

The Ark of the Covenant

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to our service. And as we come together around the Word of God, let us seek his blessing to be upon his Word. Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks unto thee that we can draw near to thee in an act of worship. And as we do so, we seek that it may praise thee to grant to us the grace to humble ourselves and to come to thine own footstool and to confess our sins.

For thy Word proclaims to us that if we say that we have no sin, that we deceive ourselves and that the truth is not in us. But we come at this hour, O Lord, confessing our sins and giving thanks for the efficacy of the finished work of Christ, which is able to wash away our sins and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness, that is able to reconcile us to our God so that we can know peace with God, that we can have communion and fellowship with God, that communion and fellowship that was broken by sin can be restored to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We seek thy blessing upon thy Word, that it may please thee to take thy Word for us and to make it to be quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrows, to be a Word that will discern our thoughts and the intents of our heart.

O Lord, we acknowledge that we are dependent upon thy Spirit to open our hearts and to enlighten our understanding in regards to thine own Word.

[1 : 5 8] We give thanks, O Lord, for the work of thy Spirit in the lives of sinners such as we are, for giving us life and giving us a purpose in life to achieve our chief end, which is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

We give thanks for the efficacy of the life and death and resurrection of thy Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We give thanks for his continual ministry at thine own right hand and for the great promise that he will return, not to offer himself again as a sacrifice for sin, but to ungather his people and to bring them to be with him in the inheritance that he has prepared for them.

O Lord, we pray that thou would bless the preaching of thy Word through our islands and through our nation and to the ends of the earth, and that thou, O Lord, would help all those who have gone forth with the Gospel.

We pray that they may know the unction of thine own Spirit upon them, granting them boldness and confidence to proclaim thy truth. O may thy Word go forth in the power of the Spirit, in convicting, converting, and in the building up of thy church on earth.

We seek thy blessing upon our Queen and the royal household and all those who are set up in leadership over us. Give to them, O Lord, that they may see that righteousness exalts a nation, but that a sin is a reproach to all people.

[3 : 3 7] We remember those who are elderly, those who are confined to their homes, and we pray, O Lord, that thou would draw near to them. We remember those who may be going through hard times, whether it be in relationships or in marriage or in family or employment.

O, we are reminded of the changeability that belongs to our lives, but we are thankful that there is no changeability or inconsistency with thee, that thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever, that thou art the unchanging God, that it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed because thy compassions fail not.

And we give thanks that we can come to a compassionate God, a God who delighteth in mercy and for whom judgment is a strange work.

Remember, O Lord, those whose lives have been devastated with a virus that is so widespread among us as a people, all those who mourn the passing away of loved ones.

It reminds us of how fragile our lives are. Remember those who have been parted from loved ones, and pray that it may be blessed to them in reminding them and us that our companionship in this world with each other is only for a brief time.

[5 : 07] O, may we have that assurance that we are within a union by faith that even death itself cannot break up. Remember our young people and our children, and if it please let thee, O Lord, raise up a generation that would fear thy no name and be thy witnesses in this world.

Bless thy people, those whom thou hast redeemed for thyself. O Lord, we pray that we may indeed be faithful witnesses for thee, wherever our lot in providence may be, that we would be as lights that would shine forth in the midst of the darkness of the world that is around us.

We ask that thy blessing would be upon us now as we come together to read and to meditate upon thine own word. And all that we ask with the forgiveness of our many sins is in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Let us now read two passages, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The Old Testament passage will be in Exodus chapter 25 and at verse 10.

And they shall make an ark of shittim wood. Two cupids and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cupid and a half the breadth thereof, and a cupid and a half the height thereof.

[6 : 38] And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof.

And two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold.

And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne by them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark, and they shall not be taken from it.

And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee. And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cupids and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cupid and a half the breadth thereof.

And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end.

[7 : 44] Even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings.

And their faces shall look one to another, toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.

And there will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

And our New Testament passage will be from the book of Hebrews, and chapter 9, verse 1 to 7.

And the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat, of which we cannot now speak particularly.

[9 : 15] Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But unto the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.

And so on. May the Lord bless unto us the reading of these portions of his word. Now seeking the Lord's help and blessing, we will return back to Exodus chapter 25, and the portion that we read there from verse 10 to 22 will be our study this evening.

