

**THE ARK OF THE COVENANT—
THE PRESENCE
EXODUS 25:10-16**

INTRODUCTION:

The tabernacle is all about the presence of the Lord. The Lord God of Israel chose to make His presence known in the part of the tabernacle that is called the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies there was only one piece of furniture—an ark. The word for ark could probably be better-translated "chest." It was a chest made of acacia wood and covered over with precious gold, both within and without. On top of this Ark of the Covenant was placed the Mercy Seat. Attached to the Mercy Seat were two cherubim that looked down on the Mercy Seat as angelic beings. We will not consider the Mercy Seat or the cherubim tonight but will come back to them the next time. They are a message concerning God's redemptive purposes all to themselves.

The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the presence of God. When we speak of the presence of God we need to be careful in our thinking. The presence of God is presented in Scriptures in different ways.

There is first the omnipresence of God. This word means that God's presence is everywhere in His universe. Many sections of Scripture state this glorious truth and Psalm 139 celebrates this truth. There is actually no place that you can go in the whole universe and thereby escape the presence of God. The Ark of the Covenant is not a symbol of the omnipresent God.

There is also the manifest presence of God. This is where the presence of God that is present everywhere manifests itself at a specific moment in time in a specific way. The Ark of the Covenant was the symbol of the manifest presence of God. There would be burning over that Ark of the Covenant in the Holy Place, a burning light. It was the outshining of the Shekina glory of the eternal God. The Ark was a constant reminder that the manifest presence of God was present in that tabernacle. But the Scriptures also speak to us of the incarnate presence of God. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this truth when he writes, "God was in Christ." In another place he writes, "The fullness of deity dwelt in Him bodily" so for the days of His flesh and for all eternity the manifest presence of God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. This means that when you looked upon Him you were actually looking upon the presence of God in history and on the earth. The Ark of the Covenant is really a beautiful type of the incarnate presence of God.

However, for our study tonight we are going to focus upon the manifest presence of God and what we can learn about the manifest presence of God from this ancient piece of furniture that was situated in the midst of the Holy of Holies.

I. THE HOLINESS OF HIS PRESENCE.

Everything about the Ark of the Covenant is a symbol of the holy presence of God.

1. The veil reminds us of His holy presence.

In order to stand before the Ark of the Covenant the high priest had to move through the veil. He was invited to move beyond the veil only once each year. To venture into the

Holy of Holies and to stand before the Ark of the Covenant on any other day meant certain death. This is a reminder to us that the presence of God is always a holy presence. Where ever God manifests His presence in time or eternity, it will always be a manifestation of His holiness. Holiness is so much a part of who God is that there can be nothing else connected with His presence. There can be no presence of God, no manifest presence, unless there is a manifestation of His holiness.

2. The Holy of Holies reminds of His holiness.

The location of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies symbolizes the holiness of His presence. The Ark of the Covenant was not located in the Holy Place. It was separated from the furniture of the Holy Place by that beautiful veil and was situated right in the middle of this cubicle room that was called the Holy of Holies. The thing that made that room the Holy of Holies was the manifestation of the holy presence of God in that room. The symbol of that manifestation of the presence of God was this Ark of the Covenant that was situated right in the middle of the room.

We must never forget the truth—the manifest presence of God is the manifestation of His holy presence.

II. THE BASIS OF HIS PRESENCE.

The content of the Ark of the Covenant is a symbol of the basis of the manifest presence of God.

1. The Ten Commandments in the Ark symbolized the Covenant.

Moses was given specific instructions that the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written were to be stored in the Ark of the Covenant. In fact, this was one of the primary purposes of the chest itself. Other things were added later, such as pot of manna, the rod of Aaron that budded, and then even time later some golden symbols that were placed beside the Ark by the Philistines when it had brought such decimation to them. However, in the beginning there were only the Ten Commandments.

We must remember the context in which God gave the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments embodied the basis of God's Covenant with His people. He would be their God and they would be His people if they lived by the principles revealed in the Ten Commandments.

2. The Covenant was the basis of the manifest presence of God.

It is interesting that the most common name for the Ark in the Old Testament is the Ark of the Covenant. It was sometimes called "the Ark of the Testimony," and even other names in the Old Testament, but the most common name was the Ark of the Covenant. This very title was a symbol of the basis of God manifesting His presence among the people. As the gracious and eternal God that He is, He chose to manifest His presence among His people on the basis of the Covenant He had made with them.

While the omnipresence of God encircles the universe, it is only among the people with whom God has a covenant that you can expect there to be dramatic manifestations of His holy presence. God is pleased to manifest His presence to His people on the basis of His covenant with His people.

III. THE ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS PRESENCE.

We must realize that there was a very fundamental purpose beyond the Covenant for this Ark. It was the symbol of a seat on which God could sit.

1. The Ark was His earthly throne.

God revealed to His people that the Holy of Holies was the throne room for the holy God of the universe. The Ark of the Covenant was the place where God sat enthroned in the midst of His people. God manifest His presence among His people as the reigning King and Lord over His people.

