

THE ARK AND ITS CONTENTS

by G.S. Byford

A collection of articles and writings by G.S. Byford from The Ark and Its Contents, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

8 Chapters

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The Ark and Its Contents

The Ark and Its Contents: 1

“The ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot that had the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy-seat” (Heb. 9:4, 5). “And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with him [God], then he heard the voice speaking unto him from above the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony” (Num. 7:89).

The first of these scriptures presents in a figurative way God dwelling in the midst of His redeemed people, at a time when they were pilgrims in the wilderness, on their way to the promised rest. The second points to the readiness with which He hastened to avail Himself—when all had been finished according to His own word—of the opportunity thus afforded of getting access to His people, and of communicating to them, in the manner here described, the intimations of His will for their comfort and blessing, as also for their light and guidance. The way into the holiest was not yet made manifest; so the people could not come near to Him, but He would draw nigh in grace to them and occupy Himself with all the details of the wilderness journey.

The many references to the sanctuary and worship of God in Israel, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, are all to the wilderness period, and not once to the more imposing ritual and choral service of Solomon's temple; so that the analogy between the Book of Numbers and this Epistle is very close, although with this great difference, that whereas, amongst Israel, Moses alone was privileged to speak with God face to face (Num. 12:8), and Aaron alone to represent the people officially (Lev. 16), the Epistle exhorts even the weakest believer to draw nigh both for worship and to obtain all that he stands in need of. There cannot be the smallest doubt that the ark in a very special way typifies Christ in all the rich resources of His grace: whether as the witness for God, represented by the tables of the covenant within, or as the One who was fully able to meet all the needs of the people, typified by the golden pot that had the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. Again, the blood sprinkled mercy-seat pointed onward to His death, in virtue of which alone—righteousness being established before God in heaven—God Himself, now glorified by that death of which the blood was witness, could meet man, and have to do with him, without at all raising the question of sin, as this had been met and forever settled according to the character of the divine glory, at the brazen altar, by the sacrifice.

The mercy-seat then, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is not there presented as the meeting place for God and the sinner, but as the meeting place for God and the saint, or the accepted worshipper. It is well to observe this, simple and obvious as it is, Those addressed in the Epistle were such as had received and bowed to the divine testimony as to forgiveness of sins and justification, because of God's having raised up from the place of death, and glorified at His right hand, the One who had undertaken and accomplished the work of atonement and redemption for God's glory and man's blessing. The starting point then, is Christ set down on High, Whose work of purification of sins has been accepted by God, and Whom the believing Hebrews are directed to consider as the Apostle and High Priest of their, and our, confession. Believers in Him (we as well as they) are

holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, not seen as yet in heaven, but on their way thither. Meanwhile God was speaking to them by His Son, instructing them as to all these great and precious truths, and encouraging them to make full use of their privileges as purged and accepted worshippers. The doctrine of the new birth is not here developed (although we who know it may find it assumed or emprisoned in certain passages as chap. 2:10, 13:6, etc.), yet before their conversion to Christianity they had stood in a privileged place of nearness to God (different to other nations), but there is the setting aside of every other man that “this Man” may stand forth as the expression of all that is perfect and excellent, and perfectly suitable to represent us before God, while meeting us in all our weakness and need. His perfect work necessitates the passing away of all that is imperfect and faulty. There shall even be a “new covenant” yet to be established with an earthly people. Those who believe in Christ are sanctified by the blood of the new covenant are qualified to draw near to God in the holiest of all for worship, and to find grace, etc.

The privileges of such as are represented by the High Priest who has passed through the heavens, are of a more exalted character than will be the portion of God's ancient people. However blessed and glorious they may be in their own land in the millennial days, yet will it be a worldly, and not a heavenly, sanctuary. The throne of grace (Heb. 4:16) is now for a heavenly people who enjoy the favor and right of access to God within the vail, exactly that which it was intended the mercy-seat in Israel should have been for an earthly people to whom the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest. They were, indeed, represented by the high priest, but in consequence of the grave failure of the two sons of Aaron, this was limited to the tenth day of the seventh month.

To be continued.