Over the past few weeks in studying the furniture of the tabernacle, we began our journey a few miles away from the tabernacle enclosure.

And we noted that before we reached the outer boundaries of the encampment, about four miles from the tabernacle, we come across a pile of ashes and fire burning on the ground.

It is the fire at which the sin offering was consumed without the camp. Part of the procedure involved with some of the sacrifices was taking the sacrifice outside the camp and burning the sacrifice there around, as we said, four miles from the tabernacle.

[10 : 44] But leaving the pile of ashes, we come nearer the encampment. And we noted that a beautiful order was observed, as each tribe took up their place in their tents around the tabernacle.

Their tents are at least 3,000 feet, or about two-thirds of a mile, away from the tabernacle enclosure. And that space encircles the enclosure on every side.

We noted that the entrance to the tabernacle enclosure was on the east side, the only entrance into the outer coat of the tabernacle. This entrance is formed by an embroidered curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet, 35 feet wide.

And as we enter through this entrance, the first object that confronts us is the brazen altar, which is the largest piece of furniture. The sacrificial animals were offered on this altar, and it was always burning day and night.

A continuous fire was burning on this altar. At the brazen altar, the people could meet, but only the priests could enter into the tabernacle.

[12 : 02] And as the priests came near the entrance into the tabernacle, for there they are confronted by another brazen object, the brazen laver, where they had to wash before they would enter the tabernacle.

Then the priest would walk a few paces from the brazen laver, and he would draw back another curtain and enter into the tabernacle. Now this part of the tabernacle was called the holy place, and contained three pieces of furniture.

The table of showbread, which stood on the right side in the holy place, and placed on this table were twelve loaves of bread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

And these loaves were changed every Sabbath day with fresh loaves. On the left-hand side stood the seven-branched golden candlestick, or lampstand, and right in front of the veiled holy of holies stood the altar of incense.

There was this veil separating the two parts of the tabernacle, the holy place, from the holy of holies. Now as we part the second curtain or veil, we enter into the holy of holies, and as we do so, we enter upon holy ground.

- [13 : 33] You will recall what the Lord said to Moses when he met him at Horeb, as he shepherded the flock that belonged to his father-in-law, and he saw a bush that burnt with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

And the Lord called out to Moses, and Moses turned around to see this amazing sight. And the Lord said to him, Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

Moses was in the presence of God, and as we enter into the holy of holies and stand before the ark, we are in the presence of God.

The ark was symbolic of God's throne and presence, making it the most sacred place of furniture in the tabernacle.

In fact, the tabernacle was built to house the ark, so that God could dwell among his covenant people. John Calvin writes, The ark was a standing witness that God wanted to dwell in the midst of his people.

- [14 : 51] It was also the first piece of furniture that Moses was instructed to build. Now, the top of the ark was known as the mercy seat.

It was of pure gold, and on the mercy seat there were two cherubim of gold facing each other, but looking down toward the mercy seat, with their wings touching each other as they were stretched out over its top.

We shall say more about the mercy seat, God willing, next week. But between the cherubim, the glory of God dwelt.

In Psalm 80, we read, Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock, thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Now, in 2 Samuel chapter 6, God is referred to as the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. Now, this special presence of God's glory, or of the presence of God, came to be known as the Shekinah glory.

- [16 : 10] Now, that expression does not appear in the Old Testament, but what it means is that which dwells in a certain place. The Shekinah glory, that which dwells in a certain place.

Now, the only person allowed to enter into this part of the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, was the high priest. And only on one day of the year, on the day of atonement, wherein he made atonement for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.

Now, the ark was called by many names. It was known as the ark of the testimony, because it was where the two tablets of the law were kept.

It was called the ark of the covenant, because it represented God's covenant relationship with his people. It was called the ark of God, the ark of the Lord God, the holy ark, and in Psalm 132, it was called the ark of thy strength.

Now, the ark itself was a rectangular chest, three feet nine inches long, and two feet three inches wide and high. It was made of shed and wood, and covered with gold, both inside and outside.

- [17 : 40] It had a gold room encircling its top, gold rings on the four corners, and staves of shed and wood, covered with gold to carry it.

And these staves were never to be removed. There were other pieces of furniture that had staves to help carry them, but they could be removed until they began their journey.

