

JESUS IN THE TABERNACLE

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT — PART 3

A Study Guide from My Daily Bread Global

Before we open the lid tonight, ask yourself something: have you ever been handed exactly what you asked for and not recognized it because it didn't arrive looking the way you expected? Hold that thought. Tonight's lesson is built entirely around that exact moment of missed recognition — and it happened to an entire nation.

WHERE WE LEFT OFF

We've looked at the ark from the outside — the incorruptible wood overlaid with gold, picturing Christ's humanity and divinity, and the poles that meant His presence was still on the move rather than settled. Tonight we finally lift the lid. Three objects were placed inside the ark, and each one tells us something different about what Jesus came to finish.

THE BIG IDEA

Everything inside the ark was hidden from view for a reason — not decoration, but preservation. The tablets of the law, a jar of bread, and a dead stick that came back to life together tell one story: what condemns us, what feeds us, and what proves who's actually in charge, all handled by the same Christ.

ITEM ONE: THE TABLETS — LAW PUT AWAY, NOT IGNORED

The first thing God has Moses place in the ark is the testimony — the ten commandments. That word choice matters: Scripture calls the law a testimony against us, not a decoration for us. Paul makes the logic explicit — sin isn't created by law, but it's exposed by it. Post a speed limit sign and suddenly speeding exists as a chargeable offense. The tablets weren't hidden because they were unimportant. They were hidden because leaving them exposed meant setting God's perfect standard directly across from our failure to meet it, permanently.

Romans 7:9 *I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.*

Here's the detail worth sitting with: the first set of tablets got smashed before they ever reached the camp, because Israel had already broken the first commandment by the time Moses came down the mountain. The tablets that actually went into the ark were the second set — unbroken. Christ didn't erase the law's requirement. He met it completely, then took our place in the box so that God's holiness and our failure would never again sit exposed across from each other.

Matthew 5:17 *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

ITEM TWO: THE MANNA — PROVISION NOBODY RECOGNIZED

The second object is a jar of manna. Israel had been told bread would fall from heaven, and they were hungry enough to be watching for it. But when it actually appeared, they didn't know what they were looking at — the word manna literally means “what is it?” They wanted bread. Bread came. They still asked what it was.

Exodus 16:15 *So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.*

That's not just a wilderness footnote — it's a preview. Israel had spent generations anticipating a Messiah, and when He finally showed up, He didn't match the picture they'd built in their heads. A carpenter's son from Nazareth wasn't what they were scanning the horizon for, so plenty of people looked right at their answered prayer and asked the same question: what is it? It's worth being honest that we're not automatically exempt from that mistake just because we already know how the story ends.

John 6:35 *I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger.*

One more detail: every jar of manna gathered outside the ark eventually bred worms or melted in the sun by midday. The single portion placed inside the ark never spoiled. Everything else Israel tried to store on their own terms didn't last a day. What God preserved lasted forever.

ITEM THREE: THE ROD THAT WOULDN'T STAY DEAD

The third object answers a leadership dispute. A group led by Korah had challenged Aaron's authority as priest, so God settled it with an unmistakable sign: twelve dead sticks, one per tribe, laid out overnight in the tabernacle. By morning, only Aaron's had budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds — a full life cycle from a piece of dead wood, overnight, with zero human effort involved.

Numbers 17:8 *The rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.*

Bud, blossom, fruit — three stages, one dead branch. It's a strange but exact picture of how God authenticates His own choice of leadership: not by popular vote, not by force, but by bringing something alive out of what everyone else had already written off as finished. Whatever else you take from tonight, that principle alone is worth sitting with — the sign of a genuine call from God is usually life coming from a place you'd stopped expecting anything from.

SIT WITH THIS

1. Where has God possibly already answered something you've been asking for, but it didn't look the way you expected — so you missed it, or you're still asking, “what is it?”
2. Is there a “dead rod” area of your life — a relationship, a calling, a gift — that you've quietly written off, that God might still intend to bring back to life on His own timetable rather than yours?
3. The law exposed what was already true about Israel; it didn't invent their guilt. Where has conviction shown you something true about yourself that you'd rather blame on the standard than actually face?
4. Everything Israel tried to preserve on their own spoiled by the next day. What are you currently trying to store up or control that might do better handed over than hoarded?

BEFORE NEXT TIME

Pick one thing you've mentally filed as dead or finished — a relationship, a dream, a door you assumed was closed. Don't force anything. Just bring it back into your prayers this week and watch, honestly, for whatever God does or doesn't do with it.