BIBLE TOPICS · OLD TESTAMENT

The Ark of the Covenant

Where God Met with His People · Exodus 25:22

Made at Sinai
c. 1445 B.C.

About 45 × 27 × 27 in
2½ × 1½ × 1½ cubits

Inside
Law, manna, Aaron's rod

Fulfilled in Christ
Our mercy seat

EXODUS 25:10–22

How the Ark Was Made

God gave Moses every detail of the Ark on Mount Sinai.

THE WOOD

Shittim Wood

Acacia, a hard desert wood that lasts.

"And they shall make an ark of shittim wood"

EXODUS 25:10

THE GOLD

Pure Gold Inside and Out

With a crown (rim) of gold round about.

"within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about."

EXODUS 25:11

THE STAVES

Rings and Poles

Four gold rings and two gold-covered poles.

"The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it."

EXODUS 25:15

THE LID

The Mercy Seat

A lid of solid pure gold.

"And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold"

EXODUS 25:17

THE CHERUBIM

Two Cherubim

Of beaten gold, one at each end.

"and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be."

EXODUS 25:20

THE MAKER

Bezaleel

A craftsman filled with God's Spirit.

"And Bezaleel made the ark of shittim wood"

EXODUS 37:1

KEY VERSE

"And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony."

Exodus 25:22 (KJV)