The Ark and Its Contents: 2. Manna

The manna was the provision of God's grace for a wilderness people, just as the paschal lamb had been his provision for a guilty people, providing a shelter from wrath to which otherwise they must have been exposed. Both pointed to Christ as the Sent One of God, meeting the need of the earthly people as God knew it, and not according to their sense of it. Israel did not ask for either one or the other; the blood of the lamb provided a safe shelter that they might in peaceful enjoyment feed upon the lamb itself. God's glory was secured by Christ's obedience unto death, and faith appropriates such a Savior who becomes the life of the soul. "He that eateth me, even he shall live because of me." The sinner saved feeds upon the grace which brought Him to the place of death for his deliverance—bows to the divine testimony (that of the Judge Himself) "When I see the blood I will pass over you"; and the immense relief and satisfaction obtained thereby sustain the heart and shut out for a time all idea of any other necessity.

It was a full month before the Israelites realized that although they had escaped the judgment, they had lost all Egypt's resources and its pleasures. The world becomes a barren desert to the believer in Christ, the wilderness is before him and he has yet to learn, with the Psalmist, that all his springs are in God: this discovery is painful and humiliating, He humbled thee and proved thee (Deut. 8:2, 3). God in infinite love provided for the need of His people by giving them bread from heaven, but in doing so He put them to the proof; they were on their way to the promised rest, but the rest itself must be ever kept before them; hence the manna must not be looked upon as a thing permanent and lasting, but as a temporary provision for exceptional circumstances and closely connected from its very beginning with the sabbath which was to be a permanent institution and an outward sign, a witness to the whole world that they belonged to God and were to be obedient to Jehovah Who had redeemed them.

This test of obedience was not, as in the passover, to be satisfied by one act of faith once for all ("through faith he kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood" (Heb. 11:28) with results immediately made good in the soul, so that the questions of deliverance and acceptance need never again be opened up) but was also a protracted and continuous one as long as they were passing through the wilderness.

From the first, Israel failed to appreciate angels' food; their tastes, desires and inclinations were gross and impure; the yearning of their hearts was for the fleshpots of Egypt, and, in the last year of their pilgrimage they made the awful admission without shame, "our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num. 21:5).

It is just the same now with the children of God on their journey to the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

God has found His delight in His beloved Son, and will look to no other; the voice from the excellent glory bore witness to this, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." We are put to the proof by this just as Israel was by the manna. Israel was set to learn the

lesson "that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live." This, the nation as a whole never learned, though there were bright exceptions, such as Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, etc., To have knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment of the most advanced truth touching Christ's present position, and our relationship to Him as members of His body, the coming rapture of the saints and such like subjects, precious as these are, will not compensate for the want of appetite for the Manna. Perhaps the lessons of the wilderness are never fully learned until the close of the journey. God might have supplied the needs of His people in other ways, but the way He chose, certainly called for the daily exercise of faith, obedience, diligence, and constant dependence upon Himself. If we read carefully Ex. 16 we shall not only be instructed in God's gracious way of nourishing His earthly people, but also as to the way in which our spiritual wants are anticipated in His word, the regular and diligent study of which will supply us with that divine food, Christ Himself, which our souls so much need. But the manna was after all a temporary provision. Intended only to continue for a year or so, Israel's unbelief and refusal to go into the promised land, had the effect of adding to their pilgrimage eight and thirty years, and God graciously continued this wonderful provision for their daily need. His care over them was shown out in the minutest details, so that their raiment waxed not old, nor did their feet swell; circumstances which may have passed unnoticed by many at the time. One remarkable thing remains to be noticed; whether much or little was gathered, everyone was satisfied, and the need of each soul was met, "and when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating" (Ex. 16:18). No doubt there are degrees of spiritual appetite amongst the Lord's people and different capacities for the reception, and understanding, of the truth of God, but that is not the precise point here, but rather that in coming to Christ every one finds his need fully met and nothing superfluous. Whatever may be our heart's need, we find it all met by Christ, and as we make progress in the divine life and discover new glories and fresh graces and excellencies in our Lord Jesus Christ under the teaching of the Spirit, we can say that we need them all, we cannot do without one of them.

