

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The Ark of the Covenant”

Introduction

There are few objects in holy Scripture that convey a sense of mystery and power like the Ark of the Covenant. As a kid, I liked to watch the program, “In Search of” narrated by Leonard Nimoy, which had an episode on the Ark. When I was in middle school the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark” was a big success.

For those of you who missed those shows, the Ark of the Covenant is a box that contained the stone tablets that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. It disappeared at some point in Israel’s history and people are always searching for it. It has no relation to Noah’s Ark and the two words are different in Hebrew. Today’s Old Testament lesson talks about Solomon bringing it into the Temple so I decided to teach (maybe more than preach) about it today.

Ark and Tabernacle

The ark is first described in Exodus 25:10, "Have them make a chest of acacia wood-- two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high."

Acacia wood is a very hard, durable wood. When it ages, it can grow almost as dark as ebony. It is very resistant to rotting and so it is sometimes called “incorruptible wood.” The acacia tree grows near streams in some of the most arid parts of the Middle East. Therefore, it would have been accessible while Israelites were wandering in the desert.

A cubit is the distance from a man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger. In today's measurements, a cubit is about two feet. So the ark would have been about 5 feet long, 3 feet wide and 3 feet deep.

The rest of the passage continues:

Exodus 25:11 Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. 12 Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. 13 Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 14 Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. 15 The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. 16 Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.

The ark was made to be picked up and carried quickly. It would be the focal point of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent used for worship. It could be rolled up and carried as the Israelites wandered through the desert and as they fought their way into the Promised Land. I imagine that God commanded them to keep the poles in the ark so they could take off with it quickly.

It wasn't the gold that covered the ark that made it so valuable. What was inside it was more important than the outside: the Testimony, or the contract that God had made with Israel. The Law that God gave would be carried as a symbol of his special relationship with Israel.

Ark and Promised Land

When the Israelites completed the forty years of wandering in the desert, they had to fight the inhabitants of the Promised Land before they could take the land. The tribes that lived in that land were more numerous than the Israelites and they were more advanced technologically. By their own strength, the Israelites would not have been able to take the land.

But Israel did not fight alone. God was on their side. God began to do miracles through the ark. One of the first miracles was similar to Israelites crossing the Red Sea. God command the ark to be brought into

the Jordan River and all the water stoop up as in a heap. The Israelites crossed into the Holy Land on a dry river bed.

Most of you remember the fall of Jericho from Sunday school. The people were commanded to blow seven rams horns and carry the ark around the city seven times. On the seventh day, the walls collapsed. So the Israelites took the city by God's power, not their own.

In the days of Eli, the ark was captured by the Philistines and they put it in the temple of their god Dagon. The next day, they saw that something had knocked down their idol so it was bowing before the ark. They tipped it upright but the next day it was bowing down to the ark again with several of its limbs torn off.

Then the Philistines started to be afflicted with painful boils all over their bodies and an infestation of mice. They put the ark on a cart pulled by cattle and sent it back to the Israelites with offerings of gold in the shape of mice and boils. Finally, God lifted the curse he had put on them.

Ark and Temple

Today's Old Testament lesson is set in the time of King Solomon. Solomon, you may remember, is the son of King David. David was not allowed to build the Temple because he was a man of war and had blood on his hands. So Solomon was given permission to build the Temple and to bring the ark to the Temple. When he did so, the glory of the Lord filled the Temple and the priests were no longer able to serve because it was so awesome.

Ark in the New Testament

In our New Testament lesson, we have *Jesus* coming to the Temple instead of the ark coming to the Temple. This is not Solomon's Temple (which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC) but the second

Temple which was built after the Babylonian captivity. The second Temple never had the ark, the stone tablets of the law or the glory of the Lord that was present in the first Temple.

Because the second Temple didn't have the ark, the ark is not mentioned much in the New Testament. It only comes up twice.

First, the Book of Hebrews explains what Solomon's Temple was like and briefly mentions the ark:

NIV Hebrews 9:3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, 4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.

Second, the book of Revelation describes the ark in heaven:

NIV Revelation 11:19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

So maybe we do know where the ark is. Did God bring it up to heaven before Solomon's Temple was destroyed? If this verse is taken literally, that's what it implies. We will have to wait until Judgment Day to know for sure.

Ark and Atonement

Now some of you may be sitting back saying, "Preacher, ya been preachin' a lot but what does this have to do with Jesus?" It's fair question. I haven't mentioned Jesus much in this sermon.

To really understand the ark and to understand what it has to do with Jesus, you need to know that the ark had a cover called the atonement cover. The atonement cover would be sprinkled by the blood of a bull

and the blood of a goat on the Day of Atonement. By doing this, the priest could take away the sin of the people for the year.

This sacrifice needed to be repeated every year. But what happened when the temple was destroyed? The sacrifices could not be offered. As Christians, we know that these sacrifices were only intended to foreshadow the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Once Christ made atonement for all time, the Temple became irrelevant. That may be why God allowed it to be destroyed again in 70 AD. The author of Hebrews puts it this way when describes Jesus as our High Priest:

NIV Hebrews 7:27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Conclusion

After hearing this sermon, I hope you understand the fascination that people have had with the Ark of the Covenant throughout the ages. The ark is powerful, mysterious and beautiful and some day we will see it in heaven because Christ offered himself as the one and only sacrifice for our sins.

May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.