

Exodus pt. 45
The Ark of the Covenant
Exodus 25:10 - 22

I. Introduction

- A. Before we dive into our text today, I want you to close your eyes and think of a person or people whose presence makes you feel safe. Someone who merely being around sets your mind and heart at ease who makes you feel like everything will be ok. Maybe it's your parents, your spouse, your children, or your best friends. Having people in our lives that make us feel safe, loved, and valued is an immense blessing. But an even greater blessing is to know that God is with us.
- B. Remember that God has led the Hebrews out of Egypt and through the wilderness by His presence in the form of a cloud of smoke and fire. Now that God has entered into a sacred covenant with the people He instructs them to build the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting. This is where God is going to dwell amongst His people. When finished the Tabernacle will be set in the middle of the camp of Israel. Anytime the people wonder if God is with them, all they have to do is look at the Tent of Meeting and they will be reminded that God loves them and is protecting and guiding them.
- C. Over the next several weeks we will study the specifics of the Tabernacle, its furniture, and its purpose.
- D. Bible teacher, M.R. DeHaan wrote in regard to the Tabernacle, "Every single detail was designed by Almighty God, every part had a prophetic, redemptive, and typical significance. There is no portion of Scripture richer in meaning, more perfect in its teaching of the plan of redemption, than this divinely designed building. God Himself was the architect, and every detail points to some aspect of the character and work of the person of His Son Jesus Christ, and in its complete form, it is probably the most comprehensive, detailed revelation of Jesus the Son of God, and the plan of salvation in the entire Old Testament." (*Preaching the Word: Exodus* pg. 769)
- E. We will begin our study of the Tabernacle where God's Word does by focussing on the Ark of the Covenant. Instead of God explaining the Tabernacle from outside in, He starts with the Ark of the Covenant which will be housed in the Holy of Holies, the most central and exclusive part of the Tabernacle.

II. The Contributions to the Ark

- A. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece." (Exodus 25:1 - 7)
- B. The Motive for the Contributions
 - 1. God tells Moses to "raise a contribution [...] from every man whose heart moves him." This is not meant to be obligatory but voluntary. Keep in mind that God has just given all kinds of commandments including the Ten Commandments. He has every right to command that everyone in Israel give to this building project. Instead, He wants people to give because they love Him and are grateful for what He has done.

2. Imagine all that these people have seen and experienced. They were slaves in Egypt being beaten down into the dust. Then God heard their cry and sent Moses to deliver them. God inflicts the plagues on Egypt and their false gods. He then leads them out of Egypt and parts the Red Sea, drowning Pharaoh and his army. In the wilderness, God provides clean water to drink and quail and bread to eat. God leads the people with His very presence to Mount Sinai where He enters into a sacred covenant with them, promising to dwell with them, lead them, protect them, and give them a land and countless blessings. Now God asks for the people to give donations to build the Tabernacle so that He can visibly be with them. Can you imagine someone seeing all of that, experiencing God's salvation, protection, guidance and love saying now, "I don't want to give anything to God. What's He ever done for me? What's in this for me?"
3. Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed. (2 Corinthians 9:6 - 8)

C. The Material of the Contributions

1. You'll notice the long list of material goods that God asks the Hebrews to give. All of these materials will be used to build the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. It's worth asking how the Hebrews, who were slaves, ended up in possession of gold, silver, precious jewels, and elaborate fabrics. After the tenth and final plague the Hebrews "plundered Egypt." That is, the Egyptians were so desperate for them to leave that they paid them to get out of Egypt. This plundering is where the Hebrews had gotten their wealth.
2. So don't miss this, not only did God deserve contributions because of the many ways He had loved and protected the Hebrews, He also deserves the contribution because everything they have to give is only because of Him in the first place. This is true of us as well.
3. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

III. The Construction of the Ark

- A. "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall construct it." (Exodus 25:8 - 9)
 1. Because the Tabernacle is going to be where God's presence dwells, God gives precise instructions on how it is to be constructed.
 2. You'll notice that the word "pattern" is used twice in these verses. My understanding is that the Hebrew word used here conveys "a model" not merely a blueprint. Moses seems to have been shown a 3d model of some sort that showed him exactly how God wanted the Tabernacle to be.
 3. The book of Hebrews indicates that the Tabernacle and the ark are based off of real scene in Heaven.

