

Message Four

**The History of the Ark and the Tabernacle**

Scripture Reading: 1 Sam. 4:1—7:2

- I. Christ has gained us so that we might gain Him in order for God to be built into us and for us to be built into Him to become a corporate God-man, the reality of the church as the tabernacle of God, which is the house of the living God, the mutual abode of God and man—Phil. 3:8, 12-14; John 1:14; Rev. 21:2-3; 7:15; 1 Tim. 3:15; John 14:2, 23.**
- II. In order to enter into the reality of the Body of Christ, we must see the intrinsic significance of the Ark:**
  - A. The Ark typifies Christ as the presence of the Triune God with His people for the carrying out of His economy to establish His kingdom on earth—Matt. 1:23.
  - B. The Ark was the center and content of the tabernacle, signifying Christ as the center and content of the church; the Ark being the first item mentioned in the vision of the tabernacle indicates that Christ occupies the place of preeminence in the church—Exo. 25:22; Col. 1:17b, 18b:
    1. The Ark contained the tablets of the law as the testimony of God, the expression and revelation of who God is—Exo. 25:16; 31:18.
    2. The Ark in the Holy of Holies signifies Christ as the center of God's dwelling place, the church (Eph. 2:21-22), and the contents of the church as the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15-16; cf. 1 Sam. 4:22; Rev. 3:20).
  - C. The Ark of acacia wood overlaid with gold signifies the pneumatic Christ as the embodiment of God and as the mingling of divinity with humanity, the building of God with man, dwelling in our spirit for us to contact God and enjoy God—2 Tim. 4:22; 2 Cor. 3:17; Col. 2:9; Heb. 9:4:
    1. Acacia wood signifies Christ's humanity, strong in character and high in standard, as the basic substance for expressing God—Exo. 25:10; Matt. 3:16; 4:4; 8:20; 9:12-13; 11:29; 12:19-20; 17:27; 20:28; 27:12, 14; Mark 1:35; 6:39-41; John 6:12; 7:6; cf. Acts 16:7.
    2. The acacia wood being overlaid with gold both inside and outside signifies the divine nature penetrating the human nature and resting on the human nature so that it may be expressed through the human nature—Exo. 25:11; Rev. 3:18a; 2 Pet. 1:4; cf. Rev. 17:4.

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- D. The propitiatory cover of the Ark signifies Christ as the meeting place of God and His redeemed people—Exo. 25:17-22:
  - 1. Christ is the One who propitiates (Heb. 2:17), the One who appeases the relationship between God and us, the One who reconciles us to God by satisfying God's demand through Himself as the propitiatory sacrifice (1 John 2:2; 4:10).
  - 2. Christ is also the propitiatory cover with the shining of His divinity and the redeeming of His humanity, the place where we enjoy propitiation before God and where we can meet and fellowship with our righteous, holy, and glorious God to receive Him as grace—Rom. 3:25; Heb. 4:16:
    - a. The two cherubim of gold on the propitiatory cover indicate that God's glory shines out from Christ (Exo. 25:18-20); the blood of the propitiatory sacrifice being sprinkled on the propitiatory cover of the Ark signifies that because of the blood of Christ's redemption, we can have fellowship with the righteous God in the midst of His glory (Lev. 16:14-15).
    - b. The more God meets with us and speaks with us, and the more we meet with God and listen to His speaking, the more of the testimony of God there will be in our experience.

### **III. The history of the Ark and the tabernacle portrays the desire of God's heart, the desolation of the church, and the recovery of the church for God's testimony, God's expression—Exo. 25:9-10; 26:26-30; 40:38:**

- A. As the center and content of the tabernacle, the Ark signifies Christ as the center and content of the church as God's tabernacle, God's house, for God's corporate expression—25:22; 40:21; Col. 2:9; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Tim. 3:15.
- B. In the first stage of its history, the Ark was in the tabernacle; this signifies that the normal church was the expression of Christ, and Christ was the content of the church; however, the Ark eventually was separated from the tabernacle; this signifies that the church became degraded and lost the reality and presence of Christ—Exo. 40:34-35; 1 Sam. 4:1—7:2.
- C. The Ark typifies Christ as the embodiment of God and as the presence of the Triune God with His people for the carrying out of His economy to establish His kingdom on earth (Josh. 3:3, 10-17);

