

The Ark of God

Overview & Purpose	Names	Construction	The Mercy Seat	The Staves	Selected History
<p>The Ark is clearly a most exact type of Christ. As an inanimate object it could not fail. Other types of the Lord are human, and even the best of them, such as Joseph, have recorded flaws.</p> <p>Of the components of the Tabernacle it is the first described (see Exod. 25: 10) - God begins with Christ, and works outwards.</p> <p>The normal position of the Ark was in the holiest of all (see Exod. 26: 34; 40: 3) – Christ can only be properly contemplated when we are in the presence of God.</p>	<p>The Ark of the Testimony (e.g. Exodus 25: 22). The testimony is for the wilderness, a picture of our passage through this world – hence the Ark is never spoken of as the Ark of the Testimony after Israel had entered the land.</p> <p>The testimony was the tables of stone placed inside the Ark (see Exod. 25: 16; 40: 20). The testimony today by contrast is "Jesus Christ and <i>him</i> crucified" (1 Cor. 2: 2; see also v1).</p>	<p>The details are given in Exodus 25: 10 – 22; 37: 1 – 9; Deut. 10: 1 – 5.</p> <p>The word <i>Ark</i> simply means a chest or box. It is the same word as used for Joseph's coffin (see Gen. 50: 26). A different Hebrew word is used for <i>Noah's ark</i>.</p>	<p>The Mercy Seat was the lid of the ark, and consisted of the lid proper, and the two cherubim. The cherubim were not cast separately from the lid and then attached, but everything was beaten out of the same piece of gold. Thus: "out of the mercy-seat shall ye make the cherubim at the two ends thereof" (Exod. 25: 19).</p>	<p>The Ark was <i>designed</i> to be carried, reminding us that we must take Christ with us as we journey through this world. The staves were not to be removed from the Ark (see Exod. 25: 15). Even when the Ark reached its resting place in the Temple the staves were still there (see 1 Kings 8: 8), indicating that even when we reach the Father's house, our journeying here with Christ will not be forgotten. (See also Ps. 132: 8).</p>	<p>The Wilderness:</p> <p>Bezaleel constructs the Ark (see Exod. 37: 1 – 9), and the Children of Israel bring it to Moses (see Exod. 39: 33-35).</p> <p>The normal position of the Ark when Israel was on the move was in the midst (see Num. 14: 44). How good if God's people today will not take one step without Christ in their midst! An exception is Num. 10: 33 when the Ark led the people – perhaps in answer to Moses' attempt to procure Reuel as a guide instead of looking to God (see v31).</p>
<p>The Ark was made to contain the two tables of the Law (see Exod. 25: 16, 21; 40: 20; Deut. 10: 1-5). As containing the ten words it typifies Christ: "Then said I, Behold, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me-To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40: 7, 8).</p> <p>The Ark also contained in its side (not inside) the book of the Law (see Deut. 31: 26). The book of the Law is distinct from the two tables of the Law.</p>	<p>The Ark of The Covenant of the Lord (see Num. 10: 33). The Ark of the Covenant of God (see Jud. 20: 27). The Ark of the Covenant (see Josh. 3: 6).</p> <p>The covenant (or agreement) refers to God's promise to be Israel's God, and Israel's corresponding oath to obey the Law that God delivered to them (see Exod. 19: 5). The Ark was a symbol of God's presence with His people, while the tables of stone within it were a reminder of what the people had said they would do.</p>	<p>The Ark was made of Acacia-wood, a type of the Lord's manhood. This wood is said not to decay, speaking of how the Lord remained uncorrupted and undefiled by this world. A perfect man. The Ark was overlaid with gold (see below) – in intimate contact with the gold, and yet distinct. The Lord is one person, but at the same time we can see two very distinct aspects of that person – that He is both God and man.</p>	<p>The Mercy Seat was made entirely of pure gold. <i>Underneath</i> it (i.e. in the Ark itself) were the two stone tables on which God wrote the 10 commandments (see Deut. 10: 5). This speaks of that which God demanded from man, but of which man fell short. The punishment for failure was death. On the Mercy Seat was sprinkled the blood which met that claim for a year (see Lev. 16: 14, 15). We now have a "better" sacrifice for Christ has "perfected in perpetuity the sanctified" (see Heb. 9: 23; 10: 14). The blood and the gold put together speak of divine mercy.</p>	<p>The staves were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The materials are the same as those of the Ark, indicating that there must be an appreciation on our behalf of both the Lord's deity and manhood as we journey through the wilderness that is this world.</p> <p>1 Cor. 2: 13 may also be relevant here: "communicating spiritual [things] by spiritual [means]". The testimony in this scene is to be 'carried' by spiritual persons.</p>	<p>The Land:</p> <p>The Ark parted the Jordan and conducted the people into the land (see Josh. 3 – 4: 11).</p> <p>The Ark carried around Jericho prior to the city's destruction (see Josh. 7).</p> <p>The Ark of God at Shiloh, Kirjath-Jearim and the house of Obed-Edom (see 1 Sam. 3: 3; 7: 2; 2 Sam. 6: 11).</p> <p>David brings the Ark up to Jerusalem (see 2 Sam. 6: 12-19).</p>

