is a sanctuary, and in that sanctuary is the ark, and in the ark are the tables of stone, [on] which is written the law spoken from Sinai amidst scenes of awful grandeur. These tables of stone are in the heavens, and they will be brought forth in that day when the judgment shall sit

and the books shall be opened, and men shall be judged according to the things written in the books. They will be judged by the law written by the finger of God and given to Moses to be deposited in the ark. A record is kept of the deeds of all men, and according to his works will every man receive sentence, whether they be good or whether they be evil."--Ms 20, 1906 (20MR 68).

"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."--RH March 26, 1908 (1BC 1109).

"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."--RH January 28, 1909. (1BC 1109; from Ms 117, 1908.)

"God has not altered the thing that has gone out of His lips. His word will stand fast forever, as unalterable as His throne. At the judgment, when every case shall be decided in the courts of heaven, this covenant will be brought forth, plainly written with the finger of God. The world will be arraigned before the bar of Infinite Justice to receive sentence."--RH November 20, 1913. (From Ms 82, 1899; see PK 187.)

"God will not break His covenant, nor alter the thing that has gone out of His lips. His word will stand fast forever as unalterable as His throne. At the judgment this covenant will be brought forth, plainly written with the finger of God, and the world will be arraigned before the bar of Infinite Justice to receive sentence."--PK 187. (From Ms 82, 1899; see RH November 20, 1913.)

Several things should be noted in these statements quoted above. Nowhere is it said that the tables of the law will be brought forth by men as a result of finding them hidden in a cave. In fact, it is clearly stated that God Himself will bring forth the tables of the law to the view of men, and in one statement Ellen White specifies that "these tables of stone are in the heavens." Moreover, the time when He will do this is said specifically to be:

"when every case is decided in the courts of heaven"

"in the great day when every case is decided"

"when God's temple in heaven is opened"

"in the last great day"

"in that great day when sentence will be pronounced against every evil, seducing science"

"in that day when the judgment shall sit, and the books shall be opened, and men shall be judged according to the things written in the books"

"in the great judgment-day"

"at the judgment"

Two Descriptions of Future Exhibitions

Elsewhere in her writings Ellen White describes two occasions when the tables of stone will be exhibited. However, she does not specify which of the two sets of tables of the law are brought to

view, and it is possible for one to interpret either occasion as fulfilling the prediction of the revealing of the hidden tables of stone.

1. *Just Before the Second Advent.* In describing what takes place immediately after the first six of the seven last plagues have fallen, and just before the falling of the seventh and the second coming of Christ, Ellen White says:

"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 heaven is beaming from the gates ajar. Then there appears against the sky a hand holding two tables of stone folded together. The hand opens the tables and there are revealed the precepts of the Decalogue, traced as with a pen of fire. The words are so plain that all can read them. Memory is aroused, the darkness of superstition and heresy is swept from every mind, and God's ten words, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, presented to the view of all the inhabitants of the earth. Wonderful code! Wonderful occasion!"--4SP 456, 457.

"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."--GC 639.

Here, again, it is clear that God, and not man, is the one who will bring the tables to view. The tables of the law will then be exhibited "as the rule of judgment." This will be done after probation has closed for all men.

2. *At the Final Coronation of Christ.* In describing the final coronation of Christ and the final judgment of men at the close of the millennium, Ellen White says:

"As if entranced, the wicked have looked upon the coronation of the Son of God. They see in His hands the tables of the divine law, the statutes which they have despised and transgressed. They witness the outburst of wonder, rapture, and adoration from the saved; and as the wave of melody sweeps over the multitudes without the city, all with one voice exclaim, 'Marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints (Rev. 15:3);' and falling prostrate, they worship the Prince of life."--4SP 484; GC 668, 669.

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