

Questions About How the High Priest Did Yom Kippur Without the Ark of the Covenant After Babylonian Conquer

By Pastor Ed Anderson

After the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, how did the High Priest in ancient times carry out Yom Kippur without the physical presence of the Ark of the Covenant (Testament?) in the Holy of Holies?

Answer:

After the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C. and took the people of Judah into exile, the **Ark of the Covenant was lost** from that point forward. It was **not present** in the rebuilt Second Temple during the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and even in Herod's expanded temple in Jesus' day.

So how did the High Priest carry out Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) **without the Ark** in the Most Holy Place?

What Replaced the Ark?

Jewish tradition and historical records (like the Mishnah and writings of Josephus) indicate that:

- The **Holy of Holies** in the Second Temple **was still entered once a year** by the High Priest on Yom Kippur.
- Instead of the Ark, there was **a flat stone platform** called the *Even Shetiyah* (Foundation Stone), believed to be the place where the Ark had once rested.
- The High Priest would sprinkle the blood of the sin offering **toward that stone**, acknowledging God's presence even though the Ark was no longer physically there.

What Does This Teach Us?

- God's presence was **not confined** to the golden box of the Ark. Though the physical representation was missing, the rituals of Yom Kippur continued, and God's mercy was still sought.
- Hebrews 9:5 even acknowledges the mystery of the Ark's disappearance, but points us to **Jesus as our true High Priest** who entered the heavenly sanctuary, not the earthly copy.

“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come... by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” — *Hebrews 9:11–12*

The Greater Fulfillment

Ultimately, the absence of the Ark in the Second Temple foreshadowed that a **greater reality was coming**:

- A heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 8:1–5)
- A perfect High Priest (Jesus)
- A once-for-all sacrifice

So, even though the Ark was absent, the rituals continued with **deep reverence**, and the Jewish people adapted their practice to focus on **God’s unseen presence** and **faith in His mercy**.

The true lesson of the Sanctuary was not about the location or the furnishings—it was about the blood that was shed, the process of atonement, the mercy extended, and the access granted to God’s presence.