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The Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace **25:10-16 and 37:1-5**

The arc of the covenant in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace DIG: As a cubit was about eighteen inches, how big was the Ark? What in your home would compare in size? What memories should this Ark rekindle for the Israelites? Why was the Ark portable? How does it point to their relationship with God? Since idols were prohibited, why were the cherubim on the Ark's cover?

REFLECT: Do you know anyone who has gone the way of Korah (Jude 11)? What might you carry around with you to remind you of God's past actions and continuing presence in your life?

As we hurry through the detailed descriptions and instructions for the various implements of **the Sanctuary**, we will probably overlook the fact that we are reading a type of poetry. Far from dry, technical writing, the instructions for **the Tabernacle** are delivered in a verse-like rhythm. Hebrew parallelism is obvious even in English. When reading in Hebrew, the repetitions and similar sounding words have all the flow and character of poetry. These are **God's** words. They are **His** mitzvot regarding **the Tabernacle**, and they swirl and dance with a beauty all their own.

As the priest passed through the gate into the courtyard of the Tabernacle, he brought his animal sacrifice, which pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God. As he went on toward the Holy Place, he washed his hands and feet in the bronze basin, foreshadowing Christ's cleansing of the believer. Once inside the Sanctuary, he would see the golden lampstand on his left, a picture of Christ as the light of the world. On the right, the priest saw the table of bread of the Presence, prophetic of Christ as the bread of life, on whom the believer feeds. Before him, the priest would see the altar of incense, a beautiful picture of Christ, our intercessor to the Father. But at that point he could go no further. Only the High Priest could

enter the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. And there, behind the inner veil, would be the throne of grace, the Ark of the Covenant, which was the sixth piece of furniture.

The Most Holy Place was a perfect cube of fifteen feet. In it there were two pieces of furniture. If you looked at them, you would visualize it as one. But they are always described separately. They were **the Ark of the Covenant** and **the Mercy Seat**. **The Ark** and **the Mercy Seat** above it was the place where **God** would meet with the children of Isra'el. It was there that **the Sh'khinah glory**, or the visible manifestation of **God's** presence, would dwell.

There was no window in **the Most Holy Place**. **The Sh'khinah glory** gave it light. There was no lampstand, as in the **Holy Place**. The only light was **the Sh'khinah glory** above **the Mercy Seat** and **between the cherubim of gold**. As the aged **John** saw the New Jerusalem in a vision, he wrote, saying: **The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there (Revelation 21:23 and 25)**. There was no artificial light in **the Most Holy Place** of the Sanctuary, and there will be no artificial light in heaven. When **Peter, James** and **John** saw the face of **Jesus** on the mountain of transfiguration they said: **His face shone like the sun before them (Matthew 17:2)**. When **John** saw the risen **Lord** on the Isle of Patmos, he also said: **His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance (Revelation 1:16b)**. The eternal **glory** that **He** had with **the Father** before the world began, will shine from within **His** very being, and will fill heaven with its light. One day we will see **Him**, for we will be like **Him**.

The Ark of the Covenant was a chest of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. It was a perfect symbol of **Jesus Christ** in His deity and in **His** humanity. **Christ** was called the **God-man**. **His** deity represented by the **gold** and the **wood** represented **His** humanity. The Hebrew word for **the ark** is *aron*, and refers to a chest or coffin of small dimensions used to contain money or other valuables.⁶⁰¹ It measured three feet, nine inches **long**, two feet, three inches **wide**, and three feet **high**, with an ornamental **gold** border around it (25:10-11, 37:1-2). **The rabbis teach that its golden border symbolized the crown of the Torah**. That mere box of **wood** and **gold**, truly stretches our thinking. **God** chooses the simple things of this world to confound the wise. **For** the Bible tells us that **in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (Colossians 2:9)**.⁶⁰²

Altogether, the Bible gives us seven different names for **the Ark**. First, it was called **the Ark of the covenant (Joshua 3:6)**; second, it was called **the Ark of the Testimony (Exodus 25:22)**; third, it was called **the Ark of ADONAI's covenant (Numbers 14:44)**; fourth, it was called **the Ark of the covenant of ADONAI (Deuteronomy 10:8)**; fifth, it was called **the Ark of the covenant of ADONAI your God (Joshua 3:3)**; sixth, it was called **the Ark of the covenant of ADONAI's armies (First Samuel 4:4 CJB)**; and last, it was called **the Ark of Your might (Psalm 132:8)**.

