

The Search

Introduction. Hundreds of books and dozens of documentaries have been written about the search for Biblical relics, and to explain Biblical events. On its surface, this would appear to be good, because the Bible continually urges us to search the Scriptures for truth (Acts 17:11). However, the kind of searching that the book writers and documentarians are doing is not the kind of searching taught in the Scriptures.

Haters of the Bible are looking for proof it is not true. They are searching for what the Bible does not teach. They are searching for proof of what people say is in the Bible, but which was invented in legend by men.

Intellectuals like to brand this kind of searching as "honest investigation," but there is nothing honest about it. Its aim is to discredit rather than to prove, and to destroy rather than to build. Jesus said the Jewish leadership was involved in dishonest searching of the Scriptures, so there is nothing new here (John 5:39).

I. Biblical Relics Searched For

A. The garden of Eden.

1. The garden of Eden was in the east (Genesis 2:8).
2. The only Bible text that gives any hint to the location of the Garden of Eden is Genesis 2:10-14.
 - a) The only fact that seems clear is that it is located somewhere in southern Mesopotamia, where the Tigris and Euphrates meet. However, the exact location is impossible to know.
 - b) We cannot find the other two rivers anywhere on a modern map. Some people believe the rivers might be beneath the Persian Gulf today because of the cataclysm of the Flood.

B. Noah's ark.

1. The account of the ark ends in the Bible with it resting on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4). Is it still there? Is it buried in a glacier? Has it been broken apart by time, ice floes, and thieves, or has it simply disintegrated with time? Who knows?
2. Searches for the ark date back to the time of Eusebius (275-339).
3. Marco Polo (1254-1324) wrote about visiting Mount Ararat on his journeys. He said that Mount Ararat has snow covering its summit that never melts, and it takes two days journey to get around it.
4. Astronaut James Irwin (1930-1991) spent his post-NASA Apollo 15 life in a fevered search for Noah's ark.

C. The ark of the covenant.

1. The ark of the covenant was constructed according to strict instructions given Moses by God (Exodus 37:1-9).
2. The ark was carried by the Hebrews as they traveled in the wilderness, and it was kept in the tabernacle at each camp.
3. The history of the ark shows its importance to Israel.
 - a) It was kept in Shiloh during the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:3).
 - b) It was captured in battle by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:3-11).

- c) The Philistines sent it back, because of the trouble it brought them (1 Samuel 5:1-8).
- d) David regained the ark and brought it to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:1-16).
- 4. The last Biblical reference to the location of the ark of the covenant was in the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.
 - a) When Solomon finished building his temple, he had the ark placed in the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 8:6-11).
 - b) At some point the ark was removed from the temple by one of the wicked kings of Judah, but Josiah restored it to its rightful place during his reforms (2 Chronicles 35:3).
- 5. However, the history of Israel was not over at this point, and Jerusalem was under nearly constant siege after the days of David.
 - a) The Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and attempted to sack Jerusalem as well. The Babylonians invaded and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
 - b) What happened to the ark after this is not stated in the Bible.
 - c) However, the apocryphal book 1 Esdras 1:54 states for legend's sake: "And they took all the holy vessels of the Lord, both great and small, with the vessels of the ark of God, and the king's treasures, and carried them away into Babylon."
- 6. The fate of the ark of the covenant has been the subject of speculation, research, archaeological adventures, as well as books and documentaries.
- D. The "holy grail".
 - 1. There are some objects, such as the "holy grail," that have no basis in the Bible at all, but they are so widely accepted that people assume they must be in the Bible.
 - a) It is purely an invention of men, and is nothing more than legend.
 - b) The Bible places absolutely no value on the vessel from which the Lord and the disciples drank on the night of the Passover.
 - 2. The legend says that Joseph of Arimathea owned the cup used by Jesus at the last supper, and when Jesus died, he caught some of Jesus' blood in it, giving the cup magical powers to heal and transform lives.
 - a) Indiana Jones famously sought it, and the movie mentions some of the "grail legends," including the Knights Templar.
 - b) More recently, author Dan Brown wrote *The DaVinci Code* which delves deeply into medieval legends and the Templar story to show that the grail is actually Mary Magdalene. Some of the "Gnostic" gospels maintain that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child. The book and movie purport to tell how Mary and her child are the great "holy grail" or secret that was protected by the Templars.
 - 3. The Bible makes only one mention of the cup at the final Passover (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17; 1 Corinthians 11:25).
 - a) There was never in any of the gospels or Paul's letter a mention made of a "holy grail".
 - b) There appears to be no more importance placed on the cup than it was the vessel that contained the fruit of the vine.

