

ADULT BIBLE LECTURE GUIDE

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

GOD'S THRONE ON EARTH



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A. Introductory Discussion: Setting the Stage (5-7 Minutes)

Goal: Transition from the common cultural image of the Ark (e.g., *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) to its profound theological reality as the focal point of the Old Covenant.

Initial Questions for the Class:

1. **God’s Address:** What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase, "God dwells with His people"? How does a physical object, like a golden box, complicate or clarify that concept?
2. **Access & Distance:** The Ark was the holiest object in Israel, kept behind a thick curtain. What does this immediate distance tell us about the nature of God's holiness versus man's sinfulness?
3. **Thesis Question:** Does the Ark of the Covenant remain with us today—and if so, what would that mean for our relationship with God?

I. The Divine Blueprint – The 'arōn and God's Dwelling

 **Key Scripture: Exodus 25:10–22**

Exodus 25:21–22: “You shall put the **mercy seat** on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the **testimony** that I will give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the **mercy seat** (*kappōret*), from between the two **cherubim** (*kěrûbîm*) that are on the **ark** ('arōn) of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.”

◆ **Historiography & Theology: The Ark’s Construction**

- **The Name:** The Hebrew word for Ark is 'arōn (ארון), simply meaning "chest" or "box." This humble name contrasts sharply with its function as the seat of God's presence.
- **Materials: The Union of Two Natures**
 - **Acacia Wood (Earthly):** Durable, native to the Sinai wilderness. It represents the incorruptible *humanity* drawn from the earth.
 - **Pure Gold (Divine):** Refined, perfect, symbolizing the glory and unapproachable

divinity of God.

- **Theological Significance:** The combination of wood and gold, inside and out, foreshadows the eventual perfect union of humanity and divinity in a single person.
- **The Lid – The Mercy Seat (kappōret):** Made of **pure gold** and overshadowed by two winged **kěrûbîm** (cherubim). The Hebrew term **kappōret** (כַּפֹּרֶת) literally means "place of covering" and is directly related to the concept of atonement (**kippur**). It is the sacred intersection where God meets man.

Critical Thinking Question 1 (Guided Discussion)

Why do you think God required both the **earthly, perishable wood** and the **refined, heavenly gold** in one object? What might that combination imply about God's requirements for fellowship?

Answer Insight:

The Ark's materials unite the earthly (acacia) and the divine (gold), symbolizing God's desire for Immanence (dwelling with us) while stressing His Transcendence (holiness). It suggests that true fellowship requires something perfectly human and perfectly divine—a harmony impossible for man to achieve on his own.

II. The Ark's Sacred Contents – The Covenant's Witnesses

The contents of the Ark, detailed in Hebrews 9:4 and Old Testament narratives, represent three distinct ways Israel failed to maintain the covenant, yet three distinct ways God continually provided.

Item	Covenant Failure Addressed	Theological Significance
 The Tablets of the Law	Israel's <i>Moral Rebellion</i> (Golden Calf, breaking the law)	God's perfect standard and righteous judgment.
 Pot of Manna	Israel's <i>Provisionary Rebellion</i> (grumbling, desire for meat)	God's sustaining life and daily provision (Ex 16:33).
 Aaron's Rod that Budded	Israel's <i>Authority Rebellion</i> (Korah's challenge to priesthood)	God's exclusive, ordained authority and life from death (Num 17:10).

Critical Thinking Question 2 (Guided Discussion)

The Law (Judgment) was held **inside** the Ark, and the Mercy Seat (Forgiveness) was held **above** it. Why was the Mercy Seat *above* the Law, not beside it or beneath it?

Answer Insight:

The placement is critical to typology: Mercy covers Judgment. The Law inside testified to guilt and the breach of the covenant, demanding justice. The blood on the kappōret testified to forgiveness, satisfying that justice. God's justice and mercy meet at the same point.

III. The Ark's Function – The Nexus of Atonement

1 God's Throne and Footstool

The Ark was God's mobile throne: the visible location for an invisible King.

- **Psalm 99:1, 5:** "The Lord reigns... He dwells between the cherubim... Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His **footstool** (*hădōm*)."
- **Isaiah 37:16:** "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the **cherubim**..."

2 The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

The Ark was essential to Israel's corporate forgiveness.