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The Ark and Its Contents: 3

"Wherein was a golden pot that had the manna," God's daily provision for the need of His people passing through the wilderness; the manna which came from heaven day by day gathered and appropriated by the people in their natural state and condition. Believers and unbelievers alike ate of it and proved its sustaining qualities. Where faith was in exercise as with Caleb, it was a daily expression of the gracious interest God took in the life and circumstances of His people; to such it was a real link which grace had formed between the God of glory who dwelt in heaven, and the needy pilgrim on his way to the promised rest. Caleb's testimony before all Israel and to Joshua, was a striking witness of the faithfulness of Jehovah which should have been the experience and testimony of the whole nation (Josh. 14:6-15). Jehovah had kept him alive "these forty and five years," and that too with undiminished strength and enthusiasm. It had been by means of the manna, but if not thus it would have been by some other means, for the word and honor of God were pledged to it. The children of Israel had wandered in the wilderness, but he had lived, nor do we read of his death; his links with God had been daily renewed, faith strengthened, and experience of God's faithfulness extended and deepened. Every case of death of rebels, who were also his brethren, confirmed the truth of Jehovah's word to his soul, while the hope set before him as time rolled on (and he knew the precise period of the wanderings of the children of Israel), became clearer and more stimulating than ever.

How well did his life's history illustrate the truth that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith!" And how intensely individual is the path of faith in the day of provocation in the wilderness Joshua and Caleb stilled the people. Now in the day of triumph, Caleb recalls "the thing that Jehovah said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea." The fellowship of those two faithful servants had not widened out. They knew how to keep a secret, and when to declare it and to claim the prize.

We are not to suppose that there was any potent charm or mysterious virtue in the manna; it was no "elixir of life" to prolong the life of the body indefinitely. The Lord Jesus told His hearers in John 6, "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and died," and again, "Not Moses has given you the bread out of heaven." It was very distinctly a type of Christ sent from heaven, "that a man may eat thereof and not die" which necessitates faith in His person and a real acceptance and appreciation of the grace that brought Him into this world, and which was continually in evidence in His daily life and ministry up to the cross where He then became the Antitype of the paschal lamb. But just as God ordained that an omer of manna should be laid up before the testimony for a witness to succeeding generations, so has God the Spirit, in the four Gospels, given us a divine record of the words and ways of our Lord Jesus Christ as He trod this earth the constant manifestation of grace and truth, which alone meets the real need of our souls now passing through a wilderness. There will come a time when we shall need this no longer. It came to an end when Israel reached the land of promise, "The manna ceased... neither had the children of Israel manna any more" (Josh. 5:12). And as for us, when the journey has come to a close, faith shall change to sight and we shall know as known. It will then be our experience to have gathered up

the manna to prove the sympathies and grace of Christ and His strength made perfect in weakness. The circumstances of grief, weakness and poverty will then be no longer existing for us, but it is here that the "hidden manna" comes into use. It was the memorial before God of that which had been so efficacious in the past for the blessing of the people of Israel. The golden pot containing it speaks of divine excellence and particularly of divine righteousness. If the people had laid it up for themselves for future use, it would have become nauseous (Ex. 16:20), but Aaron the divinely appointed high priest was commanded to lay it up before the testimony (the ark was not then made). It was therefore a priestly act intended for the instruction and edification of future generations, and pointing to the wondrous truth that He who came down from heaven full of grace and truth, and was here upon earth for a time in all lowliness, despised, unknown and rejected (as thus it was with the manna), has gone into heaven in righteousness. The once humbled Man is now the glorified Man. He came down from heaven in grace. He is gone back in righteousness.

The scripture before us is the only one which speaks of the manna being in the ark; and the divine purpose in placing it there seems never to have been realized because of the inability of the Israelites to draw nigh to God in the holiest; so the garments "for glory and for beauty" intended [?] for Aaron's use in the most holy place were never worn there (compare Ex. 28:29, 35 with Lev. 16:4, 32), and yet again, the proposal that Israel should be unto Jehovah "A kingdom of priests, a holy nation" was not fulfilled under the law which made nothing perfect, but was made good to the remnant according to the election of grace who believed on the risen Christ (1 Peter 2:9). Yet such a one as David, found in the ark and its contents that which spoke of Jehovah's presence in holiness and grace amongst His people, so that faith was strengthened and spiritual affections nourished (1 Chron. 15). It is only the overcomer who escapes the corruption of the world through lust and rising to the height of the heavenly calling, that is enabled to feed upon Christ by faith and to realize that all that grace which was so blessedly manifested in Christ here on earth is the present portion of the believer, now that He is gone into heaven. It were easy perhaps to overcome the spirit of the world in its own proper place, but it has to be withstood and overcome amongst the saints, and the Lord's promise to the overcomer in the church at Pergamos appeals with peculiar distinctness to His saints to-day when all the characteristics of that assembly are so clearly marked. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna" (Rev. 2:17).

