

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-12-16—ARK OF COVENANTS & TESTIMONIES

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The central piece of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, was the Ark of the Covenant, sometimes referred to as the Ark of the Testimony. God commanded its construction when He gave instructions for building the Tabernacle:

EXODUS 25:10 “And they shall **make an ark of acacia wood [Heb. shittah (from its scourging thorns)]**; two and a half cubits *shall be* its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height.

This was dimensionally about 4.3 x 2.5 x 2.5 feet (1.3 x 0.8 x 0.8 meters) and entirely covered in gold. Acacia trees are full of thorns but the wood has some interesting characteristics including being very durable as well as water and scratch resistant. Originally, Ark was a repository for three items. The first was a sample of manna:

EXODUS 16:26, 29-34 “**Six days you shall gather it [the manna], but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.**” ... 29 “See! For **the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days.** Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. 31 And the house of Israel called its name **Manna**. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers *made* with honey. 32 Then Moses said, “This *is* the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘**Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.**’ “ 33 And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations.” 34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so **Aaron laid it up before the [Ark of the] Testimony**, to be kept.

The second item in the Ark was of equal importance:

EXODUS 25:16, 21-22 “And **you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you.** ... 21 “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.** 22 “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.

When God had the Israelites construct the Ark, He intended it to contain, along with the manna, The Testimony. What exactly was The Testimony?

EXODUS 31:18 And when He [*the LORD*] had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses **two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone**, written with the finger of God.

Obviously, the two tablets are the stones upon which God wrote the Ten Commandments:

EXODUS 34:27-28 Then the LORD said to Moses, **“Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”** 28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And **He [the LORD] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.**

The two tablets represented the COVENANT God established with the Israelites:

DEUTERONOMY 9:9-11 “When I [Moses] went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, **the tablets of the covenant** which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. 10 “Then the LORD delivered to me two tablets of stone **written with the finger of God**, and on them *were* all the words which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. 11 “And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, **that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.**

While the manna reminded the Israelites that God fed them in the wilderness, it was much more than that:

EXODUS 31:12-17 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 13 “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely **My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you** throughout your generations, **that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.** 14 ‘You shall keep **the Sabbath**, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 ‘Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. 16 ‘Therefore **the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath**, to observe **the Sabbath** throughout their generations **as a perpetual covenant.** 17 **‘It is a sign [rowth = evidence] between Me and the children of Israel** forever; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ ”

The manna established the seventh day of the week (God had not yet discussed His holydays). Clearly, manna was a reminder of several of things, but of primary importance was the KEEPING of Sabbaths. That is why verse 13 says, “My **Sabbaths [plural]** you shall keep, for **it [singular]** is a sign” The ‘it’ is referring to the *keeping of Sabbaths*, not the word Sabbaths. Keeping the Sabbath was a **covenant** between God and the Israelites (v16) but it was also the sign or **evidence** of that covenant.

The manna and tablets are symbols of two covenants and why it was called the Ark of the **Covenant**. But it is also called the Ark of the Testimony. From a legal perspective, testimony is a solemn attestation or declaration of the truth of an event or matter given under oath by a witness. Even though we consider a witness to be a person, physical *evidence* is also a ‘testimony’. For example, a fingerprint ‘testifies’ that someone touched an object. God even said that heaven and earth are a witness (lit. *testimony*) (Deut. 4:26).

The manna was evidence of the first six days of each week. It did not come on the seventh day because there was twice as much on the sixth day. Manna was literally

evidence or testimony for the seventh-day Sabbath because no manna appeared on that day of the week.

In similar fashion, the tablets with the Ten Commandments were called the Tablets of the Testimony (Exod. 31:18). They were evidence or a testimony of the covenant because it was WRITTEN on the stones by God Himself. But there was third item:

HEBREWS 9:4 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;

Aaron's rod that budded was not something originally intended to be in the Ark. It was a proof that God chose Aaron and his sons for the priesthood but why was it in the Ark?

NUMBERS 17:8, 10 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, **the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.** ... 10 And the LORD said to Moses, **"Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign [rowth = evidence] against the rebels,** that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die."

As in Exodus 31:17, the word *sign* can mean *evidence*. So, Aaron's rod was evidence or 'testimony' after Korah's rebellion that God chose Aaron and his sons for the priesthood. But was the selection of the priesthood also a covenant? Notice the Levitical covenant:

MALACHI 2:4-5 Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That **My covenant with Levi** may continue," Says the LORD of hosts. 5 **"My covenant was with him [Levi],** one of life and peace, And I gave them to him *that he might fear Me; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name.*

God had made a covenant with the whole tribe of Levi to minister to His tabernacle, but specifically chose Aaron and his sons from among that tribe to be priests. Believing they were just as worthy, Korah (also of the tribe of Levi) led a rebellion out of envy against Aaron and Moses. After the rebellion was put down, God proved His decision:

NUMBERS 17:5 "And it shall be *that* **the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel,** which they make against you."

God's choice was manifested by causing Aaron's rod to blossom. He later permanently gave the priesthood to Aaron's descendants through a covenant with his son Phinehas:

NUMBERS 25:11-13 **"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest,** has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. 12 "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; 13 'and **it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood,** because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.' "

So, even Aaron's rod that budded was a testimony to a covenant. But there was a fourth item with the Ark that usually goes unnoticed. It was called the Book of the Law:

DEUTERONOMY 31:9-11 So **Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests**, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. 10 And Moses commanded them, saying: "**At the end of every seven years**, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, 11 "when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, **you shall read this law before all Israel** in their hearing.

This was the book that Moses wrote of which all the Israelites swore obedience:

EXODUS 24:7 Then he [Moses] took **the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient."**

The Book of the Law or Book of the Covenant contained all the laws, statutes, precepts, and judgments spoken by God and it was kept in an interesting place:

DEUTERONOMY 31:24-26 And it came to pass, **when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book**, until they were finished, 25 That **Moses commanded the Levites**, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 26 **Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant** of the LORD your God, **that it may be there for a witness [ed = testimony]** against thee.

It was kept on the side of the Ark so it was accessible for teaching the people. It was also evidence or testimony of the covenant. So, the Ark contained items that testified of covenants with God. But what about the New Covenant? Is there a testimony of it?

HEBREWS 10:15-16 *Whereof* **the Holy Spirit also is a witness [martureo = testifies]** to us: for after that he had said before, 16 **This is the covenant that I will make** with them after those days, saith the Lord, **I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;**

The Holy Spirit is a witness or testimony of the New Covenant. But as a spiritual covenant, it is kept in a New Ark: "*you are* an epistle of Christ ... **written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.**" (2 Cor. 3:3). The Old Ark was made from the thorny acacia tree but the New Ark contains the covenant written on hearts of flesh with the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Old Ark was replaced with the New Ark—the saints of God—by a singular act of mercy under a crown of **thorns** and upon a cross of **wood!**

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>  
[sabbathreflections@gmail.com](mailto:sabbathreflections@gmail.com)