But the staves of the ark were permanent. They were not to be removed. However, on the completion of Solomon's temple, we read in 1 Kings 8, verse 8, and also in 2 Chronicles 5, verse 9, Now, that verse has been interpreted in a number of ways.

Some interpret this to mean that the poles were removed and stored in such a way that the ends could be seen from the holy place. Presumably, before the oracle means the poles was placed on the floor on either side of the ark, and the end of each pole could be seen from the holy place.

However, others understand that the poles were not removed, but that they were so long that the ends protruded into the holy place. Maybe the poles were too long to fit within the holy of holies.

[19 : 26] Some say that the heads of the poles could be seen only as protruding from the curtain, and that was deliberate so that the poles would extend outside of the holy of holies, so that the poles could be grasped and taken hold of when the ark was removed for transport by merely standing in the holy place without anyone having to enter into the holy of holies.

In Numbers chapter 4, we read of the instructions given for removing the ark as they marched on their journey. And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come and his sons, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of testimony with it, and shall put it on the covering of badger's skin, and shall spread over it a cloth holy of blue, and shall put it in the staves thereof.

It would seem from that that they did not have to enter into the holy of holies, to carry the ark. The poles would be protruding through the curtain, and they would just grasp the poles as they took down the veil and covered the ark with it.

Really, yes, I suppose that the question is, does drawn out mean removed completely, or drawn out just enough so that the ends were visible from the holy place.

I myself am of the opinion that they were drawn out just enough so that the ends would be visible from the holy place and would enable them to take hold of the poles when they went to remove the ark and bring it on their journey.

[21 : 26] However, whether the Lord gave permission for the staves to be removed on the completion of Solomon's temple or not, the fact remains that Moses was instructed not to remove the staves of the ark.

Now, this may look a minor detail. However, it was an order that no contact be made by human hands towards the ark. To touch the ark was to die.

In Numbers chapter 4, verse 15, we read regarding the Kohathites, for they were given the charge of the holy vessels which they carried on their journeys.

And it says this, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it, but they shall not touch any holy thing lest they die.

Now, as history shows us, God judged Israel by allowing their enemies, the Philistines, to capture the ark. And after the Lord brought many judgment upon the Philistines, they decided to put the ark on a cart drawn by milk cows and to send it back towards Israel.

[22 : 36] In arriving in Israel, it came to a place by the name of Beth Shemesh. And in 1 Samuel chapter 6, we read, And he smote the men of Beth Shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people 50,000 and three score and ten men.

And the people lamented because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?

And to whom shall he go up from us? And they sent messages to the inhabitants of Kerioth-Jerim saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord.

Come ye down and fetch it up for you. And the ark was taken to the home of a man named Abinadab, where it remained for many years during the reign of King Saul.

However, eventually David decided to bring the ark back up to Jerusalem. And to see how serious this point of detail was regarding the manner of carrying the ark, we only need to consider the tragic death of Uzzah as recorded for us in 2 Samuel chapter 6 and 1 Chronicles chapter 13.

[24 : 02] On arriving at the home of Abinadab, David loaded the ark onto a cart drawn by oxen. And as the procession advanced, they came to the threshing floor of Nacon.

And the ox stumbled and Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark. And we are told that the Lord's anger burned against Uzzah and that he died there beside the ark.

We are told of David's reaction to the death of Uzzah. And David was displeased because the Lord had made a bridge upon Uzzah.

However, after David returned to him and heard how the Lord had blessed the house of Abedum where the ark had been placed in the intervening three months, he must have consulted the word of God and learned of the error that he had previously made in bringing up the ark.

For in 1 Chronicles chapter 15, we read, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites. For them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God and to minister unto him forever.

[25 : 23] The Lord our God made a bridge upon us for that we sought him not after the Jew ought. And the children of the Levites bear the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereof as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord.

Now there are many lessons for us to learn from this event. However, what I want to emphasize tonight is the holiness of God.

How the ark represents to us the holiness of God. The ark reflects God's holiness. There is a sense in which the whole tabernacle structure speaks to us of the holiness of God.

Can we define the holiness of God? Well the holiness of God is the outshining of all that God is.

And God had established so close a relationship with the ark that where the ark was present God was there in his infinite glory.

