

## ARK OF THE COVENANT

Shortly after the Israelites fled from their Egyptian bondage, God called Moses up to Mount Sinai and there communed with him. Here were given the sacred tablets of the Law, the ten commandments. Here God made a covenant, accepted and ratified by the people, to take them for His peculiar people, if they took him for their God.



“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant (the ten Commandments), then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me, above all people.”

Moses was commanded to build a tabernacle. “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I might dwell among them. According to all that I show thee after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, so shall ye make it.” And then the record states, that after giving Moses instructions to build the tabernacle, the first piece of furniture mentioned to him by God was, the “Ark of the Covenant.”

Of all the furniture the Ark was the most important and the most sacred, and held in high reverence by the people of Israel. It was a comparatively small chest, made of acacia wood, two and one-half cubits long and a half cubit wide and deep. To transpose these measurements into our measurements with any degree of certainty is difficult. There are many different cubits according to use, such as sacred, secular, building measure or land measure, etc., and varying again in different periods in history. The most generally accepted measure of that period was about 18 inches. This would make the Ark about 45" long by 27 inches wide and deep.

It was overlaid with pure gold within and without, and around the top was a crown, a moulding or band of the same metal. On each side at the corners were two rings of gold, through which staves, also covered with gold, by which the Ark was carried by the Levites. Within the crown at the top was fitted the cover, called the Mercy Seat. On the mercy Seat, one at each end, stood cherubim facing inwards and spreading their wings over the centre. Between these two cherubim, shone the Shekinah, the visible evidence of God's presence. Within the Ark were placed the tables of the law, as described in the book of Exodus: “And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the Ark, and in the Ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give you. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two Cherubim's which are upon the Ark of the testimony.”

And finally, when the tabernacle was erected, the Ark and the furniture set in place, and Moses and Aaron and his sons had performed their service, “then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: but if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not until the day it was taken up.

Even after the Israelites had entered the promised land and settled there, the tabernacle moved from place to place. There was no permanent seat for the Ark and no permanent dwelling place for God.

However, after David had subdued the enemies of Israel, and brought peace to the land, he wished to build a temple that was eventually completed by King Solomon. When the Temple was completed and dedicated and the Ark seated in the Holy of Holies, God again manifested His presence. “When Solomon made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the Glory of the Lord filled the house.” Thus the Ark, which for so long without a resting place, was safely seated.

From all these manifestations of God's presence we must appreciate how sacred was the Ark, to the people of Israel. It was the centre of all their hopes and promises because, in it, God dwelt among them. The ceremony of the seating of the Ark and the dedication of the Temple in the M.E.M.°, should inspire us with the same awe and reverence, the most sacred and religious of our Capitular degrees. Symbolically it represents the coming of God among us and his abiding in the place we have prepared for Him.

The Rabbi, the teachers and expounders of the law have said, “The heart of man may be likened to God's sanctuary; for as in the sanctuary the Shekinah or Divine glory dwelt, because there were the Ark, the tables and the cherubim; so in the heart of man it is meet that a place be made for the Divine Majesty to dwell in, and that it be the Holy of Holies.”