The Ark of the Covenant Diagram

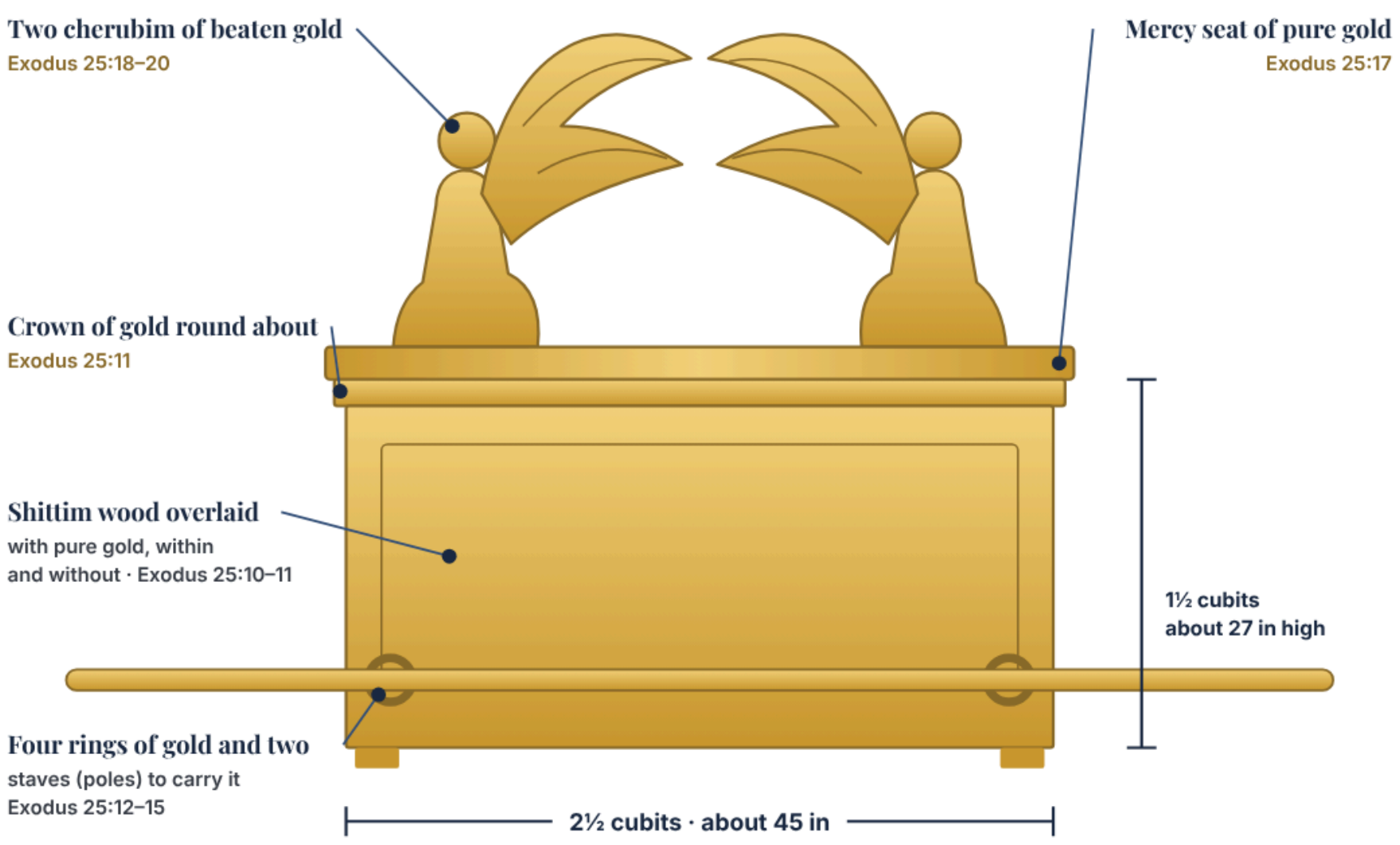
EXODUS 25:10–22 · HEBREWS 9:3–5

The Ark of the Covenant

Made by God's design at Mount Sinai

Shittim wood overlaid with pure gold · c. 1445 B.C.

THE ARK, FRONT VIEW

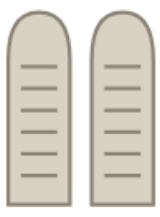


Width (front to back) also 1½ cubits, about 27 in · About 1.1 × 0.7 × 0.7 m · Exodus 25:10

WHAT WAS INSIDE

"the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant"

HEBREWS 9:4



The Tables of the Covenant

The Ten Commandments,
written by the finger of God

EXODUS 25:16 · DEUTERONOMY 10:5



The Golden Pot of Manna

An omer of the bread from
heaven, kept as a memorial

EXODUS 16:33–34



Aaron's Rod That Budded

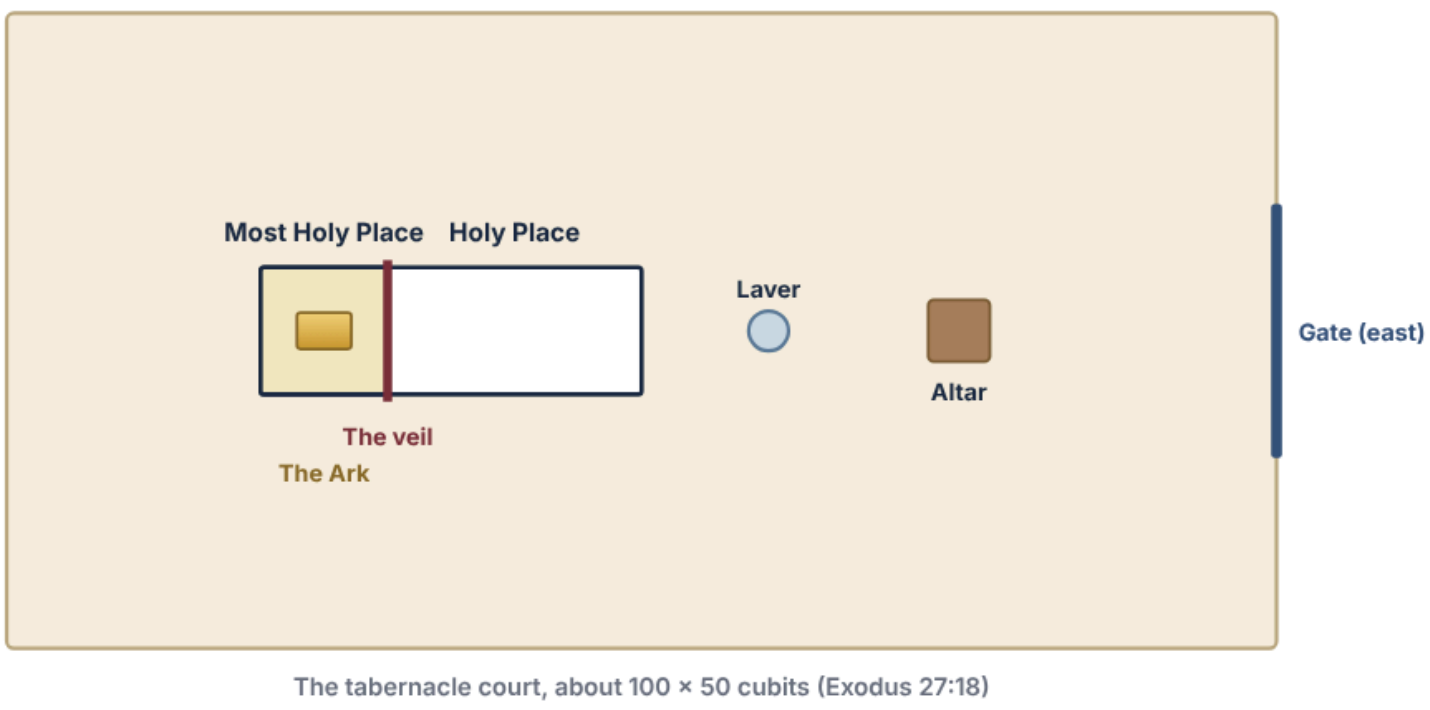
Budded, bloomed and bore
almonds in one night

