

Lesson 9: The Ark of the Covenant and its Articles

Read: Exodus 25:10-16, Hebrews 9:3-4

Within the Holy of Holies, shielded from the eye of the common man, was one piece of furniture comprising two parts: the Ark of the Covenant and the atonement cover (or “mercy seat”) on top of it. The ark was a chest made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold inside and out. It was 3 feet, 9 inches long and 2 feet, 3 inches wide and high.

God commanded Moses to put in the ark three items: a golden pot of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written.

Although the Ark and the atonement cover comprise one piece of furniture, we will study them over two lessons. Today we will cover the contents of the Ark and next week we will discuss the atonement cover.

Discussion:

1. Read Exodus 16:2-5 and 13-36 about God’s provision of manna in the desert. Why did God command Moses to put the manna in the Ark? How was this a reminder and a warning?

The manna was a reminder of God’s kind provision for the Israelites throughout their time in the desert. They could only rely on the Lord and trust in Him because they were helpless on their own! Yet, the people were not thankful. While He continued to provide food daily and faithfully, they complained and wanted something else. Despite what God had provided for them, the Israelites had rejected God’s provision. The pot of manna was a warning to them not to reject God’s provision and grumble against Him again.

2. Read Numbers 16:1-3, 17:1-10. Why did God command Moses to put Aaron’s rod in the Ark? How was this a reminder and a warning?

The staff confirmed God’s choice of Aaron’s household as the priestly line. It reminded the Israelites that His choice was sovereign. On more than one occasion, the Israelites had rejected God’s authority. This was a warning that if they rebelled again and rejected God’s authority, they would bear the consequences. (See Numbers 16 and 17:10 for the consequences of Korah’s rebellion.)

3. Read Exodus 19:5-8. In light of these verses, why were the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments put in the Ark? How was this a reminder and a warning?

The stone tablets reminded the Israelites of God’s covenant with them. They were God’s special people and in order to qualify for that distinction, they had to obey His law, the Ten Commandments. It was a conditional agreement. But they did not

fulfill their end of the contract. It was impossible for them to keep the Ten Commandments perfectly. Over and over again, they violated God's holy Law, and God made it clear to them the consequences of their sin by sending plagues, natural hazards and foreign armies upon them. The stone tablets in the ark were reminder that the Israelites had said they would follow God's law, and a warning that if they continued to reject it, they would be rejected as a holy nation and kingdom of priests.

The three items revisited

These three articles were preserved in the ark throughout Israel's history as an unpleasant symbol of man's sins and shortcomings, a reminder of how they rejected God's provision, authority and right standard of living. It pointed to man as a helpless sinner. However, the three items in the ark that served as a sore reminder of man's shortcomings have taken on a different meaning since Jesus Christ redeemed us from our sins. Let's look at the three articles again and see how they point to Christ.

4. *Manna*: Read John 6:32, 48-50. How does Jesus fulfill the picture of the manna? Reflecting on the Israelites' behavior toward the manna, how should we respond to Jesus?

Manna, the bread from heaven, in itself did not impart life. Manna was an imagery of Jesus, who became the true bread from heaven, God's provision for our souls. If we partake of this true bread, we will be washed of our sins and live eternally with God in heaven. When Jesus came and walked on earth, he didn't reject God's provision. Rather, He became God's provision to us. We should not reject God's provision like the Israelites did in the wilderness, but partake in it, for it is the only source of life.

5. *The budding rod*: Read John 6:38 and Mark 14:36. How is Jesus' attitude different from that of Korah's in Numbers 16? How was the budding rod a projection of Christ?

Korah's clan rebelled against Aaron because they were jealous of Aaron's status as high priest. God made it clear to them that the high priest position was His sovereign choice, and they needed to accept God's authority. In contrast, Jesus did not reject God's authority, but willingly submitted to God's will, even though He was equal to God. He demonstrated this by dying on the cross (ref. Hebrews 5:7-9).

In more than one way, Christ fulfilled the picture of Aaron's budding rod. First, because of His sinlessness, He was not bound by death. He came back to life, just like Aaron's branch – although cut off from the tree, it miraculously budded and had new life imparted into it. Second, Jesus was God's chosen one ("Christ" means "Anointed One") to serve as our high priest forever (see Hebrews 7:23).

6. *The Ten Commandments*: Read Romans 3:20-26. How did Jesus fulfill the Ten Commandments and establish a new covenant between believers and God?

Jesus didn't reject God's right standard of living. He lived a sinless life and obeyed God's law perfectly, becoming our perfect sacrifice and intercessor. His sacrifice instituted a new covenant that was not based on the Law, but on faith in Christ. (Ref. Hebrews 9:15.)