

BFF326 The Ark of the Testimony

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I am well. You and I, both have our housing challenges. I just finished my drain line project going to the street, which has been about three to four months in the process. You've been wrestling with a wet basement, is that correct?

Scott: Yes, sir, I have. We're basically going to rebuild our basement. Good times. I did a drain many years ago. I spent the summer digging a trench around the side of my house. Apparently, that helped for a good long while, but now there's other problems. The wall might cave in if we don't take care of it...the fun of home ownership.

Steve: At least our episode today is not about Jericho.

Steve: If someone comes down to your basement and starts blowing trumpets really loud, if I was you, I'd get out of there.

Scott: Definitely.

Steve: Today, we're going to talk about the Ark of the Testimony.

Let's pray. Father, this is such an important part of the Bible. The Ark is mentioned over 200 times in the Bible. It's the centerpiece of all that we've been talking about of the tabernacle. It's in the Holy of Holies. This is the place where Aaron was only allowed to enter once a year.

Now we're getting a peak into it ourselves, and I pray that as we look at it, as we consider it, that You'll wash all of us in a special way in the blood of Jesus, and just as the priests had to wash their feet in the water, we wash our feet by faith as we enter into this holy place. Give us ears to hear what You're saying to us, and help us to comprehend what we need to comprehend. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: There's a lot of wonderful scripture for us today. If you are a note taker, just drink in the scripture and read the transcript.

Exodus 25:1-9, "Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, 'Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me, from every man whose heart moves him, you shall raise My contribution. This is the contribution which you are to raise from them. Gold, silver, and bronze, blue, purple, and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

"Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I'm going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it."

We've studied each of these items; the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, the acacia wood, the gold, etc.

The children of Israel were to make this voluntary contribution for the materials which were to be crafted by two anointed men that God had set apart, Oholiab and Bezalel. Oholiab means "the tent of His Father" or "His Father's tent." Bezalel means "shadow of God." These names are significant because we're talking about the tabernacle where God lived, it was the Father's tent and very special.

Exodus 25:10–16, "They shall construct an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it.

"You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark with them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it. You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you." This is pretty straightforward.

Now, I don't know if you've noticed this, but when Moses is giving the instructions on how to build the tabernacle, from the courtyard and the gates all the way into the Holy of Holies, He starts with the inside, the Ark, and then he works out from there. I did the opposite. I started with the gate and the courtyard and then we went into the altar of sacrifice, the basin, through the curtain into the Holy place, where we encountered the bread of the Presence, and the golden lampstands. God however began on the inside and worked out.

Have you ever been to the Grand Canyon, Scott?

Scott: I saw it from an airplane above, but I've never been to it.

Steve: Our had a wonderful opportunity to travel with me. We began by staying at a hotel in St. George's, Utah. The first day, we visited Mount Zion, which was beautiful. Then we went to Bryce Canyon. Then the third day, we drove around from the North Rim all the way to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

It seemed like it was a really good order to do it, because as wonderful as Mount Zion was, and Bryce Canyon, once you see the Grand Canyon, everything else pales in comparison.

We met people who had been to the Grand Canyon first when we were at Mount Zion, and they looked at us and they said, "Is this it?" I said, "This is it." They had seen such majesty, grandeur, for it is a Grand Canyon.

Perhaps, that's why we worked from the outside in, because once you start appreciating the Ark, everything else becomes smaller and less significant. This Ark is made of similar materials to what we read about in the table that held the showbread, that bread of his Presence. It was acacia wood. It was overlaid with gold.

When I think of the Ark in scripture, I think of the time that the Ark was taken to the battle lines with Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was an old man, and Samuel was just a child at the time.

The Philistines captured the Ark and when word reached Eli, he fell off his seat or chair and died. While the Ark is in the five cities of the Philistines, it was wreaking havoc, so they sent it back.

I remember David's experiences with the Ark, when he was going to bring it up to Jerusalem. They had it on a new cart, and Uzzah touched it when the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah died. It was a turning point in David's life. David and his friends had placed it on a new cart, when scripture clearly teaches "You shall put the poles into the rings and the sides of the ark, the poles shall remain in the rings of the ark."