NUMBERS 17:8–10

By Solomon's day only the two tables of stone remained in the Ark (1 Kings 8:9).

WHERE IT STOOD

In the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, behind the veil



The tabernacle court, about 100 × 50 cubits (Exodus 27:18)

Only the high priest went in, "once every year, not without blood" (Hebrews 9:7).

KEY VERSE

"And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony."

EXODUS 25:22 (KJV)

Drawing for study: the Bible gives the measurements but not every detail of the cherubim. A cubit is taken as about 18 inches.

BibleStudyForAll.com · Scripture quotations from the King James Version

Inside the Ark and God's Holiness

HEBREWS 9:4

What Was Inside the Ark

Hebrews 9:4 names three things kept in the Ark, each a reminder of what God had done.

THE LAW

The Tables of the Covenant

The Ten Commandments, written by God.

"And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee."

EXODUS 25:16

THE MANNA

The Golden Pot of Manna

Bread from heaven, kept for later generations.

"Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD"

EXODUS 16:33

THE ROD

Aaron's Rod That Budded

God's sign of the priest He chose.

"Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token"

NUMBERS 17:10

The book of the law was kept "in the side of the ark" (Deuteronomy 31:26). By Solomon's day "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone" (1 Kings 8:9).

A HOLY GOD

The Ark and God's Holiness

Again and again, what happened around the Ark showed that the LORD is holy and must be approached His way.

THE HIGH PRIEST

Once a Year, with Blood

Only the high priest, on the Day of Atonement.

"But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood"

HEBREWS 9:7

THE BATTLE

Not a Lucky Charm

Israel trusted the box, not the LORD.

"And the ark of God was taken"

1 SAMUEL 4:11

DAGON

The Idol Falls

The false god bowed before the true God.

"Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD."

1 SAMUEL 5:3

BETH-SHEMESH

Looking Inside

Men treated the holy things lightly.

"because they had looked into the ark of the LORD"

1 SAMUEL 6:19

UZZAH

The Wrong Way

A new cart instead of the Levites' shoulders.

"and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God."

2 SAMUEL 6:7

OBED-EDOM

The Right Way Brings Blessing

God blessed the home that kept the Ark.

"and the LORD blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."

