

# The Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10-22)

The Ark of the Covenant is the best known item in the [Tabernacle](#), renowned for its mysterious powers against the enemies of Israel (I Samuel chapters 5 & 6).

The Ark of the Covenant resided in the Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the Tabernacle. Access was only permitted once per year, on the [Day of Atonement](#) (Yom Kippur). Access was restricted to one person only, the [high priest](#). He had to come into the Holy of Holies with the blood of a goat, on behalf of his own and the [people of Israel](#)'s sins.

The Ark itself was a small box made of [acacia wood](#), overlaid with [gold](#). It measured 1.15 metres long, 0.7 metres wide and 0.7 metres high. It was carried by two long bars, also made of acacia wood overlaid with gold.

The Ark was God's throne in His dwelling place in the Tabernacle. Most people associate the Ark of the Covenant with judgement and wrath, rightly so. The day is soon coming when God will judge the secrets of people's hearts (Romans 2:16) and "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). "He who formed the eye, do you think He cannot see? or He who planted the ear, do you think He does not hear?" (Psalm 94:9) If you are still not sure, please read about the great white throne of God's judgement in Revelation 20:11-15. But, there was a cover on the Ark, known as the Mercy Seat, or Propitiation Cover. It was here that the blood of a goat was sprinkled by the [high priest](#) on the [Day of Atonement](#), to appease God's righteous anger (propitiate) for the sins of the people of Israel.

Romans 3:24-25 tells us that there is [redemption](#) in Christ Jesus, because God has set Him forth as a propitiation, through faith in His blood. Christ has died. The price is paid. To those who [believe](#) in Jesus Christ's death for their sins, there is now mercy not wrath. "God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us. Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-9).

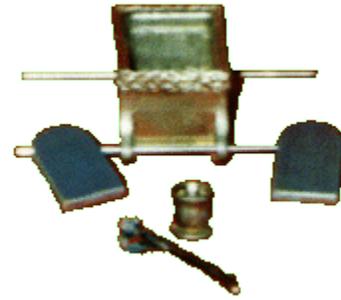
Attached to the Ark's covering lid were two Cherubim. God's presence did not dwell inside the box, but remained over the Ark, in between the two Cherubim. Here God dwelt "in unapproachable light" (I Timothy 6:16 Psalm 104:2). The high priest had to shield his eyes, because "no man shall see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20). This was where God met with Moses (Exodus 25:21-22 Leviticus 16:14-15). The glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle on the day it was reared up and anointed (Exodus 40:9,18,34-35), exactly fourteen days short of one year since the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 40:2; 12:6,31). The two Cherubim on the Mercy Seat represented God's glory (Hebrews 9:5).

We are not told in great detail exactly what the Ark of the Covenant looked like. Some models, like this one, show the Cherubim kneeling. Other models show the Cherubim standing. What we do know is that the wings of the Cherubim were stretched out, to cover the Mercy Seat; the wings of the two Cherubim possibly touched one another to form a complete covering. The uncertainty should not unduly trouble us "for now we see dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am known" (I Corinthians 13:12)



The picture below shows a model of the Ark, where the lid has been removed so you can see the contents that fit inside the Ark:

1. [the two stone tablets of the Law](#)
2. [Aaron's rod that budded](#)
3. [the golden pot of 'hidden' manna.](#)



Together these three items form the Testimony (Exodus 25:21), hence the Ark is called the Ark of the Testimony.

## 1. The Stone Tablets of the Law

The Ten Commandments were written on these two pieces of stone, by the finger of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 31:18; 32:16,19; 34:1). The tablets of stone are also called the tables of testimony (Exodus 31:18), because they show us what God is like: jealous, caring, faithful and true. He is holy and righteous.

Here are the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17):

**Introduction: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.**

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourselves any carved image, you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold guiltless anyone who misuses His name.
4. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.
5. Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor anything that belongs to your neighbour.

The Ten Commandments on the two stone tablets are the basis for God's covenant with the [children of Israel](#) (Exodus 19:5-7). They stipulate what the righteous requirements of the law are, but there is no supply to help the children of Israel to obey the commandments.

Because the children of Israel did not continue in their side of the covenant (it was impossible, Romans 8:3), God promised to make a new covenant, "not like the covenant I made with their fathers, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them" says the Lord (Jeremiah 31:32).

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law into their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour saying 'Know the Lord', for they all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest among them,

says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

This is the New Covenant which Jesus has ratified by His blood (Luke 22:20).