<p>Rather than dwelling <i>in</i> the Ark, Scripture presents God as sitting upon it. In one sense, the Ark was thus God's throne. There are numerous references to God as the One who sits between the cherubim (see 1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 2 Kings 19: 15; 1 Chron. 3: 6; Ps. 80: 1; 99: 1). In Lev. 16: 2, God said "I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat".</p>	<p>The Holy Ark (see 2 Chron. 35: 3) – emphasising the holiness of the Ark. This is said at a time when the Ark appears to have been previously removed from the Temple, but Josiah sought to have it put back in its rightful place – in the Holy of Holies.</p>	<p>Length = 2.5 cubits, height = 1.5 cubits, width = 1.5 cubits (a cubit is 18 inches). Ratio: 5:3:3. The spiritual lesson of these dimensions seems never to have been established.</p>	<p>Length = 2.5 cubits, width = 1.5 cubits (a cubit is 18 inches). The dimensions of the lid of the ark thus matched the dimensions of the ark itself.</p>	<p>The staves were "long" (2 Chron. 5: 9) – but we are not told how long. The implication, perhaps, is that there is room enough for all who would carry the testimony of Christ through this scene.</p>	<p>The Temple:</p> <p>The Ark seems to be the only vessel of the tabernacle transferred into the temple.</p> <p>Solomon brings the Ark up in to the Temple (see 1 Kings 8; 2 Chron. 5).</p> <p>The Ark was later removed (?) but returned to the Temple in the time of Josiah (see 2 Chron. 35: 3).</p>
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<p>God spoke to Moses from "off the mercy-seat which was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubim" (Num. 7: 89). It was where God had said He would meet with Moses and speak to him "everything that I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel" (Exod. 25: 22). If we want to receive divine communications then all is through Christ: "<i>This</i> is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him" (Matt. 17: 5). God has now spoken in the Son (see Heb. 1: 2) - the One who has "made [by himself] the purification of sins" (v3).</p>	<p>The Ark of Jehovah, the Lord of all the earth (see Josh. 3: 13). The Ark of Jehovah (see Josh. 4: 11) – parting the waters of the Jordan.</p> <p>The Ark of the God of Israel (see 1 Sam. 5: 7) – before whom the God of the Philistines was prostrated & broken.</p> <p>The Ark of thy strength (see Ps. 132: 8).</p> <p>All of the above terms seem connected in some way with divine power. We "more than conquer through him that has loved us" (Rom. 8: 37)</p>	<p>The Ark was overlaid both inside and outside in pure gold – referring to the deity of Christ. It was not simply a question of God coming upon a man. He was (and is) God. The term <i>God-man</i>, implying He was a hybrid, is not the truth. Further, to say He was possessed of <i>full</i> deity is a nonsensical expression. Anything less than 'full' deity is not deity.</p>	<p>The function of the Cherubim was to ensure that absolute righteousness is upheld. Thus they guarded the way to the tree of life (see Gen. 3: 24) preventing sinful man living forever, and escaping the penalty of death. Satan was "the anointed covering cherub" (Ezek. 28: 14), and he still acts up to his former role by questioning God's righteousness in blessing sinners, accusing them "before our God day and night" (Rev. 12: 10; see also Job 1: 6-12). The cherubim gaze down at a blood on the mercy-seat, testifying that God's righteous claims have been met in the death of Christ and that His people are free from the penalty of sin. Their wings guard the holy scene (see Heb. 9: 5) where God has been glorified.</p>	<p>Putting the Ark on a "new cart" (2 Sam. 6: 3) ignored the divine instruction that the Ark was to be carried by the priests holding the staves. Like all religious innovations that depart from God's Word it led to disaster. Uzzah thought to steady the ark with his hand (v 6), as if what is human can be brought in to support what is of God, and paid for his error with his life.</p> <p>The Ark was only to be carried by the priests (Josh. 3: 3; Deut. 31: 9). All Christians are priests (see Rev. 1: 6) and are thus able to journey with Christ through this world, and bear His testimony. However, our state must also be in accord with our standing, hence "be ye clean, that bear the vessels of Jehovah" (Is. 52: 11). If we defile ourselves through sin, then we cannot expect to have the privilege of travelling with Christ. We must put ourselves right first.</p>	<p>The Captivity:</p> <p>It is not known what happened to the Ark when Jerusalem was taken, and the vessels of the Temple were transferred to Babylon. There is no mention of the Ark being in the rebuilt Temple (see Ezra 3: 8-13) or in Ezekiel's Temple (see Ezek. 41).</p> <p>Jeremiah (who was present when Jerusalem was taken) makes an interesting comment: "And it shall come to pass, when ye are multiplied in the land and become fruitful, in those days, saith Jehovah, they shall say no more, Ark of the covenant of Jehovah! neither shall it come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit [it]; neither shall it be done any more" (Jer. 3: 16-17).</p>

