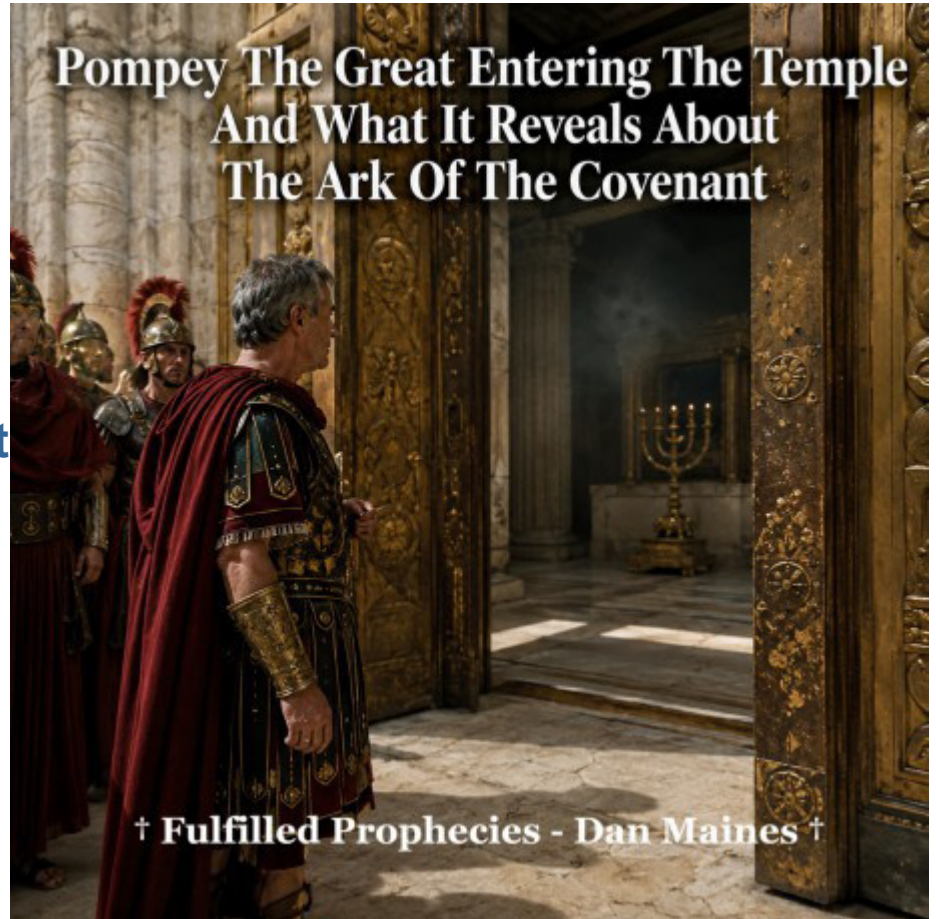


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**Pompey The Great
Entering The
Temple And What It
Reveals About The
Ark Of The
Covenant**



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† In 63 BC, the Roman general Pompey the Great captured Jerusalem and entered the temple, including the Holy of Holies. His actions shocked the Jewish people because only the high priest was permitted to enter that sacred place, and only once each year on the Day of Atonement. Ancient historians record that Pompey expected to find Israel's most sacred objects

inside. Instead, he found the room empty. This historical event agrees with the biblical evidence that the Ark of the Covenant had disappeared centuries earlier and was never restored to the Second Temple. Scripture never records the ark being returned after the Babylonian destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 BC. The silence of Scripture, combined with the testimony of history, forms powerful evidence that the ark was no longer present during the Second Temple period.

2 Chronicles 35:3

He also said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built; it will not be a burden on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel.

† This is the last historical reference to the Ark of the Covenant before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. (2 Kings 25:8-17)

† After this point, Scripture never records the ark being carried into the rebuilt Second Temple. (Ezra 6:15-18)

† The silence is significant because the return of the temple vessels is carefully recorded, but the ark is never mentioned among them. (Ezra 1:7-11)

Jeremiah 3:16

And it shall be in those days when you become numerous and are fruitful in the land, declares the LORD, they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor miss it, nor will it be made again.

- † Jeremiah foretold a day when God's covenant people would no longer focus on the Ark of the Covenant because God's purposes would move beyond that symbol. (Hebrews 8:13)
- † The prophet even declared that another ark would never be made, showing that the old covenant shadows were temporary. (Colossians 2:16-17)
- † God's presence would no longer be centered upon a physical object but upon His covenant people. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Ezra 1:7-11

Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods; and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the leader of Judah. Now this was their number: thirty gold dishes, a thousand silver dishes, twenty nine duplicates; thirty gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second kind, and a thousand other articles. All the articles of gold and silver totaled 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

- † Ezra carefully lists the sacred vessels that returned from Babylon.
- † The Ark of the Covenant is noticeably absent from the inventory.
- † If the ark had been returned, it would have been the most important object listed. Its omission strongly suggests it was already gone. (Hebrews 9:1-5)

Haggai 2:3

Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?
And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like
nothing in comparison?