Psalm 40:8 is a prophecy of the Messiah: "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the Book it is written of me: 'I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart'". In fulfillment: "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, so that He might [redeem](#) those who were under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus Christ has kept the law of God, loving the Lord His God with all His heart, and His neighbour as Himself. This is obvious from reading the [four gospels](#). Delighting to do God's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38), Jesus had the law of God (the Ten 'Words' of God) in His heart, just as the Ark of the Covenant kept the stone tablets of the Testimony. The Word of God had become flesh and [tabernacled](#) among us, full of grace and truth (reality, Greek) (John 1:14). Through Jesus' death on the cross, as a perfect [offering](#), we are forgiven our offenses under the law and redeemed from slavery to it.

God undertakes to write His laws into our hearts and inscribe them on our minds, by sending forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Galatians 4:6 Hebrews 8:10-12). Thereafter, an inner working of life takes place, "Christ who is our life" (Colossians 3:4), "Christ being formed in you" (Galatians 4:19), that will result in at least the same testimony of God as the Ten Commandments. The children of Israel broke the old covenant, and we still do, because of trying to keep it by self-effort in our flesh. In the New Covenant, God undertakes to write His laws into our minds by His Spirit (Romans 8:4 Ezekiel 36:25-28), providing we walk by the Spirit.

John is very economical in his writing, using one or two words to describe vast realities. But his focus is not on understanding so much as truly knowing, experiencing, for example the Bread of Life (John 6:35). John refers to Jesus as:

the 'Word' in his gospel (John 1:1)

the 'Word of Life' in his first epistle (1 John 1:1)

the 'Word of God' in Revelation 19:6.

In each case, John's underlying thought seems to be the Ark of the Testimony.

*Click here to return to [Index](#)*

---

## 2. Aaron's Rod that Budded

A little history is required to begin with: the account is in Numbers chapter 16. A short while after the Tabernacle had been functioning, one of the priests (Korah) and some others mounted a challenge to the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Couched in language that was very spiritual, Korah reasoned 'aren't all the Lord's people holy? isn't He among all of them? why are Moses and Aaron the only leaders? - it's too much for them to cope with'. Korah's partners were not priests. Their line of reasoning was totally anti- God's

word: 'Moses, you've brought us away from a land flowing with milk and honey (Egypt) into this desert. Where is this land flowing with milk and honey that you promised us? D'you think we're all blind?' This was an outright lie; Egypt had meant toil and miserable hardship, bitter tears and hopelessness, but after a few months of building a beautiful Tabernacle, the memory of that slavery was fading, hence the challenge.

Moses instructed everyone to appear before the Lord the next day. They were to fill bronze incense burners and place them before the Lord. God was furious and judged Korah and his cronies. Their censors became used in the covering for the [Burnt Offering Altar](#), as a reminder of God's wrath from heaven against the ones who had spoken so vehemently against Him and those He had chosen (Numbers 16:29).

But the incident did not finish there. The whole congregation then started to murmur against Moses and Aaron because they had 'killed the Lord's people'. Again God reacted furiously and plague broke out, quenched only when Aaron obeyed Moses and placed his (the authorised) incense burner before the Lord in the Tabernacle. The plague had exacted a devastating toll on the people and God had proved negatively that Moses and Aaron were indeed his choice.

However, God wanted to prove positively that Aaron was his choice for the priesthood (Numbers 17:5). A rod from the head of each of the twelve tribes was marked with the name of the tribe and placed before the Lord, at Ark of the Testimony (Numbers 17:4). When Moses returned the next day, Aaron's rod had budded with sprouts, yielding blossoms and ripe almonds. God instructed Moses to place Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, "to be kept as a sign against the rebels" to prevent further murmurings and death (Numbers 17:10).

That is the history. The application comes in John chapter 11. Jesus' friend Lazarus is quite seriously ill. Jesus loved the family: Lazarus, Martha and Mary. But Jesus did not go to see them straightaway, He waited two days. This caused a lot of murmuring and reasoning. The first bunch of murmurers and reasoners were the disciples, especially when Jesus (without being told) announces that Lazarus has fallen asleep (John 11:11,14). The next bunch of murmurers and reasoners were Martha and Mary and the mourners. Martha can't wait to tell Jesus what she thinks, meeting Him on the road. Mary was less vociferous, but still made the same observation as Martha: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21,32).

It looks really bad. Jesus has let everybody down, just what the 'press' wanted to 'publish'. It is in this very environment of death, despair and hopelessness that Jesus announces "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25) Jesus asks Martha if she believes. She gives a reply that is doctrinally superb: she believes Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God who is come into the world (John 11:27). She avoids answering Jesus' actual question because her theology is already 'at the back of her mind' due to her grief. Some of the others begin to question even whether He is the Messiah. After all, if Jesus can make the blind to see (a strong proof He is the Messiah, Isaiah 42:1,7), why couldn't he have prevented Lazarus from dying?

