INTRODUCTION

Very little is known about the box covered in gold whose dimensions were about 3 feet 9 inches long, by 2 feet 3 inches wide and high. This box was the most important piece of furniture in all Jewish culture. It was the center of all Jewish living and apart from it the Jews were no different than any of the nations of Canaan. This box was known as the Ark of the Covenant. Understanding the significance of the Ark helps us to understand the role that God’s presence played in the nation of Israel and how His presence can affect and transform our lives today. Today we don’t gather around a box covered in gold to worship the Lord, for the Ark of the Covenant is no longer something that is to be sought after but is now living and breathing within the heart of every believer. For Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Ark of the Covenant in the flesh.

“Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table of incense, and the table of showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.” Hebrews 9:1-5

***(See image #1)

I. THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

A. God manifested Himself as being a God of relationship and has revealed this truth throughout all of human history by initiating communion and intimacy with mankind. The Lord made it very clear to Moses and to the people of Israel that His purpose in having the Tabernacle of Meeting constructed and the Ark of the Covenant was to fellowship with man.

“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them... 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. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.” Exodus 25:8, 21-22
B. The center of the Israeli camp was the Tabernacle of Meeting which hosted the Ark of the Covenant. Each of the 12 tribes were divided into four sections surrounding the Ark in the Tabernacle of Meeting. This picture deeply affected the nation of Israel signifying that God's presence was the center of all Jewish life. Without God's presence (The Ark) Israel was just like any other nation.

*** (See image #2).

“And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”

Numbers 1:51-53

C. The Ark contained three important items that each testified to the ever active and life giving presence of God among His people.

1. The Golden Pot of Manna: This symbolized God's daily provision of spiritual bread for His people. It symbolized man's urgent need to live by God's word. It symbolized food that came from fellowshipping with God. God's word is to be more important to our lives than physical food! (Ex. 16:12-19, 32, Jn. 6:32, 48-50)

2. Aaron's Staff that Budded: It symbolized the fruitful life by abiding in Christ and His word. This was ultimately fulfilled in Christ's resurrection from the dead. He was and is the only approved Human Being that was acceptable before a Holy God. (Num. 17:1-10, Isa. 11:1, 53:2, Jn. 15:1-8)

3. The 2 Tablets of Stone on which the 10 Commandments were written on: Symbolizing God's word, and laws which Israel was to live by in order to live holy before a Holy God (Ex. 25:16, 31:18, Dt. 10:2)

II. HOW THE ARK BENEFITED GOD'S PEOPLE

A. It was the place where God's MERCY was extended to His people (Heb. 4:16).

“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.”

Exodus 25:21
“He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.” Leviticus 16:14-15

“Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him.” Numbers 7:89

B. It was the place from where God SPOKE and ENCOUNTERED His people.

“And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.” Exodus 25:22

C. It was the place from where God REVEALED Himself.

“But Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod.” 1 Samuel 2:18

“And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, “Here I am!” ... (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.” 1 Samuel 3:2-4, 7, 21

D. It was the place from where God would give DIRECTION for His people. The Cloud of Glory would appear as fire over the Ark. It would lift and move when it was time for God’s people to journey on.

“Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.” Exodus 40:36-38
E. It was the place from where God gave MILITARY VICTORY over all their enemies. This symbolized spiritual warfare and victory over all the demonic forces.

“So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them. The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets... So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. “ Joshua 6:8-9, 20

III. THE PRIESTHOOD’S CHARGE OVER THE ARK

A. The Levites were given the charge of carrying the Ark during Israel's wilderness journeys. It was their responsibility to make sure the ark was properly covered and secured while the Israel camp followed the Glory Cloud to the new resting place. Bearing the Ark on their shoulders symbolized God's Government and rule over His people.

*** (See image #3)

“At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day.” Deuteronomy 10:8

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

B. The Priests were to STAND before the Lord and MINISTER to Him from before the veil. The Table of Incense continually burned with fiery coals that released perpetual incense into the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The veil was saturated with the perpetual smell of the burning incense before the Holy of Holies and the ark of the Covenant. This symbolized the continual Prayers and Worship of God's people MINISTERING before Him day and night, 24/7.

“And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.” Exodus 30:6-8
“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Revelation 5:8

“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.” Revelation 8:3-5

C. Once a year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest was to enter into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. Once there, he was to take a censure with burning coals from the Altar of Incense and burn incense before the mercy seat, filling the Holy of Holies with a cloud of incense. He would apply blood on the Mercy Seat to ATONE (cover) the sins on the nation. 2000 years ago Jesus fulfilled the blood being applied on the mercy seat.

“Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering...Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die. He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanliness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.” Leviticus 16:3, 12-16

“...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.” Romans 3:24-25

“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption... how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” Hebrews 9:12, 14