[26 : 38] Thomas Watson wrote holiness is the most sparkling jewel of God's crown. It is the name by which he is known. Daphne wrote, holiness is to be regarded not as a distinct attribute but as the result of all God's moral perfection together.

In Isaiah chapter 57 we read, for thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabits the eternity whose name is holy.

Now there are many other scriptures that brings before us the holiness of God. In Exodus 15 verse 11 Israel sang after crossing the right sea and they sang this who is like unto thee O Lord among the gods who is like the glorious in holiness.

Fearful in praises doing wonders. When Hannah rejoiced in God for answering her prayer for a son, in 1 Samuel chapter 2 we read, there is none holy as the Lord for there is none beside thee.

Recently we noted the words of A.W. Tozer in his book The Knowledge of the Holy where he writes holy is the way God is.

[28 : 07] To be holy he does not conform to a standard he is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is because he is holy in all his attributes.

That is whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holiness. Holiness is a characteristic of God's nature.

It is at the very core of his being. The prophet Habakkuk wrote these words thou art of pure eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity.

it is only as we encounter God in his holiness is it that it's possible for us to see ourselves as we really are.

Remember Isaiah's vision of God's holiness as recorded for us in chapter 6. Isaiah chapter 6, the result of his vision of God's holiness had such a profound humbling effect upon him that he cried out woe is me for I am undone.

[29 : 36] His response was almost despair because in the light of God's holiness he saw his own sinfulness. well does it do the same for us today?

Does it do the same for me and you today? How can a greater understanding of the infinite holiness of God create in our hearts a deeper reverence towards God?

What impact should the holiness of God have upon us in our everyday life? This aspect of the character of God was always kept before the eyes of Israel in the whole tabernacle structure but especially in the holy of holies and especially in regards to the ark.

Another lesson for us to learn is that we must be careful not to treat holy things carelessly. We are to be reverent in our worship for we are in the presence of God.

The writer to the Hebrew warns us, he says, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

[31 : 05] to enter the holy of holies, the presence of God in an improper way or at an unwarranted time incurred the death penalty.

The high priest on the day of atonement probably entered into the holy of holies four times. For before he carried the blood for sprinkling, he had to go in with incense to make a cloud over the mercy seat.

And he did not carry in the incense and the blood at the same time, for he could not carry the golden censer full of burning coals from the altar and having his hands filled with incense and the bowl filled with blood at the same time.

After he filled the holy of holies with a cloud of incense, he would return to the altar in the courtyard, the brazen altar, where a sacrifice was offered, and while the blood was still fresh, he would gather some of it into the bowl and he would walk towards the tabernacle he would wash at the brazen laver, and then he would enter into the tabernacle and go through the tabernacle, through the veil, into the holy of holies.

And with his finger he sprinkled the blood seven times on the mercy seat and towards the mercy seat. The emphasis as described for us by the writer to the Hebrews must be on the fact that he could not enter without blood.

[32 : 50] It teaches us that there is no entrance into the gracious presence of God without the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God.

Even this fact makes a part of the song of the redeemed in heaven. for they sing unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us kings and priests and to God and his Father to whom be glory and dominion forever and ever.

In our glorified state we will not forget the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As we already noted the high priest could not enter every day as he did into the holy place.

This was not a matter of his choosing. He might not choose the day nor the time. The tenth day of the seventh month it was the Lord's choosing.

So here then we see how the ark reflects to us God's holiness. Now as we already noted before the ark was called the ark of the covenant because it represented God's covenant relationship with his people.

[34 : 16] And the ark, it was also called the ark of testimony because it was where the two tablets of the law were kept. We read in Exodus chapter 40, verse 20, and he took and put the testimony into the ark and set the staves on the ark and put the mercy's feet above upon the ark.

Now why are the ten commandments written on two tablets? Was there just not enough room to fit them on a single tablet? Well there may have been various reasons given.

There are those who would suggest that the first tablet contained the rules of worshipping God while the second contained the rules of man's relationship to man.

Others think that they were perhaps duplicated. That is, that each tablet contained all of the commandments and that the tablets were written on both sides. Those who study ancient treaties say that the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai followed the structure and contained the essential elements of treaties that was made in the ancient Near East.

