

# **UNIT 46**

## **THE ARK OF THE COVENANT**

### **(Exodus 25:10-22; 37:1-9)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

With the material on the construction of the Tabernacle and its parts, a new approach needs to be taken to avoid needless repetition of expositions. Chapters 25-30 record the instructions for making these things, and chapters 35-39 the making of them. It would be best to combine the two sections and deal with the matters topically--yet contextually exegetical. In doing this you can address both the historical description and purpose and the typological significance at once. You will have to offer an explanation on why the material in the book was broken up this way--but probably chapter 32 and the following chapters 33 and 34 will serve that purpose better.

You have to be careful with topical exposition, though. If it is exegetical, then it must be derived from the passages being used. If two passages from Exodus are being used, your topic is a piece of furniture or building that was symbolical to their faith. You do not know it is a type until you add the New Testament. So the typological material must be subordinated to or correlated with the actual theological point of the passages.

So you may wish to take a safer approach, that is, treat the first passage as an exegetical unit and correlate bits of additional material from the second as the need arises. This will almost serve as a topical presentation; but the order is more easily followed in one passage.

Exodus 25:11-22 records the instructions for building the ark, the most sacred and important object of Israel's worship. In the passage verses 10-15 provide the instructions for making the ark itself, verse 16 the putting of the Law into it, verses 17-21 the mercy cover, and verse 22 the meeting above it. The passage lends itself to a two fold division: the making of the ark and the putting of the Law in it; and the making of the mercy cover and the meeting above it.

## EXPOSITION

- I. *The covenant people must always have God's holy standard before them as they draw near to worship him (10-16).*

Verses 10-16, then, describe the making of the ark of the testimony (for the testimony). Theologically this material describes God's plan to have His Law at the center of their worship, that is, in the presence of God is the Law that presents the stipulations of the covenant--which God will enforce. Since this ark was to be in the presence of the LORD, i.e., it was the footstool, the point must be that in the presence of God's glory there is a perpetual reminder of God's standards of righteousness. There are a number of ways to say this. The wording above takes it from the perspective of worshipping Israel who were here to make the ark. It could be worded from the perspective of God's sovereign presence among his people.

In this section one may emphasize the nature of God as well from the precise directions. He is a God of order. The instruments of worship must conform to His standard. None of these instructions were left up to Israel for size and specification. Each instruction in itself was *torah*--it had to be done according to His will.

It was also symbolic. The gold probably signified value and purity that was to be given to Him. Storing the law was also symbolic, as has been mentioned. God teaches through symbolic representation.

The ark was a chest about 3' 9" by 2' 3" by 2' 3" in size. This is not the same word for "ark" earlier; this is *'aron*, a box or coffer. An ornamental crown of gold (in the shape of rope or bead) around the top. It had legs and poles for ease in transport.

Into it was put the "attestation," *'edut*, that is, God's will and man's duty, expressed in the Decalogue. The box would hereafter be the ark of the testimony.

- II. *Even though the covenant people have God's righteous demands before them, they may draw near to Him through His provision of propitiation (17-22).*

Verses 17-22 describe the making of the cover and its function as a whole unit. If the Law condemns, God also in the Law prescribed the provision for forgiveness. The “mercy-seat,” that is “propitiatory,” or place of atonement (*kapporet*), was the solid lid of the box made of pure gold (the most perfect metal near to god). It sealed in the Law as a covering and provided the place for the sprinkling of the blood. This is the *hilasterion*, a place of propitiation (-*terion* ending) used in Hebrews 9:5 for the theological point of expiation. Entrance into the presence of God was prohibited unless one met the requirements of the Law, or, unless propitiation could be made over it. So placing the propitiatory over the box with the Law in it significantly taught the principle of expiatory provision. On the Day of Atonement the blood was brought as near to the LORD as possible.

A word study of *kipper* is in order. It is very unlikely that it meant “cover” --that is the homonym. This word means “expiate” or “atone” or “pacify.”

Cherubim will need to be studied also for the exposition. These are emblematic figures that imply the nearness of God. See Ps. 18:10 where the LORD rides a cherubim in the storm; Ps. 80:1 where He sits above them in the temple; Ezek. 1:5ff., 10:1ff., where four cherubim carry the firmament under His throne (where they are described as composite creatures).

Verse 22 tells the purpose: “There I will meet with you, and I will commune with you.” This is not meeting by chance but an appointed meeting (*ya’ad*). Here God would give His commands for the people to follow, but they would be given through gracious dealings.

## CONCLUSION

The fulfillment of the typology or theology symbolized by the ark is in the New Testament Christ and His work. The theology is that even though the righteousness of God reminds us of our unworthiness, the propitiation of Christ gains us communion with the Father. In practical affairs we would say that

***At the center of our worship*** (we go to commune with God through Christ) ***must be the perpetual reminder of God’s righteous standard and God’s gracious provision of atonement.***

Applications can be made concerning the arrangement and furnishing of the sanctuary—all churches have something that says what they truly believe. And then applications can be made about the standard of righteousness and the gracious provision of propitiation in Christ. This too says that if God judged us on our merits (if the lid of the box were opened), we would all perish; but the blood is sprinkled to make propitiation. This should lead to greater loyalty and greater adoration.