- **Leviticus 16:14–15:** On **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement), the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. He sprinkled the blood of the bull and the goat seven times **upon the kappōret**.
- **Theology of Kippūr:** The root word **KPR** (כָּפַר) means "to cover, to make expiation." The act of sprinkling blood over the divine Law satisfied the demands of that Law for another year. It was a yearly reminder that sin cannot be removed; it must be covered.

IV. The Reverence and Historiography of the Ark in Motion

♦ Rules of Engagement (Numbers 4:5–6, 15)

- **Handling:** Only the **Kohathite** family of the Levites could carry it, never touching the Ark itself—only the poles.
- **Concealment:** It was always covered by the thick inner **veil** (**katapetasma**) and an outer layer of blue cloth when traveling, emphasizing its inherent holiness and the mortal danger of access.

♦ Historical Case Studies (Historiography)

Event	Scripture Reference	Theological Lesson
Crossing the Jordan	Joshua 3	The Presence makes the

		impossible path possible.
The Battle of Jericho	Joshua 6	The Ark is a sign of God's Sovereignty , not a magical charm.
Capture by the Philistines	1 Samuel 4–6	God's power cannot be contained. He demonstrates victory over Dagon and judges His own (Uzzah).

V. The Silence of the Ark – Its Disappearance and Mystery

The Ark's physical journey ends, preparing the people for a new, non-physical dwelling.

- **Last Explicit Mention:** Solomon's Temple dedication, where it was placed in the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 8:9).
- **Disappearance:** It was likely carried off or hidden during the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC.
- **The Theological Void:** The Second Temple (built after the Exile) had no Ark. Its place in the Holy of Holies was empty. This forced Israel to confront the question: *If there is no Mercy Seat, how can we be atoned for?*

Key Scripture: Jeremiah 3:16–17

"And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, declares the Lord, they shall no longer say, 'The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.' It shall **not come to mind** or be remembered or missed; **nor shall another one be made**. At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord."

Theological Implication: God allowed the Ark to disappear because it was never meant to be the final dwelling. Its loss prepared hearts for the **New Covenant**—a covenant where God's Law would be written not on stone, but on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31–33), and where the Throne of God would not be limited to a box, but would extend to a rebuilt, sanctified people (Jerusalem).

VI. The Great Revelation – The Ark as a Type of Christ

The New Testament reveals that the Ark was a **type** (shadow) of Jesus Christ, the **antitype** (fulfillment).

Key Scripture: Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5

Romans 3:25 (Greek): “God presented Christ as a propitiation (hilastērion) through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness...”

Hebrews 9:5 (Greek): “Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat (hilastērion).”

The Greek word **hilastērion** is used both for the **Mercy Seat** (Old Covenant) and for **Jesus Christ** (New Covenant). Jesus is the *place* where God's wrath against sin is satisfied.

Ark Component (Type)	Fulfillment in Christ (Antitype)	Key Scripture Connection
Acacia Wood & Gold	Jesus's Humanity (Wood) and Divinity (Gold) in one person.	Colossians 2:9
Tablets of the Law (Inside)	He fulfilled the Law (the Law was written on His heart).	Matthew 5:17, Hebrews 8:10
Pot of Manna	He is the Bread of Life (The ultimate provision).	John 6:35
Aaron's Rod that Budded	He is the Resurrected High Priest (Life conquering death).	Hebrews 7:24, Romans 8:34
The Mercy Seat (kappōret)	He is the Propitiation (hilastērion) . His blood covers sin.	Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2

VII. Final Reflection – The Torn Veil and Open Access

Matthew 27:51: “And behold, the **veil** (*katapetasma*) of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom...”

The **katapetasma** (the thick, dividing curtain) that guarded the Ark's space was torn at the moment of Christ's death. This was a physical declaration that the ultimate **hilastērion**—Jesus—had made the final atonement. The way to the Holy of Holies is now

open.

Critical Thinking Question 6 (Closing Discussion)

If the Ark represented the unapproachable holiness of God and the need for a yearly covering, what does Christ's fulfillment of the Ark change about how we approach God in prayer, worship, and daily life?

Answer Insight:

We approach with reverent boldness (Hebrews 4:16). The Holy of Holies is now open; access is no longer restricted to a physical place or a single priest. What was once behind a veil now lives within us by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), making every believer a mobile "Ark of the New Covenant."

 **Key Takeaway: The Ark of the Covenant was not lost — it was fulfilled. Its wood, gold, contents, and mercy seat all whisper the same truth: God has chosen to dwell among us, not in a box, but in a Body.**