The holiness of **the Ark** was the reason why it could not be touched. You could not merely walk up to it and pick it up. Touching **the Ark** meant death (**Second Samuel 6:3-7; First Chronicles 13:9-10**).⁶⁰³ Instead, **four gold rings** were **cast for it** to be carried. **The Ark** was to be mounted on **four** short legs, **with two rings on one side and two rings on the other**. Two **poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold**, were inserted into the **gold rings** when carried. **The poles remained in the rings of this Ark** and were **not to be removed (25:12-15, 37:3-5)**. It is widely recognized that the design of **the Ark** (and the entire **Tabernacle**, for that matter) was distinctly Egyptian. That is not a problem, since **God** may have used a pattern, or model, which **the Israelites** were accustomed to seeing.⁶⁰⁴

The golden covered **Ark** was not empty. Within it were the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and later, Aaron's rod that **budded**; all graphic pictures of **Christ's** keeping **the Torah, His** Word as the bread of life, and Him being a **Priest** forever after the order of **Melchizedek (Exodus 16:33, 25:16; Hebrews 9:4)**. All of these rich and meaningful truths, we will consider in our study. But before we do, let us realize that as we enter, by faith, into **the Most Holy Place** we recall **God's** words to **Moses** at the burning bush: **Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground (3:5)**.⁶⁰⁵



The Ten Commandments within the Ark. **ADONAI** said to **put the** Ten Commandments into **the Ark (25:16 and 21)**. Like other Suzerainty Treaties, **the Torah** had **a deposit and a recording**. Therefore, **the** Ten Commandments were deposited into **the Ark** to serve as a recording. To better understand the significance of **Christ** perfectly keeping **the Torah**, let us go back to Isra'el's previous history. **God** had dealt with Abraham upon the grounds of unconditional grace, for **His** promises and **His** grace go together. **His** promises rest solely upon **His** power and unchangeableness. That is why salvation before **God** requires nothing on our part but faith. Abraham had taken the ground of a guilty sinner before a gracious **God**.

Up to the time of Isra'el's arrival at Mount Sinai, **God** had dealt with **His** people upon the basis of unconditional grace. **He** delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians through the water of the Red Sea. **He** fed them manna. **He** sent them quail for them to eat. **He** gave them water out of the rock, even though from the very beginning they were rebellious and grumbling. Yet, **ADONAI** blessed them, because **He** was dealing with them on the basis of grace.

Then at Mount Sinai, Israel presumptuously asked for **the Torah**. In ignorance and spiritual pride, she said she would do all that **the Torah** required. But once the covenant was made, no one could annul it. Sometimes you have to be careful what you ask for. It was a **covenant** that held Isra'el to a perfect standard, and it bound **God** to punish anything less than perfection. It was a covenant that rested upon Isra'el's own faithfulness and strength; a **covenant** in which **God** had nothing to do, so to speak, but to watch the results of their actions and to deal with them accordingly.

And what was Isra'el? They were a nation of poor, lost sinners who could only act

sinfully. This was a train wreck from the very beginning. I am sure it sounded great when they said they would obey **ADONAI** faithfully and to make their relationship to **Him** depend upon their own efforts. But in reality, it was merely an expression of the helplessness of their spiritual condition and the holiness of **God**. It was proof that sin had blinded their eyes to the extent that they were unable to understand how lost they were. In other words, they were like you and me before we were saved.

However, although Isra'el was blinded to her own spiritual condition, as **ADONAI** knew only too well, **He** commanded **the Ark of the Covenant** to be made. So that, **the ministry that brought death, or the Ten Commandments**, would be shut out of their sight. It condemned **men**, which came with temporary brightness that was **fading away** after the death and resurrection of **Christ (Second Corinthians 3:7-11)**. But how can the **engraved letters on stone** bring **death** when Paul calls **the Torah holy (Romans 7:12)**? He answers in his other letters to the Church. He explains that **the Torah** can be said to bring **death** in at least four ways. First, it declares death as the penalty for sin (**Romans 5:12-21**). Secondly, in defining transgression it increases sin (**Galatians 3:21-31**), which leads to death. Thirdly, it provides an opportunity for sinful people to pervert God's holy **Torah** into legalism, that is, a dead system of rules intended to earn **God's** favor when followed without trusting in **Him (Romans 7:1-25)**. Fourthly, because it is **engraved letters on stone**, it does not have within itself the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring righteousness (**Romans 3:19-31**).

But those who are not legalists, those who do have faith, are not **under the curse (Galatians 3:10)**, because **Christ redeemed us** who trust in **Him** and in **God from the curse pronounced in Deuteronomy 27 and 28**. He could never lower **His** standard and mankind had no way to meet it. The penalty for breaking **the Torah** was death, and every Israelite had broken it. What could be done? **God Himself** would bear the curse of the guilty sinner (**Galatians 3:10-13**). **He** wasn't surprised by this. **He** knew it would happen before the foundations of the earth were laid. Let **One** be found, a Man **born from a woman, born into a culture in which legalistic perversion of the Torah was the norm (Galatians 4:4 CJB)**. Let **Him** be the sinner's **Substitute** and the debt of sin would be paid forever.⁶⁰⁶

The golden jar of manna within the Ark. When **ADONAI** fed Isra'el in the wilderness with the **manna** from heaven, **He** told Moses to put some of it in a golden **jar** to be placed in **the Ark (Exodus 16:32-36; Hebrews 9:4)**. The **manna**, like the bread of the Presence, was a type of **the Messiah, the bread of**

life, and the golden **jar** reminds us once more of **His deity**. **He Himself** was **the bread from heaven (John 6:32-35)**. As the **manna** was Isra'el's daily food in the wilderness, so **Christ** is **Food** for our daily pilgrimage, as we journey from Egypt to Canaan, from this world to the Promised Land.