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The Ark and Its Contents: 4. Aaron's Rod

"Wherein was...Aaron's rod that budded". We have seen that the manna was God's special provision for a wilderness people and, in view of the time when it should be no longer necessary, God ordained that the memorial of it should be laid up within the ark, so that when the people of God were happy and prosperous they might recall to their minds the particular care and providence of Jehovah in thus nourishing them and providing for their every need during their passage through a great and terrible wilderness, wherein was nothing to minister to their necessities save what came down from heaven; or, if found upon earth, as water from the smitten rock, was made to flow in a divinely ordered channel according to their daily need. But real blessing involves much more than the constant supply of food and drink. These things are quite sufficient for the creature, but man in his moral nature looks outside himself for light and guidance. Israel had been brought as a nation into conditions of special relationship to the God who had redeemed them from Egypt, and had undertaken their safe conduct through the desert to the promised inheritance. They had not merely been preserved from the sword of divine justice in Egypt (Jer. 31:2), but they had been brought near to Jehovah, so that He might enter into covenant relationship with them, and that they might be to Him "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In view of this new relationship thus formed between Jehovah and themselves, fresh wants came into existence; for even had they (as most probably they would have) been content to have gone on indifferent to, and in ignorance of, their obligations to God under the covenant of Mount Sinai, God would not leave them without a properly qualified and duly ordained witness of His authority over them. Moreover the effect of leaving them to the action of law pure and simple would have been bondage and death. Gal. 4 shows that for Jerusalem and her children the result was bondage, and if the Galatian saints did not recover themselves and return to the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, they would have been in a more hopeless bondage than the Jews, because of having known and rejected the grace of the gospel. Again, the effect of the application of the law to the old nature is death, "when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:9).

But surely this was not the realization of God's purposes concerning His people. On the contrary, He established the priesthood amongst, and over, them, and His covenant with Levi was "of life and peace" (Mal. 2:5), in complete contrast to the death and bondage of the law. God in a merciful way took knowledge of human infirmity and weakness, and established the priesthood in Israel that His people might be instructed in all the ordinances and commandments pertaining to the Levitical economy and might also have an ever-present resource in times of difficulty and need. The priesthood, for its efficacy, depended upon two principles—authority, which must be that of God Himself, and therefore unquestionable, and sacrifice, such as He had appointed, and therefore acceptable to Him. The law in itself had no blessing for Israel, for it could not recognize a partial obedience; its curse, strictly applied, would have reached to every man in the nation, for "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). The sentence and curse of the law were, however, arrested in their exercise by

the sin offering which the repentant sinner brought to the priest; and when all was carried out according to divine instructions, defilement being removed from the camp, cleansed ones restored to their privilege, vows fulfilled etc., then the full priestly blessing was sanctioned and made good by Jehovah Himself (Num. 6:22-27). What value there was in the priestly benediction, and the regard which any faithful Israelite would have for it, are shown in the case of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:17, 18). The principles of law and grace which entered into God's government of His earthly people were prevented from appearing antagonistic by the sacrifice offered by the priests.