2 SAMUEL 6:11

> *"For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order."*
>
> 1 Chronicles 15:13 (KJV)

Map of the Ark's Journey

MAP

Map of the Ark's Journey

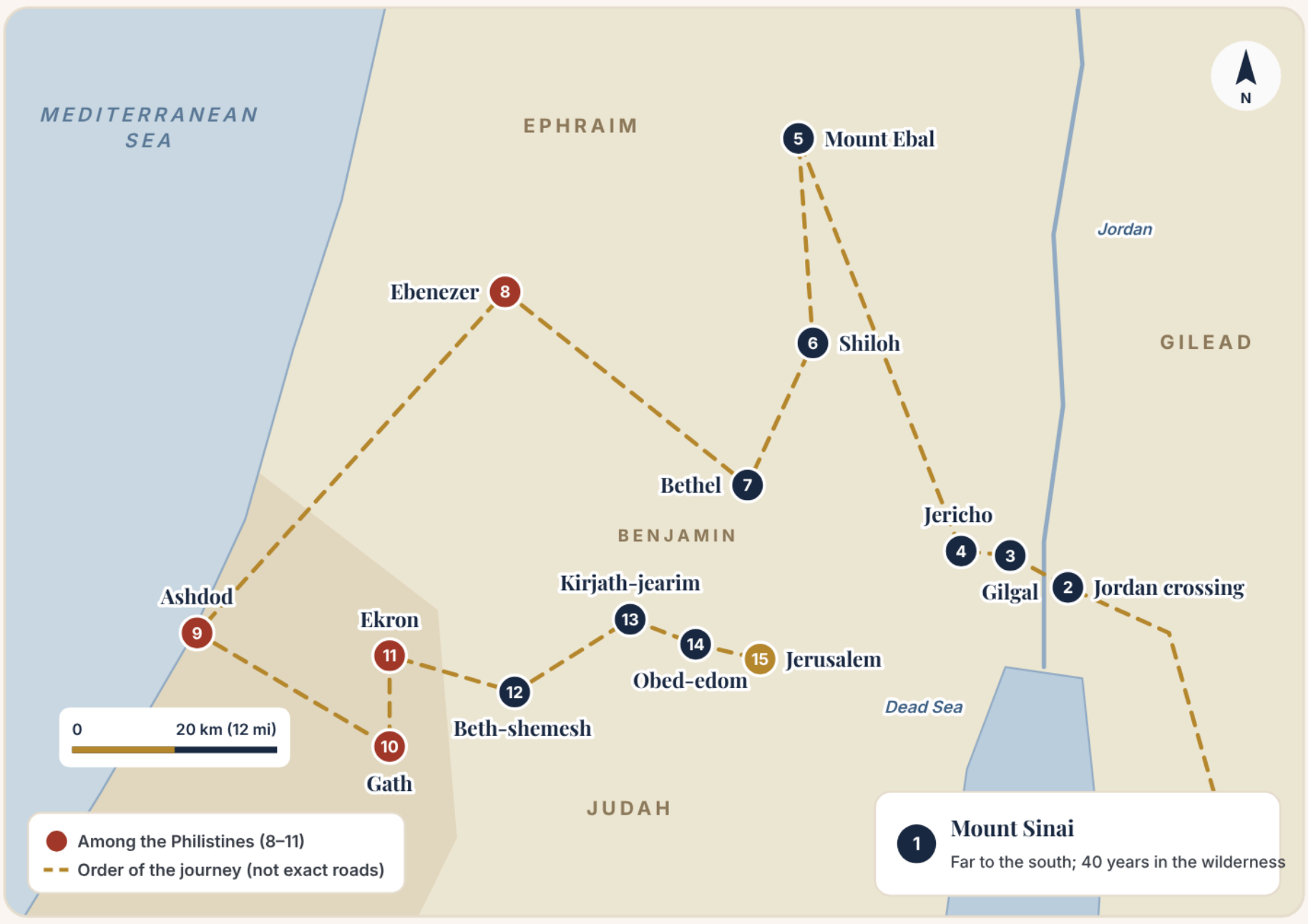
From Mount Sinai to Solomon's temple: fifteen places where the Ark rested or was carried, in the order they happened.