The **manna** was a beautiful type of **Christ**. It came down from heaven, as did our **Lord** and Savior. It came in the night, while Isra'el slept, even as **Christ** came into the world in the night of sin, as men were sleeping the sleep of spiritual death. The **manna** was **white**, as our **Lord** was spotless in **His** character, absolutely holy. The **manna** was **sweet and tasted like wafers made with honey (16:31)**, just as **Christ** was gentle, compassionate, and loved the lost. The **manna** in the wilderness was seen upon the ground in the morning when the dew had disappeared; **the Holy Spirit**, suggested by the dew, does not reveal **Himself**, but points to **Christ**. Before **Jesus** died on the cross **He** spoke of **the Holy Spirit**, saying: **He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you (John 16:13-14)**.

The Ark, with its **Mercy Seat**, was the only piece of furniture from the Tabernacle to be placed in Solomon's Temple some 480 years later. Articles of greater beauty took the place of the five other pieces of furniture. The golden jar of **manna** and Aaron's staff that had budded were not there, because they had served their purpose during the wilderness wanderings. Neither were the poles left in the golden rings. The pilgrimage was over. Only the two tablets of **the Ten Commandments** were kept in **the Ark**, beneath **the Mercy Seat**, beneath **the sprinkled blood**, in **the Most Holy Place**. When we get to heaven, when we see the **greater than Solomon in all His glory (Matthew 12:42)**, then the **manna** will no longer be hidden in **the Ark**, as it were. **His** radiance and beauty will shine in the New Jerusalem, filling it with **His** light and **glory**. **He** will prove to be the greatest of all wonders, of whom the Paul wrote, saying: **No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (First Corinthians 2:9)**.⁶⁰⁷

Aaron's staff within the Ark. The sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of **Numbers** tell the sad story of rebellion against **Aaron**, **God's** chosen priest, and of **His** vindication of the priestly family. The sons of Korah were not content with being Levites, they wanted to be priests also. But **ADONAI** had specifically taught **His** people that no one could be a priest except **he** who was **called by God, just like Aaron (Hebrews 5:4)**. As a result of this rebellion, **God** sent his judgment upon

the rebels. **The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and they went down to the grave, with everything they owned. And fire came out from ADONAI and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.** When Israel grumbled against **ADONAI** for this righteous judgment, **He sent a plague** where **14,700 people died in addition to those who had died because of Korah (Numbers 16:31-35, 16:49).** **Jude** warns all of us not to go the way of **Korah** and reject **God's** anointed (**Jude 11**).

It was then that **ADONAI** told **Moses** to take **twelve** almond **staves, one for each tribe,** and **write each tribal leaders name on his staff,** and **on the staff of Levi write Aaron's name (Numbers 17:1-3).** Then **ADONAI** told **Moses** to place them **in the Sanctuary in front of the Ark of the Covenant.** And **ADONAI** said to **Aaron** His servant: **The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout and I will rid Myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites (Numbers 17:5).** **Moses** obeyed God's instructions and **placed the staves before God in the Sanctuary. The next day, Moses entered the Sanctuary and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted, but also budded, blossomed and produced almonds (Numbers 17:8).** This was a sign to the nation of Isra'el that **Aaron** was indeed **God's** chosen priest.

The almond tree was the first to bud in the spring, and speaks to us of resurrection. When we study the priesthood next, we will see that Aaron is a type of **Christ** in **His** priestly ministry. Therefore, in the story here in **Numbers,** we find **God's** choice of Aaron as **His** chosen **priest,** which prefigures **God's** choice of **Christ** as **His** chosen **Priest.** The dry almond staff, severed from the tree, the source of life, **budded** and bore **blossoms** and fruit. What a picture of our **Lord's** resurrection from the grave, which bore fruit, a harvest of millions upon millions of souls.

Moses was told to place the staff in **the Ark of the Covenant as a sign against the rebellious (Numbers 17:10).** Isra'el's crucified and risen **Christ** was then hidden from her view, but one day **He** will be revealed to His chosen people. In that day, Isra'el's grumblings will cease forever. All her rebellion will be done away with and she will receive her **King.** This seems to be the reason why the staff that had budded was excluded from Solomon's temple. The **glory** of Solomon's reign was but a shadow of the yet future **glory of the One** who is **greater than Solomon.** And in that coming day, Isra'el's **Messiah** will be fully and universally owned as Isra'el's chosen **Priest,** called of **God, a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7:17).**⁶⁰⁸



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The sacrifices of the TaNaKh, the blood of bulls and goats, were interest only payments. They could only buy time, but not forgiveness. Today, in **God's** New Covenant, the Most Holy Place, that is, **God's** presence, is open to all who believe in **Jesus Christ**. No blood or sacrifice is required other than the blood provided by **Jesus Himself**. And no sacrifice needs to be repeated, because **Christ's** sacrifice was once for all time (**Hebrews 7:27**).