

The Ark of the Covenant
Exodus 25:10-22 & 37:1-9

The tabernacle is God's meeting place with Israel. It is a tent-palace, God's house where he welcomed and fellowshiped with Israel.

Through the tabernacle, God taught Israel:

- a) About his uniqueness
- b) About his holiness
- c) About how Israel could relate to him

The details for the instructions for the tabernacle begin with the Ark of the Covenant. This is probably because the Ark represents the supreme symbol of God's presence on earth.

First: It's Construction

- a) 3' 9" long
- b) 2' 3" high
- c) 2' 3" wide
- d) Acacia wood
- e) Overlaid with gold
- f) Four gold rings, two in each side
- g) Two acacia wood poles overlaid with gold

The function of the poles was to ensure that no human hands ever touched the Ark.

2 Samuel 6:1-9 - *David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. ³ And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, ⁴ with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark. ⁵ And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. ⁶ And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. ⁷ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. ⁸ And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah [breaking out against Uzzah] to this day. ⁹ And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?"*

Second: It's Contents

Hebrews 9:2-4 - *For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.*

a) The Ten Commandments

Exodus 25:16 - *And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.*

The words *testimony* and *covenant* both refer to the Ten Commandments made between God and the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. The testimony in the ark literally means that the ark is a "box of the agreement."

Side Note: Suzerain treaties and similar covenants and agreements between near-eastern nations were quite prevalent during the pre-monarchic and monarchy periods in Ancient Israel. The Hittites, Egyptians, and Assyrians had been suzerains to the Israelites and other tribal kingdoms of Western Asia from 1200 to 600 BC. The structure of Jewish covenant law was similar to the Hittite form of suzerain.

Exodus 20:1f

1 - Each treaty would typically begin with an "Identification" of the Suzerain – "I am the Lord your God..."

2 - followed by an historical prologue cataloguing the relationship between the two groups "with emphasis on the benevolent actions of the suzerain towards the vassal."

"...who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

3 - Following the historical prologue came the stipulation. This included tributes, obligations and other forms of subordination that would be imposed on the Israelites.

"You shall have no other gods before me..." etc. (Commands 1-10)

4 - According to the Hittite form, after the stipulations were offered to the vassal, it was necessary to include a request to have copies of the treaty that would be read throughout the kingdom periodically.

Nehemiah 8:1-3 - *And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh*

month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

- 5 - The treaty would have divine and earthly witnesses purporting the treaty's validity, trustworthiness, and efficacy.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 - “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God^[a] that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules,^[b] then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

- 6 - This also tied into the blessings that would come from following the treaty and the curses from breaching it. For disobedience, curses would be given to those who had not remained steadfast in carrying out the stipulations of the treaty.

God promised many blessings to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy if they would obey His commands. Many important blessings are listed together in Deuteronomy 28:1–14. They include the following:

- * Prominence above other nations: “If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth” (1).
- * Successful cities and farming: “You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country” (3).
- * Blessings of children, food, and livestock: “The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks” (4).
- * Protection and power against enemies: “The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven” (7).
- * Bountiful harvest of food: “The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you” (8).

* Set apart as God's holy people: *"The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in obedience to him"* (9).

* Feared by other nations: *"Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you"* (10).

* Prosperity regarding family, food, and farm livestock: *"The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you"* (11).

* Appropriate rain and favorable blessing upon their work, including freedom from debt: *"The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none"* (12).

* Leadership among other people and nations: *"The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom"* (13).

God also promised to curse Israel if they disobeyed him. These curses are also found in Deuteronomy 28.

- Curses upon city and field: *"You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country"* (16).
- Curses upon food: *"Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed"* (17).
- Curses upon having children and upon livestock: *"The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks"* (18).
- Curses at all times: *"You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out"* (19).

In verses 15–20, the word for "curse" is used seven times, and those curses are explained throughout the remainder of the chapter.

The ultimate devastation for continued disobedience was that God's people would be removed from the land and scattered among the nations of the earth.

Verse 64 notes that God's people would become like the pagans and serve other gods: *"Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known."*

The ultimate disgrace is given in the final verse of the chapter: *“The Lord will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you”* (68).

b) Manna

Exodus 16:32-34 - *Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”*³³ *And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.”*³⁴ *As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept.*

c) Aaron’s rod that budded

Numbers 17:1-11 - *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,*² *“Speak to the people of Israel, and get from them staffs, one for each fathers' house, from all their chiefs according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. Write each man's name on his staff,*³ *and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each fathers' house.*⁴ *Then you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you.*⁵ *And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make to cease from me the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you.”*⁶ *Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs.*⁷ *And Moses deposited the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.*⁸ *On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.*⁹ *Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the LORD to all the people of Israel. And they looked, and each man took his staff.*¹⁰ *And the LORD said to Moses, “Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die.”*¹¹ *Thus did Moses; as the LORD commanded him, so he did.*

Third: It’s History

- a) The ark of the testimony represented the presence of God with His people, and His powerful presence went with them wherever they took the ark (Joshua 3:6; Numbers 10:33–35).
- b) The enemies of Israel, the Philistines, stole the ark once (1 Samuel 5:1), hoping its power would help them. They set it in their idol’s temple and waited for the good luck it would bring.
- c) But calamity broke out among the Philistines, until they begged their leaders to send the ark back to Israel (1 Samuel 5:4, 6, 9, 11–12).

- d) God demonstrated that He was not a good-luck charm whose power could be had by whoever captured His ark. The power was not in the ark of the testimony itself; the ark only represented the presence of God with His people.

Fourth: Pointing to Jesus

- a) Since the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 14:9), God no longer uses an ark of the testimony to dwell with His people. Jesus is our ark. We meet God in him.
- b) We are under a new testament or covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34,

Hebrews 10:16-17 - *“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”* ¹⁷ then he adds, *“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”*

- c) At Pentecost, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer (Acts 2:1–4, 38–39).
- d) We become His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- e) When we have been born again by faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:3, 16), we take God with us everywhere we go. It did the Philistines no good to harbor the ark, because the ark had no power in itself if God was not on their side. Likewise, we do not need physical items—crosses, images, holy relics—to carry the power of God with us because He already abides in us.
- f) That awareness of His presence, called the fear of the Lord (Psalm 19:19; Proverbs 15:33), gives us the motivation and rule for lives that honor Him.
- g) Jesus fulfills the contents of the ark

1 – Jesus is the Law-Giver and Law-Keeper –

- a) God gave Israel the law; the knowledge of sin but not the solution – Ro 3:20
- b) Jesus was born under the law – Galatians 4:4-5
- c) Jesus taught the law – Lk 10:25-27
- d) Jesus kept the law – 2 Cor 5:21; Hb 7:26; Lk 23:4 & 47
- e) Jesus fulfilled the law – Matt 5:17
- f) Jesus rescued us from the law – Gal 3:13; 4:4-7
- g) Jesus is the new law – Luke 10:27; John 13:34

Jesus is the only person who has ever perfectly kept God’s law. As such, he is able to become the perfect sacrifice for sin. Those who repent and place faith in Jesus are freed from the bondage and curse of the law; it being fulfilled in Jesus.

2 – Jesus is the Bread of Life – John 6:35

3 – Jesus is the Resurrection – John 11:25

h) Jesus fulfils everything about the Tabernacle

Hebrews 9:11-28 - But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. ²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Conclusion:

The ark of the covenant symbolized God’s presence. The items in it represented God. The ark and its contents were a shadow of Jesus and he is the fulfilment of it.