I have wondered why David did not think that he needed to use these poles to carry the Ark instead using a new cart, which proved deadly for Uzzah? I have come up with three possibilities. Maybe he had been running these military campaigns for such a long time that he thought this was the best way to move stuff. Maybe he didn't search the scriptures. Maybe he didn't think he needed to do that. He was doing the right thing, his heart was in the right place. "We need to get this Ark into Jerusalem."

Or maybe he was trying to improve on God's plan and thought, "A bunch of guys carrying this thing, I can do better. I can put it on a cart." I don't know, but I've done all three of those things. I've done stuff without thinking, I've done stuff without searching the scriptures, and I have done stuff where I tried to improve on the scriptures, and all three of them proved costly.

I don't know, I'm just saying that it struck me that these poles were in the rings of the Ark and they were not to be taken out. The ark itself comes from the Hebrew word "aron," which is used 202 times in the Bible. It means "a chest" or "a box."

There were several times this word was used. If you remember when the Kings were raising money to remodel the temple and they put a chest or a box by the entrance with a hole bored into the top of it where the people would deposit money.

It was a chest for collecting stuff, but it's also an ark. Most of the times in the Bible it's translated "ark." It does have some root words that mean "to gather," which makes sense because it's a chest that gathers things.

Sixteen times in the Bible when the word "ark" is used, and especially where we're studying Exodus, it's not called the ark, it is referred to as the Ark of the Testimony. The word for testimony is "edut" and the root word is "ed." It means "to admonish, to charge, to solemnly testify, to give warning, to witness."

I wondered why it's called the Ark of the Testimony?" The more I thought about it, I think it's pretty obvious. It's because the testimony is God's word. God's word is being put into this magnificent gold chest, or box, or ark. I did some more digging and found out that in Exodus 24, Jehovah said to Moses, "Write down these words. For in accordance with these words, I have made a Covenant with you and with Israel."

Moses was with Jehovah 40 days and 40 nights. He did not eat bread or drink water. He wrote on the tablets the words of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments. It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand that the face of Moses shined because of his speaking with God.

Another word is introduced here, "beriyth," or covenant. We have the Ark, and inside of it, we have the tablets of the testimony, which was the essence of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, written on tablets of stone.

Let me ask you just a little question. See if you can think of anything else that was in the Ark. I found two other things that were used, and one is found in Exodus 16. It says, "The house of Israel named it manna. It was like coriander seed, white. Its taste was like wafers with honey. Moses said, 'This is what Jehovah has commanded. Let an omer full of it be kept throughout your generations that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'

"Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar, put an omer full of manna in it and place it before Jehovah to be kept throughout your generations,' as Jehovah commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept." I think there may have been some manna in there.

Numbers 17, this is right after the big confrontation with Korah, or Korah's rebellion. The people were still fussing against Moses and they had a confrontation at the tent of the testimony. "Behold the rod of Aaron, for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. Moses then brought out all the rods from the presence of Jehovah to all the sons of Israel. They looked and each man took his rod.

"Jehovah said to Moses, 'Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumbings against me so that they will not die.' Thus, Moses did just as Jehovah had commanded him."

So he did. This two-and-a-half cubits by one-and-a-half cubit Ark had not only these tables of stone, it may have had a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod.? Later in Chronicles, I read where it said there was nothing in there except the stone tablets. I don't know, I'm just bringing it out there for us to consider.

I started looking to see where the words "the Ark of the Testimony" appear together in Scripture? Josiah, who was one of the wonderful kings that brought great reformation to the land of Israel. If you remember the story, was cleaning out the temple and Shaphan was given the Book of the Covenant which Hilkiah the high priest had found.

He brought it to the king who was astounded at what he read. 2 Kings 23:1, "The king sent and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him and the king went up to the house of Jehovah and with him, all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people both small

and great. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of Jehovah.