- c) What happened to the cup is anybody's guess, but it does not matter to the Bible. However, the cup has taken on a life of its own in legend.
 - d) Why this cup, and not any other one that Jesus drank from? What about the "holy sippy cup" of His childhood?
- E. Biblical events people want explained:
1. The Flood (Genesis 7:17-24) — Many millions of documentary dollars have been spent producing impressive films to show how the earth simply could not possibly have ever flooded entirely. Ironically, many more millions of dollars have been spent "proving" that scientists believe that the oceans which cover most of the earth came here from space rocks each containing a tiny droplet of water, or from chemical reactions in an ancient primordial developing atmosphere when the earth was cooling.
 2. The ten plagues (Exodus 7-12) — Scientists have written many books chiding Bible believers because they believe they can explain every single one of the plagues as a natural event rather than divine miracle.
 3. The parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:26-31) — Skeptics of the Bible believe they have discovered our "Achilles' heel" on the shores of the Red Sea. They believe that if there ever was a real exodus, the Israelites tiptoed through ankle-deep marshy land just east of Goshen.
 4. Jericho's walls (Joshua 6:1-26) — Scientists have found several different Jerichos built on top of the other. In one level, corresponding to the Late Bronze Age, the walls of the city indeed appear to have fallen flat. Scientists do not put this in the column of Bible fact, but simply dismiss the story as the destruction of a coincidental earthquake.
 5. The empty tomb of Jesus (Mark 16:5-6) — Skeptics and critics do not consider the empty tomb of Jesus to be worth their time and research dollars. They simply write the whole episode off as an apostolic hoax, a Catholic production, or a legend meant to give simpletons hope or to blind the masses and keep them sending gold to the Pope.

II. The Problem Of Searching

- A. It is not that any search for truth is problematic; it is that people are not interested in finding the truth.
1. The Bible clearly teaches to search the Scriptures for the truth (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1). However, searching the Scriptures for anything without answers is ultimately fruitless.
 2. Here is the main problem with this kind of searching: When people cannot find the answers to their searches, they conclude the Bible is a fraud.
 - a) If we cannot look at a relic in a museum, it never existed. If we cannot find residue of an event, or a historical confirmation, then the Bible is a forgery.
 - b) No! The Bible is true. We accept what we cannot see or prove on faith (John 20:29; Romans 8:24-25; Hebrews 11:1).
 3. Such searches are not the proof of intellectual curiosity; they prove a lack of faith. Searching skeptics care more about what is not in the Bible than what is in it: how to be saved (Mark 16:16), the nature of Christ's kingdom (Romans 14:17), how to live godly (Titus 2:12), and future reward (2 Peter 3:13).

- B. There is plenty to believe, if one will simply read the Scriptures (John 20:30-31; 21:25).
1. How miserable life must be to feel compelled to discredit a book that is the center of the whole history of mankind. You fight a losing battle!
 2. How miserable a person must be to spend every waking moment seeking to destroy the faith of people produced by a book which promises hope and salvation to all who will obey it.
 3. How bleak and miserable is the heart of one who feels anger when the Lord makes His impassioned plea in Matthew 11:28.

Conclusion. There is little doubt that the genuine discovery of certain objects would be both exciting and a powerful witness to the truth of the Biblical record. However, we need to be careful not to become like some medieval pilgrims, keen to have relics to supplement (or supplant) the worship of the living God. Christ actually taught that if people did not listen to “Moses and the prophets,” then neither would something as spectacular as someone rising from the dead convince them (Luke 16:29-31).

There is already a huge amount of archaeological and other evidence consistent with the truth of the Bible. The Bible does not say we should “believe all things,” but rather that we should “prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Neither does it encourage a gullible approach toward those claiming the name of Christ (cp. Luke 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16). Rather, it warns about wolves among the flock (Acts 20:29), and also teaches that the heart of man is deceitful and depraved (Jeremiah 17:9).

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