Jesus had no intention of preventing Lazarus from dying. He appears to have had every intention of waiting until he had died, so that people would see the glory of God appear in the Tabernacle, Jesus Christ, and that many would believe in(to) Him ('into' is the literal Greek)(John 11:40,15,45). Lazarus was not just a piece of wood, lopped from an almond tree somewhere, like Aaron's rod had been. Lazarus was a full scale human being, a dear friend, now (after being dead for four days in Israel) undoubtedly decomposing rapidly, damaged beyond hope.

**"Take away the stone"**

**"Father I thank You that You have heard Me"  
(He had already been at the [Golden Incense Altar](#) praying)**

**"Lazarus, come forth"**

**"Loose him! Let him go!"**

**What a sign of the Messiah! Who could doubt now that Jesus is who He says He is - the Resurrection and the Life? Only those who were masterminding the plan to kill Him (John 11:47-54). But even they were under God's sovereign masterful arrangement.**

**So much of the Tabernacle's history and the Temple's history is upsetting and disappointing. But today, thousands of years later, people are still very eager to learn about the Tabernacle and the Temple. This has much to do with the Ark of the Covenant, which (for at least part of its history) contained the budding rod that is fulfilled in Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life! So much of church history, and even my own history is deeply disappointing, but again and again the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the Resurrection and the Life to the members of His Body, which is the true Church.**

**I myself am living, walking proof that Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life. Tonight I am writing this article on the Tabernacle for the Internet and a CD-ROM. If Internet/CD-ROM technology had been available seven years ago, when I was a deeply backslidden christian, I am sure that I would have been looking out for totally different (even dirty) kinds of material. How I thank the Lord for His love towards me, for saving me, for bringing me back to take another look at Jesus in the [gospels](#) (the [Door to the Outer Court](#)), for dying for me at the [Burnt Offering Altar](#) (the cross) to forgive all my wrongdoings, for washing and cleansing me at the [Laver](#) of His word, for feeding me with the [Bread of Life](#), for shining on me as the [Light of the world](#), causing a reaction of the light of life inside me. Thank you, Lord, for [praying](#) for me at every stage of my life and for shepherding me back to Yourself. Thank you, Lord Jesus, You are the Resurrection and the Life, and You're real in my life. Praise Your Holy Name!**

**Aaron's rod that budded was a sign of God's continued choice of Aaron as a priest (Numbers 17:5). But Aaron's priesthood was interrupted by his death. The Lord Jesus Christ, though, has a priesthood that is constituted with an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16). He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). Do [you](#) need to come back to God, now, through Him?**

*Click here to return to [Index](#)*

---

### **3. The Golden Pot of 'Hidden' Manna**

**Manna was the food that came down from God to feed the children of Isreal daily in the wilderness for the forty years of their journey to Canaan. It was given to the children of Israel in such a way that it required them to develop self-discipline. Manna only came in the early morning with the dew (Exodus 16:13-14). By the time the sun was up, it would**

have evaporated (Exodus 16:21). It had to be gathered every day, any residue would breed worms and smell (Exodus 16:20), and they had to gather a double portion on the sixth day, because none would fall on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:22-27). It was called 'Manna', because that is Hebrew for 'what is it'. It looked like white coriander seed and tasted like wafer biscuits made with honey (Exodus 16:31). The Lord commanded Moses to fill an omer vessel with Manna and keep it for a memorial to future generations of how God fed them in the wilderness (Exodus 16:32-33). This is the Golden Pot of Hidden Manna in the Tabernacle.

Now, it is obvious that if Manna was kept for longer than a day, or two days (if it was a Sabbath), then the Manna would breed worms and smell. Why then try to keep it for a memorial to future generations?

The key is the Golden Pot. The Golden Pot would last for ever. It is round, indicating eternal; it is gold, indicating 'of God, divine'. The Golden Pot indicates eternal life. Our life needs to be "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3) and we need to know "Christ our life", the *zoe* (Greek) eternal life (Colossians 3:4). The Hidden Manna was a memorial of how the Lord had sustained His people in an impossible situation. Christ is real and applicable to every person in every age in every circumstance. The question is: how much is He really our life or how much is He just tacked on at the end, when we have some time/energy to give Him? Also when we have experienced His life supply in a tight situation, it is good to have a memorial of that faithful supply of His life as sustenance for future similar occasions. "This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" Jesus prays in John 17:3.