"And the king stood by the pillar and made a Covenant before Jehovah to walk after Jehovah and to keep His Commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul to perform the words of this Covenant that were written in this book and all the people joined in the Covenant."

What a day. What a king. He did it. He was not just saying, "Oh, I'm pro-God here, and I'm pro-Bible." He says, "No, I am going to make a Covenant with you, before you, before God," and he read the book and he did it. There's a couple guys in the Bible that impress me. Josiah is one of them.

What's the application for us today? Jeremiah 31-33, which is quoted in Hebrews 8 and Hebrews 10. "'The days are coming,' declares Jehovah, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares Jehovah.

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah. I will put My law within them. On their heart, I will write it, and I will be their God and they shall be My people."

This just takes it so much deeper, because when I read about the Ark, I'm in awe. This is the place that only the high priest went in once a year. And these commandments have been written by God's finger on tablets of stone, and is put right in the centerpiece of this tabernacle. This is a holy place. This is a holy book.

God takes it so much deeper in Jeremiah, when He says, "Now I'm going to put my law on their heart, and I will write it and I will be their God and they shall be My people." He's moving back towards the original garden of God in Genesis when we were His people, He was our God.

We won't need to have laws because they will be written right inside of us, the very fiber of our being. In scripture, the heart is the real man. That's why David was such a significant player because God looked on his heart. He saw what was on his heart. Proverbs 7 beautiful scripture, "My son, keep My words, treasure My commandments within you." See? "Keep my commandments, and live, and My teaching as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers. Write them on the tablet of your heart."

This is where God's word benefits us, not sitting in this magnificent gold Ark, but written with the finger of God on our heart. Paul uses similar language in 2 Corinthians 3. "You are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts."

I'm going to read one more passage, and then we're going to pray. This passage is very significant to me. I had attended a conference, a retreat while at Gordon-Conwell seminary. I could tell that everybody were being moved upon by God.

I felt like a bump on the log. I was not getting it. I went back to school and began searching my heart, and asking God if there was something that was keeping me from benefiting from the obvious presence of God at this retreat.

I talked to my professor, Dr. Christie Wilson, and said, "What do you think?" He recommended I read a sermon by Charles Finney about breaking up the fallow ground, the ground that sits there all winter, and needs plows to come through, and break it up. It's a reference to a Hosea 10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you."

I realized that my problem was I had a hard heart. It was keeping me from sensing what God was doing. I used to take time every morning, over and over for days and weeks. I would start each day by saying, "God, give me a heart of flesh. Take out the stony stuff in my heart, and give me a heart that's soft and susceptible to the movings of your spirit."

This passage in Ezekiel 36:24-27 was something that was very, very important to me. I still love it. God says, "I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will be careful to observe my ordinances."

If I can make a broad application, the Ark is the heart of the tabernacle, and within this Ark is the Word of God. It's a picture of us that we need to have God's word written on hearts of flesh. Not hearts of stone, not a stony heart, no hard heart that God has to etch them with laser or something.

We want to have soft hearts and fleshy hearts, and ask God to write His word on our heart, and thus fulfill what He said He was going to do in Jeremiah 31, and in Hebrews 8, and in Hebrews 10. This is the new covenant, this is where we're operating today, but the new covenant starts within, not without. It starts in our hearts, and it starts with His word on our hearts. Amen.

Father, thank You for this picture into this Holy of Holy places with the Ark and within the Ark your work, and within us, a place where you have chosen to live in our hearts by faith. I pray that You will have free course, free reign in our hearts, so we'll have fleshy hearts and not stony hearts. You'll take out the heart of stone, give us a heart of flesh, and that You'll write with the finger of God Your words on our heart, so that

we can be walking in the reality, in the substance of the new covenant You said was going to happen in our day.

Thank You for this covenant. Thank You that You can and do put Your laws on our heart, You write it on our heart, You put Your laws within us. Thank You for being our God, and thank You for making us Your people. We worship You, encourage us all, each one of us today in Jesus name. Amen.

Scott: That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.