EXODUS 40 – 1 KINGS 8

The Journey of the Ark

From Mount Sinai to Solomon's temple in Jerusalem

c. 1445–959 B.C. · Positions approximate



THE PLACES IN ORDER

1	**Mount Sinai** Made and set in the tabernacle	Exodus 40:20–21
2	**The Jordan River** The waters stood up in a heap	Joshua 3:17
3	**Gilgal** Israel's first camp in Canaan	Joshua 4:19
4	**Jericho** Carried around the walls	Joshua 6:11
5	**Mount Ebal** The law read to all Israel	Joshua 8:33
6	**Shiloh** The tabernacle set up	Joshua 18:1
7	**Bethel** The Ark there for a time	Judges 20:27
8	**Ebenezer** Taken by the Philistines	1 Samuel 4:11
9	**Ashdod** Dagon fell on his face	1 Samuel 5:3
10	**Gath** The city struck	1 Samuel 5:9
11	**Ekron** Sent away again	1 Samuel 5:10
12	**Beth-shemesh** Returned on a new cart	1 Samuel 6:12
13	**Kirjath-jearim** In Abinadab's house	1 Samuel 7:1
14	**House of Obed-edom** Three months of blessing	2 Samuel 6:11
15	**Jerusalem** Brought in by David, then into the temple	1 Kings 8:6

"Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan."

JOSHUA 3:11

Ebenezer and the house of Obed-edom cannot be located with certainty; positions are approximate.

BibleStudyForAll.com · Scripture quotations from the King James Version

Positions are approximate; the dashed line follows the order of the places, not exact roads.

1
Mount Sinai
Made and set in the tabernacle
EXODUS 40:20–21

2
The Jordan River
The waters stood up in a heap
JOSHUA 3:17

3
Gilgal
Israel's first camp in Canaan
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Brought in by David, then into the temple
1 KINGS 8:6

The Ark Points to Jesus

THE NEW TESTAMENT

How the Ark Points to Jesus

Hebrews calls the tabernacle “a figure for the time then present” (Hebrews 9:9). Each part of the Ark finds its meaning in Christ.

The Ark	Fulfilled in Christ
Blood sprinkled on the mercy seat LEVITICUS 16:15	**“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood”** ROMANS 3:25
The tables of the law kept inside DEUTERONOMY 10:5	**“I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”** MATTHEW 5:17
The golden pot of manna EXODUS 16:33	**“I am the bread of life”** JOHN 6:35
Aaron’s rod, dead wood that budded NUMBERS 17:8	**“Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”** HEBREWS 5:10
The veil that hid the Ark EXODUS 26:33	**“the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom”** MATTHEW 27:51
A cherub at each end of the mercy seat EXODUS 25:19	**“two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.”** JOHN 20:12

> *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*
>
> Hebrews 4:16 (KJV)

FOR TODAY

What the Ark Teaches Us Today

The Ark is gone, but the God who met His people there has not changed.

1. **God Wants to Be Near**
   He made a way to dwell with His people.
   “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”
   JAMES 4:8
2. **Take God Seriously**
   His holiness has not changed.
   “For our God is a consuming fire.”
   HEBREWS 12:29
3. **Obey His Way**
   Good intentions are not enough.
   “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice”
   1 SAMUEL 15:22
4. **Trust the LORD, Not Objects**
   Israel brought the Ark but left the LORD.
   “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”
   PSALM 20:7
5. **Keep His Word in Your Heart**
   The law in the Ark; the Word in us.
   “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”
   PSALM 119:11
6. **Come Boldly Through Jesus**
   The way into God’s presence is open.
   “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus”
   HEBREWS 10:19

KEY THEMES

Six Truths the Ark Teaches

The Ark of the Covenant teaches six truths about God and His people that run through the whole Bible.

1. **God Dwells with His People**
   The LORD chose to live among Israel.
   “And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”
   EXODUS 25:8
2. **God Is Holy**
   His presence is not to be taken lightly.
   “Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?”
   1 SAMUEL 6:20
3. **His Word Is at the Center**
   The tables of the law lay inside the Ark.
   “and put the tables in the ark which I had made”
   DEUTERONOMY 10:5
4. **Mercy Covers the Law**
   The mercy seat sat above the broken law.
   “And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark”
   EXODUS 25:21
5. **He Goes Before Us**
   The Ark led Israel into the Promised Land.
   “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.”
   JOSHUA 3:11
6. **Fulfilled in Christ**
   Jesus is our mercy seat.
   “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood”
   ROMANS 3:25