

- God's dwelling place

Materials

- Specified exactly

The ark

- Described as if God is moving out to meet His people

- Later narrative – He leads them inside to be with himself

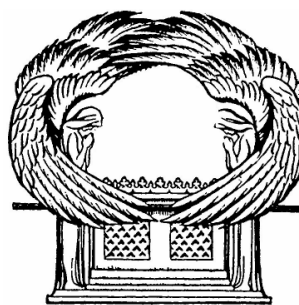
- The ark never needed to be touched

When God wanted to dwell in Israel, He did not choose to dwell in a stone or on a mountain or in a tree (as often God was thought to do, among the pagan religions). The Israelites will themselves build a place where God will dwell.

First God gives general instructions concerning collecting the materials for His dwelling place^{□1}. The structure of the tabernacle has to be exactly in accordance with God's will^{□2}. Moses cannot add to it or change it in any way. It is specially designed by God, and He wants it to be made exactly as He has said.

The next thing mentioned is **the ark**. The description begins from the inside and moves outwards. In the innermost shrine the ark was to be found^{□1}. Then the description moves outward and mentions such things as the table^{□2} and the lampstand^{□3}. These items were in the holy place. Then we move further out and the text deals with the altar^{□4} and the outer courtyard^{□5}. So the movement of the text is from the inside to the outside. **It is as if God is moving out to meet His people.** He is the one who dwells in the innermost compartment and He comes out to visit those who want to know Him. When we get to chapters 35–40 we shall find the order is the other way around. The narrative in chapters 3 5–40 move from the outside to the inside. It is as if God comes out to get His people, then He takes them by the hand and He leads them inside to be with Himself.

So let us consider the ark. It was a chest made of acacia wood, two-and-a-half cubits (about 1.5 metres) long, a cubit and a half (just under a metre) wide, and a cubit and a half high^{□1}. It was covered over, inside and outside with gold^{□2}, and had a gold raised edge around its top^{□3}. At its four corners there were rings for poles^{□4} and four gold-plated poles were put through the rings^{□5}. They stayed there all the time^{□6}. This means the ark never needed to be touched. If it had to be moved, it was carried by means of the poles. The poles were left permanently in the rings. Since the poles were at the bottom of the box, when it was carried it was lifted high.



The ark and the angels

God commanded that **'the testimony'** – a copy of the Ten Commandments on stone – should be kept inside the box^{□1}.

On top of the ark was a slab of gold which was called **'the mercy seat'**, or **'the atonement cover'**. It exactly fitted on the top, since its measurements were the same size as the top of the ark^{□1}.

Two statues of **cherubim** (angels) were placed one at each end of the slab of gold^{□1}. They had their wings spread out, and they were looking down at the golden mercy-seat^{□2}. The mercy-seat was on the ark, but over the mercy-seat nothing was to be placed. God is invisible; so there was nothing to represent Him. But He promised Moses that from above the mercy-seat He would meet with His people^{□3}. We shall come back to

□1 25:1-9
□2 25:9

□1 25:10-22
□2 25:23-30
□3 25:31-40
□4 27:1-8
□5 27:9-19

□1 25:10
□2 25:11
□3 25:11
□4 25:12
□5 25:13-14
□6 25:15

□1 25:16

□1 25:17

□1 25:18-19
□2 25:20

□3 25:21-22

- Copy of the Ten Commandments inside

- The mercy seat on top

- Two cherubim

• *The ark symbolised the presence of God*

• *Inaccessibility and holiness*

The ark stands for...

• *The kingship of God*

• *The power of God*

• *The holiness of God*

• *The inaccessibility of God*

• *The royal decrees of God*

• *The mercy of God*

consider the ark again in connection with Exodus 37:1–9. For the moment, we may note that **the ark symbolised the presence of God**. Its being placed deep within the tabernacle spoke of the **inaccessibility** of God. The same thing was implied in that the ark could never be touched. The law within the box spoke of the **holiness** of God within His nature. The mercy-seat spoke of **atonement**. God could be approached only by atoning blood which would be sprinkled on the mercy seat. The golden representations of two angels spoke of the fact that God is **to be worshipped** as He is worshipped by the angels.

The ark and the holy of holies, the inner room, stands for the presence of God. It is there that God would be shining in His glory. When the Israelites left Sinai, the ark would go before them. God's presence would be manifest over the ark¹. Where the ark was, God was present.

The ark stands for the kingship of God. God would be present above the ark. The ark was His 'footstool'. The ark is 'the ark of Yahweh Almighty who is enthroned above the cherubim'¹.

The ark stands for the power of God. Where God is present He acts in power. On one occasion when seventy men looked into the ark, they were all killed¹. The power of God was active where God was present with His ark.

The ark stands for the holiness of God. It was for this reason it could not be touched.

The ark stands for the inaccessibility of God. Generally speaking, the ark was totally out of sight and out of reach. No one could enter the holy of holies in the tabernacle except the high-priest once a year. There was no way the ordinary Israelite could go into the holy of holies. Even the priests could not go there. The high-priest went only once a year. It all spoke of the hiddenness of God. Because He is so sin-hating He dwells in unapproachable light.

The ark stands for the royal decrees of God. It was from above the ark that God spoke to Moses¹. God would issue His commands as the King of Israel, from above the mercy-seat.

The ark stands for the mercy of God. Although God is a holy God and the ark spoke of His holy presence, yet the mercy-seat or atonement-cover spoke of the way in which He could be approached by the blood of sacrifice. The atonement-cover was the place where once a year, blood was sprinkled. The holy God can be approached, if we approach Him through the blood of sacrifice. It all spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ. God can be approached because He shows mercy towards us. He permits that the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross should open up a way for us to find mercy at His throne.

¹ Numbers 10:33

¹ 1 Samuel 4:4

¹ 1 Samuel 6:19

¹ 25:22



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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