It being thus scripturally established that the priesthood was really a gracious provision whereby God would bring blessing to Israel, we may be able to perceive the real significance of the rod of Aaron that "budded and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds" (Num. 17:8). The previous chapter sets before us in great detail that serious rebellion against Moses and Aaron (king and priest,) which undoubtedly prefigures the last great development of evil and self-will against God's Christ who as King and Priest shall be established in Zion, and reign a Priest upon His throne. The character of the sin and its unique judgment bespeak this. Compare Num. 16:30-35 with Rev. 19:20, 21 and Jude 11. When the people on the next day showed how readily the lie of the devil is accepted and the plague had begun, it was made manifest that the only hope of salvation from death was in priestly intercession. Christ, in all His own excellency and value of His finished work, was prefigured by Aaron with the censer (as also in the holy place, compare Lev. 16:12, 13) now standing between the living and the dead, making atonement for the rebels. It points in a way to the mediatorial intervention in perfect grace of the "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." This is what is witnessed by the preaching of the gospel, and what alone stays the hand of God in judgment. So too, David was permitted to occupy this place of mediatorship in 1 Chron. 21:26, 27. The difference between the daily supply of manna and the golden pot that had the manna has been already noticed, and we may trace the same difference between the daily ministrations of Aaron on ordinary occasions and the unusual and extraordinary intervention between the living and the dead at this time. Such a crisis had not been anticipated in the divine instructions to the priests, but Aaron was no doubt led to act upon divine instincts and the special guidance of God's Spirit in such a way as was effectual for arresting the execution of wrath, and serving for the illustration of the real value of the priesthood in blessing and fruitfulness for man. "Aaron's rod that budded" was, then, a constant witness in the immediate presence of God, and for those who had access there, of the priestly grace of Him who glorified not Himself to be made priest but was called of God; and God will surely vindicate the power and authority in which He acts in grace now, so that "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him"; as He will overcome the rebels gathered together against Him, when He appears the second time, seeing that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

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The Ark and Its Contents: 5. Tables of the Law

The believer has little difficulty in recognizing the significance of the fact that the two tables of the law found a resting place in the ark of the testimony. They formed the sum total of God's requirements as to the life and conduct of the people toward Himself and to each other. They were the conditions of the covenant under which Israel was to enter into the land and dwell there, and leave it for an inheritance to their children after them. The holy oracles were in this way committed to them as the people of God, and made binding by the sprinkling of blood. But inasmuch as they were a sinful people and totally incompetent to observe that holy law (in spite of their solemn professions that all that Jehovah hath spoken we will do), setting forth as it did the terms or conditions of their covenant relationship with Jehovah, the ark was made specially to contain it. For if the throne of God was to be established upon earth for the government of His people and "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne" (Psa. 97:2) it could not be otherwise.

We know not at what time or in what way "the golden pot that had the manna" and "Aaron's rod that budded" disappeared from the ark in which they had been put, but we do know that when Solomon had finished all the work of the house of Jehovah, and the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Jehovah into its place there was nothing there but the two tables of stone.

The necessities of a people passing through the wilderness had been fully met, in the riches of God's grace, by those things which witnessed to His faithfulness and goodness, and which also brought blessing to the people. The circumstances were now no longer the same. The son of David reigned in Zion, and righteousness must characterize his kingdom. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." So shall it be in millennial days when David's Son and Lord, the great Antitype of Solomon, shall reign in righteousness, and bring the nations into, at least, outward or feigned obedience (2 Sam. 22:45).

The ark of shittim wood overlaid with pure gold, containing the testimony, was indeed a striking type of Him who was manifest in flesh, and in whom divine and human righteousness met. He alone could say, "I delight to do thy will, O God; yea thy law is within my heart." The righteousness of God finds its full and perfect expression in that Blessed One risen from the dead and now glorified in heaven. He who in grace came forth from God to seek man, is the one who has gone back to God after accomplishing the work of atonement, and is in Himself the full display of divine righteousness. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous one." Such is the blessed provision for the child of God, who, though confessedly weak and oft-times failing, has, nevertheless, the Holy Spirit, the power for good (Gal. 5:16-25), and the written word to guide, in order that we may not sin (1 John 2:1). Satan is ever ready to act the part of accuser before God and may find, alas, too many an occasion in my walk here, yet am I represented on high by the righteous Advocate against whom he can bring nothing. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin." I do not try to hide or extenuate my sins, but sorrowfully confess them, with the result that "He is faithful and just" (He cannot be otherwise) "to

forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7-9).

Such truths as these (so good and necessary for us to know as walking in the light as He is in the light) were but dimly foreshadowed by these patterns of heavenly realities, yet were they there in type. True, Israel could not, and were not expected to, enter into their full spiritual meaning. We, in the light of the New Testament, can look back and see clearly enough that God found His own deep joy in all that pointed to Christ's coming into the world, and in this scene where man had fallen, and God was dishonored, recovering in grace what man had lost in disobedience, and above all glorifying God in the holy judgment of our sins when on the cross he was made a sacrifice for sin.