2. His manifest presence reveals His sovereignty.

How could it be any other way? If the Lord God is the King over all kings and the Lord of the universe, does it not follow that any manifestation of His presence will be the manifestation of His sovereignty? How could the sovereign Lord manifest His presence in any other way? Israel understood this truth. They were slow in accepting the truth of it, but there was no question in their minds that the God who manifested His presence in the Holy of Holies was the sovereign King over the universe. He sat enthroned in the Holy of Holies. This tabernacle with its Holy of Holies and its Ark of the Covenant was situated right in the midst of the tribes of Israel. At the heart of the nation was the enthroned presence of the eternal God.

This is a truth that we must ever be mindful of. Whenever God manifest His presence among the people, He manifest His presence as the one who is Lord over all and sovereign over every life. As long as we are resisting the sovereign rule of God in our lives, we will never experience the gracious manifestation of His presence.

IV. THE MOVEMENT OF HIS PRESENCE.

You noticed in the description that God gave to Moses that God moves with His people.

1. The Ark moves from place to place.

On each corner of the Ark God had placed a ring. Through each of these golden rings there was at all time a rod or a pole. These poles were covered with gold. The purpose for these poles was for the movement of the Ark. Whenever the Ark was moved from place to place, it was carried by four dedicated Levites. Each of them rested the pole on his shoulder and moved the Ark to the new place where God would establish for it to be settled.

You will remember the tragic mistake that David made when he ignored this specific piece of instruction concerning the Ark of the Covenant. When they sought to move the Ark of the Covenant into the city of David, they tragically attempted to bring it on an ox cart. As they were moving it along the road toward Jerusalem, one of the ox stumbled and the Ark was about to tip over. Uzza put out his hand to steady the Ark, only to be smitten by the God. They were in violation of specific instructions about how the Ark was to be moved from place to place. He experienced the ultimate in the holy presence of God in that tragic mistake.

The reason that the Ark was so equipped was that God wanted His people to understand that His manifest presence would go with them wherever they went. The Ark was equipped to go with them from place to place. It could be carried on the shoulders of dedicated Levites and set up in the midst of the people.

2. The Ark went before the people

We will learn later in the sacred instructions that God gave his people that when they moved from place to place, the Ark went first. They were led from place to place by the manifest presence of the Lord.

Is this not a wonderful truth concerning the presence of the Lord? Is it not wonderful to know that wherever God leads us He goes before us? How can be afraid if we know that as we move forward in the will of God we are following the manifest presence of the Lord God Himself?

V. THE POWER OF HIS PRESENCE.

Wherever the presence of the Lord is manifest, it will be a powerful manifestation. He is the almighty God. How could His presence be manifest and it not be a powerful manifestation.

1. The Ark symbolizes the protecting presence of the Lord.

The people of Israel learned that as long as the Ark of the Covenant was in their midst, they were safe. They even discovered that when they went into battle that if they took the Ark of the Covenant with them, they were under His protection. There is nothing that can protect the people of God like the presence of the Lord God Himself. If any evil is going to come nigh, the evil will have to deal with God Himself.

2. The Ark symbolizes the enabling presence of the Lord.

When God led His people to attempt things that were in themselves impossible, the Ark of the Covenant was usually involved. Whenever God led the people through the Jordan while it was at flood stage, it was the Ark of the Covenant that went before them. Joshua said to the priest, "Take up the Ark of the Covenant, and cross over ahead of the people" (Joshua 3:6). It was the manifest presence of God that made the dry pathway through the Jordan for them.

When ever they marched around the walls of the fortified city Jericho, it was the Ark of the Covenant that went before them. The priest carried that ark around the city for seven days. It was the manifest presence of God that enabled His people and cast down the wall before them.

It is always that way! It is the presence of God with His people that makes His people able to do mighty deed. Without the manifest presence of the Lord, they are still just flesh.

3. The Ark symbolizes the saving presence of the Lord.

The Ark was identified with the saving activity of God on behalf of His people. Whether they were being beset by Egyptians or Philistines, it was the manifest presence of God as symbolized in the Ark that saved them from their enemies. The presence of God is a saving presence.

As we step back to look for a moment at this Ark of the Covenant and the manifestation of the presence of God, there is a lesson that we need to learn about worship. The essential purpose of the tabernacle was to provide the people of Israel with a place of worship. As they came to worship at that tabernacle, they came with the anticipation that the presence of God would be made manifest among them. We must never forget that worship involves encountering the manifest presence of God.

When the day of Pentecost came fully in the Acts of the Apostle, the manifest presence of God was experienced. The worship that is described on that day a response to this special manifestation of His holy Presence.

Never forget in order to truly worship God, there needs to be the manifest, experienced presence of God. Too many worship experiences are just ritual. They are made up of form but they have no power. It is easy for a church like ours to slip into such a pattern. The Ark of the Covenant is a reminder that God wants to meet with His people in the manifestation of His presence wherever His people assemble for worship. Why don't we adjust our expectations and begin to anticipate the presence of God being manifested in our midst every time we assemble in this place for worship.

Thanks be to the eternal God who is pleased to manifest Himself among us! Amen and

Amen!