† Many who had seen Solomon's Temple wept because the
Second Temple lacked the glory of the first. (Ezra 3:12-13)

† One reason was that several items present in Solomon's
Temple were no longer there, including the Ark of the Covenant.

† This explains why the older generation immediately
recognized that something significant was missing.

† This helps explain why the rebuilt temple was viewed as
inferior.

Hebrews 9:1-5

Now even the first covenant had regulations for divine worship
and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was equipped, the
outer sanctuary, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the
sacred bread; this is called the Holy Place. Behind the second
veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Most Holy Place,
having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant
covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding
the manna, Aaron's staff which budded, and the tablets of the
covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory
overshadowing the atoning cover; but about these things we
cannot now speak in detail.

† The writer describes the furniture of the original tabernacle,
not the condition of Herod's Temple in his own day.

† His description teaches the significance of the old covenant
sanctuary without claiming those objects were still present.

† By the first century, the Holy of Holies stood without the ark,

exactly as history records. (Matthew 23:38)

Hebrews 9:8

The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing,

† The writer uses the tabernacle to explain the meaning of the old covenant furniture.

† His purpose isn't to describe what physically stood inside Herod's Temple but to explain what those furnishings represented.

† This removes the common objection that Hebrews proves the ark still existed in the first century. (Hebrews 8:13)

This is one of the strongest objections futurists raise, so it's worth answering directly.

Matthew 23:38

Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

† Jesus declared that the temple had become their house, not God's dwelling place.

† God's presence was no longer identified with a physical building or a missing ark.

† Christ Himself was the fulfillment of everything the ark represented. (John 1:14, Colossians 2:9-10)

Historical References

† Josephus records that when Pompey entered the Holy of Holies in 63 BC, he found no image, no sacred object, and nothing hidden within the sanctuary, confirming the room was empty. (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 14.4.4)

† Tacitus likewise wrote that Pompey entered the sanctuary and found it empty, confirming there was no Ark of the Covenant present. (Tacitus, Histories 5.9)

† The Jewish Mishnah later acknowledged that during the Second Temple period the Holy of Holies contained only a foundation stone where the ark had once rested. (Mishnah, Yoma 5:2)

† The Babylonian inventory of temple treasures in Scripture never mentions the Ark of the Covenant among the items carried to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:13-17; Jeremiah 52:17-23)

† If Nebuchadnezzar had taken the ark, Scripture almost certainly would have recorded it because it was Israel's most sacred object.

† The Talmud likewise acknowledges that during the Second Temple period the Holy of Holies lacked the Ark of the Covenant, confirming an ancient Jewish understanding independent of Josephus.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Our faith doesn't rest upon missing relics or sacred objects but upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

† The absence of the ark reminds us that God's redemptive plan was never dependent upon earthly objects but upon His eternal covenant fulfilled in Christ. (John 19:30)

† Believers today are God's dwelling place through the Spirit, fulfilling what the temple and the ark only foreshadowed. (Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does the Bible ever say the Ark of the Covenant was returned to the Second Temple?

A: No. Scripture records many temple vessels returning from Babylon, but the ark is never included. (Ezra 1:7-11)

Q: Why is Pompey's entrance into the Holy of Holies historically important?

A: Because both Josephus and Tacitus testify that the Holy of Holies was empty, providing historical confirmation that the Ark of the Covenant was no longer there. (Jeremiah 3:16; Matthew 23:38)

Q: Could the Ark have been hidden somewhere before Pompey entered the temple?

A: It's possible it was hidden before the Babylonian destruction, but Scripture never says where it went. What Scripture does show is that it was never restored to the Second Temple, and both Jewish and Roman historians confirm that the Holy of Holies was empty in 63 BC. (Jeremiah 3:16; Ezra 1:7-11)

Q: Didn't the glory return to the Second Temple?

A: Yes, but not because the Ark returned. The true glory entered when Jesus Christ came into the temple. He fulfilled everything the ark symbolized. (Haggai 2:7-9; John 2:19-21; Colossians 2:9)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† 2 Chronicles 35:3, Jeremiah 3:16, Ezra 1:7-11, Hebrews 9:1-5, Matthew 23:38

† Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 14.4.4; Tacitus, Histories 5.9; Mishnah, Yoma 5:2

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