B. “They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it. (Exodus 25:10 - 15)

1. Dimensions

- a) Two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high.
- b) A cubit was a common measurement in the ancient world. It would be about the distance from a man’s elbow to his fingertips, or roughly a foot to a foot and a half.
- c) The ark was approximately, “forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high...” (Wiersbe, pg. 233)

2. Materials

a) Acacia Wood

(1) “Acacia is the hardest of all hardwoods. [...] The core of the trunk is colored in a noble reddish-brown color with dark veins. [...]” (<https://startwoodworkingnow.com/what-is-acacia-wood/>)

(2) “Acacia wood requires a special, gentle drying regimen, as it is very prone to cracking.” (Ibid)

b) Overlaid with Pure Gold

(1) “The ark also teaches us about Jesus Christ. It was made of wood, which speaks of His humanity, but was completely overlaid with gold, which speaks of His deity.” (Wiersbe, pg. 233)

3. Other Details

a) The ark had four feet, one on each corner. This prevented the ark itself from sitting on the ground.

(1) The things of God are sacred. They are holy and worthy of respect. Personally, I do not put my Bible on the ground out of respect for God’s Word. Sometimes I fear that we, as modern Christians, have lost our holy reverence for the things of God.

(2) “Everything associated with God is holy: His name, His Word, and His worship. We must be very careful not to treat such holy things carelessly. We are in the presence of God. We should honor His name. We should hear His Word. We should revere His worship.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 772)

b) The ark had two rings on either side. Poles made from acacia wood fit into these rings and allowed the ark to be carried. The poles were to remain in the ark so that it could be carried at any time.

(1) 2 Samuel tells the story of a time when the Hebrews put the ark on an ox cart instead of carrying it as God instructed with these poles. As the cart moved down the road to Jerusalem, “the oxen stumbled.” Fearing that the sacred ark would fall off of the cart, a man named Uzzah reached out to catch it. Uzzah was struck dead immediately.

- (2) This story reminds us that it is not only important to respect the things of God but to obey God's commandments. Sometimes we forget that God's commands are not meant to ruin our fun they are meant to protect us. Had the Hebrews listened to God's commandments and carried the ark as He said Huzzah would have lived.

IV. The Contents of the Ark

- A. "You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you." (Exodus 25:16)
- B. Hebrews 9:4 tells us that the Ark contained "a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant."
- C. "These objects tell us that the law of God was in Christ's heart and He perfectly obeyed and fulfilled it; He is the Bread of Life who gives eternal life to all who receive Him; and He lives by the power of an endless life so we can be fruitful for God." (Wiersbe, pg. 233)

V. The Cherubim of the Ark

- A. "You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. The cherubim shall have
 - 1. "Cherubim are special angels mentioned almost one hundred times in the Old Testament. They are first mentioned in Genesis 3, where they were charged with guarding the way to the tree of life. [...] Unlike some of the other angels, the cherubim are not messengers but remain in God's presence to deny access to by anything unholy. They are the palace guards for the King of kings." (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 773)
 - 2. The Book of Hebrews refers to them as "the cherubim of glory." (Hebrews 9:5a)
 - 3. The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! (Psalm 90:1)
 - 4. Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth! (Psalm 80:1)
 - 5. "The ark of the covenant was a earthly symbol of a heavenly reality. Its cover was a three-dimensional picture of a scene from Heaven, were God is surrounded by His holy angels." (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 774)
- B. The Mercy Seat
 - 1. You'll notice that Moses was not instructed to place any kind of depiction of God on the ark. This is for a couple of reasons:
 - a) As we saw in our study of the Ten Commandments, the Hebrews were forbidden not only from worshipping other gods but from worshiping the True God with idols or images.
 - b) God's presence would come and reside between the wings of the cherubim on top of the ark. This is why the lid of the ark came to be known as the mercy seat.
 - (1) Seat as in "the seat of power" not a literal chair.
 - 2. Remember that the Ten Commandments are kept in the ark of the covenant. So when God's presence would dwell on the mercy seat the Law was directly underneath Him. This was a reminder of the covenant that the Hebrews had made with Yahweh. However, they failed to keep their end of the covenant terribly. How can God dwell with people who constantly break His commandments and sin?

3. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would offer sacrifices for his own sins and then enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat.
4. “The location of the blood was significant. Above it was God, in all His holiness. Underneath was the Law that exposed Israel’s sin. In between came the blood of the atoning sacrifice that covered transgression and turned away wrath, reconciling the people to God. The blood on the ark provided safety from judgment. When God came down to dwell with His people, He would not see the Law that they had broken, first of all, but the saving blood of an atoning sacrifice.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 776)
5. “The cross of Christ is our mercy seat. It is the place where the blood of an atoning sacrifice reconciles us to God by coming between his holiness and our sin. The cross is the place where sinners can find mercy.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 777)
6. And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: Swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9 - 14)

VI. Conclusion and Application