

## **Advent Theme: Boxes that Hold Great Treasures**

### **Text: Exodus 25:10-22 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup>“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. <sup>11</sup>Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. <sup>14</sup>Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. <sup>15</sup>The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. <sup>16</sup>Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. <sup>17</sup>“Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide <sup>18</sup>And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. <sup>19</sup>Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. <sup>20</sup>The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. <sup>21</sup>Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. <sup>22</sup>There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

### ***Theme: An Ornate Box that Contained the Treasures of the Wilderness***

It is amusing when small children receive a Christmas present because they often quickly toss the present and begin to play with the box. For them the box is more precious than what is inside. The box, that we will be looking at this evening, was a very ornate box, whose contents didn't seem to be very special at all. This was an ornate box that held the treasures of the wilderness.

#### **I. What was the ark of the covenant like?**

Our text describes a rather large chest. It was about 3 ½ feet long, and both the width and the depth were 2 ½ feet. I measured and found that it is about the size of a small desk that I have in my home. The ark was made of wood, and was overlaid with pure gold, both on the inside and the outside. It also had four gold rings through which a pole was inserted. The pole was made of wood and was also plated with gold. The poles were never to be removed from the rings. The cover for the ark was the most valuable part. It was called the “Atonement Cover” (also known as the mercy seat). It was made of pure gold and had two golden angels which faced each other. At the price of gold today, can you imagine what the ark of the covenant would be worth?

But the things that were placed in the ark were nothing spectacular. It had the two stone tablets, which contained the 10 Commandments. You might say that these items were the treasures of the wilderness. There was nothing else there. I saw a picture of Mount Sinai recently, and it is not impressive at all. It looks like a barren rock in the middle of nowhere. The land all around it is a desert wasteland. It's no wonder that the people kept complaining to Moses that he brought them to that desolate place. Near the ark God told Moses to place some manna from the wilderness, Aaron's staff, and a copy of the Book of the Law, which might have been the book of Deuteronomy.

The ark was placed in the Holy of Holies. The tabernacle was divided into two parts, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place contained the menorah, a table with bread, and an altar that

burned incense. Every day a priest would change the bread and light the menorah and the incense. That is what Zechariah was doing when an angel appeared to him and told him that his wife would have a son. There was a large curtain that separated this part of the tabernacle from the Holy of Holies where the ark was kept. God told Moses that He would meet with him there to give His laws, but after that time the only person who would be allowed to enter this part of the temple would be the high priest. He would only be able to enter it on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day he would sprinkle blood over the Atonement Cover to atone for his sins and then sprinkle another bowl of blood to atone for the sins of the people.

There were times when the ark was not in the tabernacle. As Israel journeyed through the wilderness, it was kept at a three days journey before the people. (Nu 10:33) When Israel entered the promised land, it went before the people. When the feet of the priests, who carried it, touched the Jordan River, the water was parted. When Israel conquered Jericho, God told them to march around the city with the ark.

The ark was kept in a few different places. The tabernacle, which Moses built, was a tent. For several years the tabernacle was in Shiloh, which is where God called Samuel. When the ark was captured by the Philistines, the daughter-in-law of the High Priest Eli named her newborn son Ichabod, which means “no glory” because the glory of the Lord had departed Israel. (1 Sa 4:22) It was eventually returned after it brought hardship on the Philistines. When David was king, he moved the tabernacle to Jerusalem. Solomon built the temple for the ark. When the temple was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC, the ark was lost. There are several theories about what happened to it, including that it ended up in Africa or even Ireland or that the copper scroll that was found at Qumran is really a map that tells how to find the ark, but none of them are true. To this day, however, the cabinet in which the Torah is kept in each Jewish synagogue is called the “Aron Kadesh,” which means “The ark of glory.” It is always on the wall that faces Jerusalem.

## II. What was the purpose of the ark?

Here we see how this also pointed to Jesus and His redemption for us.

**It was the place where God promised to meet with His people.** Israel’s worship centered around the ark. God told Moses, “There I will meet with you.” God promised that He was in this place for them. From that place He would hear their prayers. From that place He would bless His people and speak to Moses. That ornate box was the place where Israel could be sure that God promised to be there for them.

In Jesus Christ God has come to be with us. He is Immanuel, which means “God with us.” John writes in the first chapter of His Gospel, “*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:14) When the ark of the covenant left Israel, it was said that the glory of the Lord left for a time. In the person of Jesus Christ, God’s glory has come to us. God no longer promises to meet with us at a box but in the flesh of a man. That verse from John’s Gospel about Jesus incarnation alludes to the tabernacle of the Old Testament. Literally it says, “*The Word became flesh and tented among us.*” God has met with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

He still meets with us in the person of Jesus Christ. Our prayers are accepted when we pray in Jesus name. Our worship is conducted in Jesus' name. In the sacrament of Holy Communion our Lord gives us His body and His blood as the assurance of the new covenant.

**The ark was also the place where atonement was made for the sins of the people.** As I said earlier, blood was sprinkled over the atonement cover on the Day of Atonement to reconcile the people with God. All of their sins were atoned for, and they were made righteous and pure by the forgiveness of their sins. In 1 John 2:2 John writes that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for all of our sins. When He gave His life on the cross, he paid for every one of them. In His Supper He gives us the assurance that He gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of my sins. The Gospels tells us that when He died on the cross, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom as a sign that all of our sins have been atone for in full.

**The ark also protected God's people.** There were a few times when God told Israel to follow the ark in battle. As long as they had the ark, the people knew that God was with them and that He would protect them. Jesus has told us that He is with us always to the end of the age. He has also ascended to the right hand of the Father where He rules all things for the good of His people and where He is surrounded by those angels who protect us and who praise Him for His salvation for us.

Where is the ark now? Revelation 11:18-19 say that it will be revealed again at the end of the world when Jesus returns. That ornate box pointed to Him. It showed Israel that they could always count on God. It was the assurance of both God's grace and His faithfulness. Our Lord Jesus has come and will come again as the ultimately bearer of God's grace and truth because He is greater than an ornate box where God promised His presence. His is God with us, God in the flesh, for our salvation.

Amen.

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