

# THE MERCY SEAT OF GOD

## *Understanding the Ark of the Covenant*

### Introduction

- 1) **Hebrews 9:1-5** – the **Ark of the Covenant** was one of the most important items in Old Testament history
- 2) It has been variously interpreted and a subject of myth and legend; many know about it but do not understand its origin, purpose, history, or meaning
- 3) It was the most important piece of furniture in the OT tabernacle and temple (cf. Rev. 11:19)
- 4) A study of the Ark of the Covenant is helpful and needed:
  - a) Through these shadows of the OT we learn about NT realities – *the mercy seat of God*

### I) **The History of the Ark of the Covenant**

#### A) **Revealed by God on Mount Sinai** (Ex. 25:10-22)

- 1) Construction (by divine pattern, vv. 8-9)
  - a) Acacia wood overlaid with gold within and without
  - b) Measurements = ca. 45 in. long x 27 in. wide x 27 in. high
  - c) Four rings of gold placed in its four corners
    - i) Poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold to be placed through rings for transport
  - d) Lid of pure gold (“mercy-seat”)
    - i) Two cherubim of gold with wings stretched out on either end of the mercy seat facing one another and toward mercy seat (looking down)
  - e) Tablets of testimony to be placed inside
  - f) Place where God would meet them (cf. Num. 7:89; Psa. 80:1; 99:1)
  - g) Here called Ark of the Testimony (after the contents)

#### B) **To Be Placed in Most Holy Place in Tabernacle** (Ex. 26:30-34)

- 1) Veil to divide Holy Place and Most Holy Place

#### C) **The Ark Constructed** (Ex. 37:1-9)

#### D) **Covered and Carried by the Sons of Kohath** (Num. 4:1-15)

- 1) Covered with covering veil, badger skins, and a blue cloth
- 2) They were to carry it, but *not* touch it, lest they die

#### E) **Set in the Tabernacle** (Ex. 40:17-21; as tabernacle moved, ark moved)

#### F) **Ark Leads People from Sinai** (Num. 10:33-36)

- 1) Went with them throughout forty years of wandering
- 2) Contents: a) Tablets of the covenant (Ex. 25:16); b) Golden pot of manna (Ex. 16:33-34); c) Aaron’s rod that budded (Num. 17:10)

#### G) **Ark and the Crossing of the Jordan River** (Josh. 3:1-17; 4:11)

#### H) **Carried around Jericho** (Josh. 6)

#### I) **Joshua before the Ark after the Defeat at Ai** (Josh. 7:6)

#### J) **At Renewing of the Covenant at Mts. Gerizim and Ebal** (Josh. 8:30-35)

#### K) **In Tabernacle at Shiloh** (Josh. 18:1; Judg. 18:31; 20:26-28; 1 Sam. 1:24; 3:1-3)

#### L) **Captured by Philistines** (1 Sam. 4)

- 1) Israelites use ark as a good-luck charm like the pagan, superstitious idolaters (v. 3)
- 2) Attended by evil sons of Eli (Hophni and Phinehas) who died in the capture (v. 4)
- 3) Eli dies when he hears the distressing news of the ark’s capture (vv. 17-18)

#### M) **Caused Great Distress to Philistines Who Gladly Return It** (1 Sam. 5-6)

- 1) Image of false god Dagon falls over twice in its presence (in house of Dagon in Ashdod)
- 2) Taken to Gath and tumors break out on people; taken to Ekron and same thing happens

- 3) After seven months they send it back on a cart to Beth Shemesh with trespass offering
- 4) Men of Beth Shemesh struck dead by God when they look into the ark (6:19)
- N) ***Stays at the House of Abinidab in Kirjath Jearim for 20 Years*** (1 Sam. 6:20-7:2)
- O) ***The Ark Brought to Jerusalem*** (2 Sam. 6:1-17; 1 Chron. 13, 15-16)
  - 1) David has ark put in a *new cart* (Philistine method - 1 Sam. 6:7)
  - 2) Uzzah dies when he touches the ark to steady it
  - 3) Ark stays in house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months (house blessed)
  - 4) Carried to City of David and put in the tabernacle of David (still carried around at times – 2 Sam. 15:24-29)

About 30-40 years later...

- P) ***Solomon Builds Temple – Ark Placed Inside*** (1 Kgs. 8:1-13, 20-21)
  - 1) There it would stay, unmoved (except for 2 Chron. 35:3 – temple repaired)
  - 2) Only contents of ark are tablets of stone – where did pot of manna and Aaron’s rod go?
- Q) ***Babylonians Capture Jerusalem and Carry Out All the Treasures of the Temple*** (2 Chron. 36:17-19)
  - 1) Ark is now lost to history (not listed among things returned – Ezra 1:7-11)
- R) In the days of the returned remnant leading into the days of the Messiah, the ark of the covenant will *not* come to mind, be visited, or *made* again (Jer. 3:16)

## II) Lessons from the Ark of the Covenant

- A) ***Must Follow the Pattern of God’s Authority*** (Ex. 25:8-9; Heb. 8:1-6)
  - 1) God leaves clear instructions as to how to please Him by faith (Rom. 10:17)
  - 2) In NT, we have commands, examples, necessary implications by which we can understand God’s pattern of righteousness (cf. Acts 2:42; Rom. 6:17; 2 Jn. 9)
  - 3) Modern teachings of “no-pattern-ism” are false; the *how* and *what* are important
- B) ***Violation of God’s Pattern is Disobedience*** (1 Chron. 13, 15)
  - 1) David’s new cart was the Philistine way (one way as good as another?)
  - 2) Problem came because they did not consult God about the “proper order” (15:13)
  - 3) Need to understand the will of God (15:2; Num 4:15)
  - 4) Must do Bible things in Bible ways (Col. 3:17; Matt. 7:21)
    - a) Modern examples of violations of God’s pattern: instrumental music, sponsoring church arrangement, Lord’s Supper on Thursday, women preachers, etc.
- C) ***OT Tabernacle/Temple a Copy and Shadow of Heavenly Things*** (Heb. 8:4-5)
  - 1) Symbolic until “the time of reformation” – greater and better sacrifice (Heb. 9:6-11)
  - 2) OT shadows have passed away – now enjoy spiritual blessings in Christ (Col. 2:16-17)
  - 3) The greater and more perfect tabernacle is in heaven (Heb. 8:2; 9:11, 24; Rev. 11:19)
- D) ***The Mercy Seat*** (or “atonement seat” - Heb. *kapporet* from *kipper* “to make atonement”)
  - 1) Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-3, 11-16, 34 *Yom Kippur*)
  - 2) Jesus has now entered as High Priest to offer His blood for us (Heb. 9:11-15; 23-26)
  - 3) We now, through Jesus, have access to God’s mercy (Heb. 6:19-20; 10:19-23)
    - a) Veil of separation torn in two (Matt. 27:51); “ark” is in heaven (Rev. 11:19)
  - 4) Jesus is our “mercy seat” and God’s “propitiation” – appease wrath, look with favor toward, render favorably, remove guilt (Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:1-2; Rom. 3:21-26)
  - 5) It is through Jesus that we now come to the Father for mercy and help (Heb. 4:14-16)

## Conclusion

The shadows of the old covenant have now given way to the superior realities of the new covenant of Christ. Our “ark of the covenant” is Christ Jesus. Follow Him today!