From Hebrews 9: 4 we learn that **the Ark also contained the Golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded** (although Exod. 16: 34 and Num. 17: 10 only say that they were only laid up "before the testimony"). 1 Kings 8: 9 and 2 Chron. 5: 10 are emphatic that later there was nothing in the Ark except the two tables of stone which Moses placed there at Horeb. Both the manna and Aaron's rod were divine provision for the wilderness, but they were not needed in the Kingdom. The manna typifies our feeding on Christ as a perfect man in this scene, while the dry wood that burst into life, speaks of His vindication, the man brought out of death by resurrection. See also the "hidden manna" (Rev. 2: 17) – the wilderness food preserved and kept in the Ark.

The Ark of God (see 1 Sam. 3: 3) – emphasising to whom the Ark belonged. I am not aware that it Scripture ever says the "Ark of Israel".

The Ark had a border or rim of gold – apparently to hold its lid in place. To look into the ark meant certain death (see 1 Sam. 6: 19). Thus we do not speculate about the Lord's person – we go no further than what is revealed to us in the Scriptures (see Matt. 11: 27).

God is able to take up an attitude of blessing towards the whole world, because Christ "is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2: 2). It does not mean all will be blessed, but that He is able to bless all. **Christ has been "set forth a mercy-seat"** (Rom. 3: 25), the means by which the claims of a holy God against sinful man has been met, and man can be blessed if he has "faith in his blood" (Rom. 3: 25; see also Lev. 16: 14, 15). Because of Christ's work at Calvary, God can now act in mercy without compromising His righteousness.

The Kohathites were responsible for the sanctuary during Israel's travels (see Num. 3: 27-32; 4: 1-20; 10: 21). However, they only carried the holy vessels when they had been covered by the priests (see Num. 4: 15).

Final:
Rev. 11: 19: "And the temple of God in the heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail" – this symbolical language seems to indicate that God is working again with His earthly people. The subject of the next chapter in Revelation is clearly Israel.