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- to bring out the Ark was to bring out the presence of God (Num. 10:33-36; 1 Sam. 4:3-4).
- D. The move of the Ark was a picture of God's move on the earth in Christ as His embodiment (Psa. 68:1-18); however, during Israel's fighting with the Philistines, God did not intend to move.
  - E. The children of Israel had no thought of or concern for God's economy, and their bringing out the Ark to battle the Philistines indicated that they were usurping God, even forcing Him to go out with them for their safety, peace, rest, and profit.
  - F. In principle, we do the same thing whenever we pray for our prosperity without any consideration of God's economy; instead of usurping God, we should pray, live, and be persons, like Samuel, according to God's heart and for His economy.
  - G. Today men are replacing God's testimony with man's need; when man's need replaces God's testimony, degradation begins and problems arise; the Ark was not only the Ark of God (1 Sam. 4:11, 13, 17-19, 21-22) but also the Ark of the Testimony (Exo. 25:22; 40:21).
  - H. Israel should have repented, made a thorough confession, returned to God from their idols, and inquired of God as to what He wanted them to do.
  - I. Instead, having no heart for God's desire or for His eternal economy, they exercised their superstition to trust in the Ark based on their past victories that they had experienced through the move of the Ark.
  - J. Due to Israel's degradation, the Ark was captured by the Philistines and was separated from the tabernacle, leaving the tabernacle an empty vessel with no reality, no proper content (1 Sam. 4:11—6:1); this signifies that in the second stage of its history, the church became degraded and lost the reality and presence of Christ (chs. 3—4; Rev. 3:20).
  - K. In their degradation Israel was foolish because they did not trust in God directly; rather, they trusted in the systems ordained by God; before bringing the Ark of God out of the tabernacle, they should have checked with God as Joshua did at Jericho (Josh. 6:2-4; cf. 9:14).
  - L. From the depths of our spirit we should say to the Lord, "Lord, I am not here on earth for my health, my prosperity, my safety, my peace, my rest, or my profit; because I want to be a true overcoming Nazarite cooperating with You for the fulfillment of Your

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economy, I ask You what is on Your heart concerning me”—1 Sam. 2:30b, 35; Num. 6:1-9; cf. 1 Kings 8:48; Jer. 32:39.

- M. In their degradation the children of Israel offended God to the uttermost, and God left them; eventually, instead of the Ark saving Israel, the Ark itself was captured, and the glory of God departed from Israel (1 Sam. 2:30, 34; 4:10-18, 22; Psa. 78:61); to be “Arkless” is to be “Christless,” and to be “Christless” means that there is “Ichabod,” meaning *No Glory* (1 Sam. 4:21-22; Rev. 3:20).
- IV. Later, the Ark was recovered and brought first to the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-jearim, where it remained for twenty years (1 Sam. 6:2—7:2), and then to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where it stayed for three months (2 Sam. 6:1-11; cf. 1 Sam. 1:24; Josh. 18:1); this signifies that beginning from the second century a number of “Obed-edom” were raised up, who had the Lord’s presence (the Ark) but did not have the proper church life as the expression of Christ (the tabernacle).**
- V. David moved the Ark from Obed-edom’s house to a tent that he had prepared for it in his own city, at Mount Zion, the choicest place in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12-19; 1 Chron. 15:1—16:1); this was an improved situation, but the Ark was still in an improper place because it had not been returned to the tabernacle:**
- A. This situation signifies that other believers who, like David, cared for God’s interests, attempted to practice the church life according to their own choice, not according to God’s revelation.
- B. These believers had Christ, but they had Him with an improper practice of the church life (typified by David’s tent in Jerusalem)—cf. 1 Kings 3:3-15.
- VI. Finally, after Solomon finished the building of the temple in Jerusalem, the Ark was moved into the Holy of Holies in the temple for a full recovery of the normal situation; today in His recovery the Lord is working to restore the normal condition of Christ within the proper church as the reality of the Body of Christ for His expression—8:1-11, 48; Eph. 2:21-22; 3:16-21.**
- VII. The history of the Ark and the tabernacle is a prefigure of church history, giving us a full portrait of the course and situation of the church from the very beginning to the present time; there are five main aspects of this history:**

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- A. The first situation is that of the church with Christ in it; this is typified by the Ark in the tabernacle, with the Ark as the content and the tabernacle as its expression; this is a picture of the first stage of the church in an absolutely normal condition of Christ being the content of the church and the church being the expression of Christ—Exo. 40:34-38; Eph. 3:16-21.
- B. The second situation is that of the church without Christ in it; this is typified by the Ark being captured and separated from the tabernacle because of the failure of the people of God; the tabernacle becoming empty portrays the failures of the Christians that caused the church to lose the reality and presence of Christ—Rev. 2:4-5; 3:20.
- C. The third situation is that of Christ without the church; this is typified by the Ark being without the tabernacle; first, in the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-jearim for twenty years (1 Sam. 7:1-2) and then in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months (2 Sam. 6:10-12), the Ark was apart from the tabernacle; church history reveals that from the second century to the present time there have been many Obed-edoms.
- D. The fourth situation is that of Christ with an inadequate church; David had prepared a tent for the Ark in Jerusalem, but it was not according to the pattern revealed by God to Moses; many Christians have the Ark—Christ—with an inadequate church—v. 17; 1 Chron. 15:1; 2 Chron. 1:4; Exo. 25:9.
- E. The fifth situation is that of Christ with a proper church; this is typified by the Ark with the proper tabernacle that has been enlarged and increased to be the temple; it is in this situation—Christ as the reality with a proper church as His expression—that we feel completely at home—Psa. 90:1-2; 91:1-16; 92:12-15; 132:5, 8; 1 Chron. 28:11-20; 2 Chron. 3:1.