We know that parties entered into a suzerain and vassal agreements or treaties. The suzerain would be the greater partner in the agreement or treaty while the vassal would be the lesser partner.

[35 : 56] And God and Sinai entered into this kind of agreement or covenant with Israel. And the Ten Commandments were the terms as a legal document of the treaty or of the covenant.

As was the practice both parties would get a copy of such an agreement hence the two tablets. God's copy would be stored in the Ark of the Covenant.

But why was the second tablet which was Israel's copy stored in the Ark? Well we're told by scholars that in the ancient Near East that there was a common practice that the lesser party would place their copy in the temple of their God.

And therefore following that practice it was reasonable that Israel would place their copy in the Ark of the Covenant. Maybe there are other reasons but we shall hold on to this one at present.

That each tablet contained all the commandments and that the tablets were written on both sides. And the two copies were placed in the Ark of the Covenant.

[37 : 13] The God's copy was stored in the Ark and Israel's copy was stored in the Ark following the practice in the ancient Near East of having the copy of their agreement placed in the temple of their God.

Now what we do know is that Israel was not able to keep the terms of that covenant. Neither is any of us. Israel soon forgot God's law and went to say of other gods worship idols which they made with their own hands.

They forgot the Sabbath and they did many things that was in complete disobedience to the law of God. You know in Psalm 15 we have these words.

Lord who shall abide in thy tabernacle who shall dwell in thy holy hill. He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in his heart.

And you know that description doesn't fit any of us. It doesn't fit me and it doesn't fit you. And so we ask is there any hope?

[38 : 30] Well God by his grace provided his people with a day of atonement. Once a year all their sins were taken care of and the people were able to retain their relationship with God.

In the person of the high priest the people as it were entered the holy of holies. That is why the top or lid to the ark was so important.

For that was part of the ark. The mercy seat was the covering of the ark. As we previously noted when the men of Beth Shemesh looked into the ark it does not appear that they first took off the mercy seat with a cherry beam and then broke up the covering of the ark.

But that they only lifted up the mercy seat which opened the ark. So that is evidence for us that we can safely accept that the only covering of the ark was the mercy seat.

That it was the top of the lid that covered the ark. it was used only once a year on the day of atonement when the high priest sprinkled blood upon it.

[39 : 57] But one of the great rules among many that the day of atonement teaches us is that there is no entrance into the presence of God but by the high priest and not without blood.

It's a reminder to us that it is through Jesus Christ and his atonement that we have admission with boldness and confidence to come into the presence of God and to come to a throne of grace.

The late John L. Mackay wrote the position of the atonement covered above the tables of the law makes clear that what has been covered is the penalty that is demanded for infringements of the sovereign commands of the covenant king.

God in all his holiness together with the law it all exposed Israel's sin. And we can ask what was to provide safety from judgment for Israel and the same thing also for me and you only the sprinkled blood.

Everything in the tabernacle points to Jesus Christ. And we read these words in Psalm 40 sacrifice sacrifice and offering thou didst not decide mine ears hast thou opened but offering and sin offering hast thou not required then said thy law I come in the volume of the book it is written of me I delight to do thy will O my God yea thy law is within my heart.

[41 : 49] John wrote for the law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Next week God willing we shall look at that part of the ark known as the mercy seed.

But before we can understand the significance of the mercy seed for Israel and for me and you we have to have at least some understanding regarding the holiness of God.

To have some understanding of the significance that is attached to the mercy seed we must have some understanding of the holiness of God.

the ark reflects God's holiness the ark reflects God's justice and yet the ark also represents to us the place of mercy.

May the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray eternal and ever blessed Lord we acknowledge that thou art the sovereign Lord we acknowledge that thou art the holy one that thou art the high and lofty one that thou art the one that inhabiteth eternity but we give thanks that in and through Jesus Christ thy son our Lord and Savior that we can exercise this boldness and confidence to come into the very throne room of God to seek thy mercy and to seek thy grace to help us in our time of need we give thanks that there is a mercy seat to which we can come that there is that provision by thine own grace by thine own love and mercy given to sinners such as we are oh

[44 : 18] Lord we pray that we may indeed be brought to that place where our hearts would give thee the praise that is due to thy name for the provision of thy grace in Jesus Christ Lord we seek that thou would help us during the coming days and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen Amen