It were well to glance briefly at the circumstances in which Moses placed the testimony within the ark at Horeb, the more so as the Spirit of God has been most explicit in recording the circumstance for our instruction, but has given no historic record of the placing of the other two objects within the ark. Thus, were it not for Heb. 9:4 we could not have certainly known that they were actually within it. If we read carefully Ex. 25:10-22 (particularly noticing vers. 16, 21, 22), we shall find that from the beginning God's purpose was that the ark should be prepared for the reception of the testimony. He well knew that His people were incompetent even to receive it, but it was necessary that Moses, faithful servant as he was, should learn this by sorrowful experience, for with what anguish of soul must he have listened to the revelation of the people's sin, from the lips of God Himself (Ex. 32:7-10); and how bitterly must he have realized the awful nature of that moral catastrophe which had exposed them to the wrath of Jehovah, and the curse of a broken law, before even they had seen it! Yet had they not been made acquainted with its requirements? and with a light heart accepted it and promised to fulfill all its conditions (Ex. 24:3)? When Moses came within hearing and view of the profane revelry which witnessed to the apostasy of Israel, can we wonder that his anger waxed hot, and that, in sight of the evil-doers, he brake the two tables of stone casting them out of his hands at the foot of Horeb? Surely it must have been fatal to the whole nation to have brought them into the idolatrous camp! There was then no ark to receive them—this handwriting of the finger of God.

The whole history of God's way with His servant and His guilty people, as set forth in Ex. 32 is deeply instructive, as illustrating the principles of mediatorship, of God's sovereignty in mercy, and of His call to separation from evil, for such as sought the Lord outside the camp. Deut. 10:5, however, shows us (what Exodus does not), that the solemn crisis which had arisen made it imperative for Moses to prepare the ark, before returning to God, so that immediately on his return to the people he might place the two tables of stone there. Perhaps, it was not then overlaid with gold; that remained for Bezaleel to complete hereafter (Ex. 37:2). However, that may be, it appears clear, from a comparison of the two scriptures, that the ark was prepared for the reception of the law, in the interval between Moses' first descent from the mount and his going up the second time, so that on his return it was there for the reception of the testimony.

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The Ark and Its Contents: 6

The reality of Jehovah's presence in the midst of His people was borne witness to in many distinct ways. He was graciously pleased not only to dwell amongst them but to accompany them in all their journeyings as their Leader and Protector. The tabernacle of witness and the ark of His covenant provided a sufficient guarantee against disorder in their ranks, or danger from outside. The people had the knowledge of this for their own comfort. It was outwardly attested by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The strength and happiness of the people depended upon their spiritual discernment of the great truth that Jehovah was with them. The Gentiles even had to own this obvious fact although it excited their envy and hatred. Num. 9 sets before us in great detail how Jehovah was guiding them in their journeyings by the cloud, with its "appearance of fire by night"; as the next chapter shows that He was not only their Leader, but Protector—the silver trumpets proclaiming His authority and instructions to the utmost parts of the camp. The tribes had their respective positions allotted to them in the camp (Num. 2); as also, in this chapter, the order of its setting forward when called to march, that thus there should be no uncertainty or confusion in the minds of any of them.

Now in all the perfect arrangement for the blessing and safety of Israel, there was an undercurrent of grace which would admit and welcome the stranger to a share in the blessing of Jehovah's people. "And Moses said unto Hobab... We are journeying unto the place of which Jehovah said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for Jehovah hath spoken good concerning Israel.... And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness Jehovah shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee" (Num. 10:29-32).

And why not? Israel's separation from the nations in nearness to Jehovah had been secured: their supremacy was acknowledged and their God worshipped by the stranger (Ex. 18:7-12). Such a gracious invitation was quite in keeping with the ways of God towards His people, and shall surely be made good in millennial days. "And they departed from the mount of Jehovah three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of Jehovah [was] upon them by day, when they went out of the camp. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, "Rise up, O Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Jehovah, unto the many thousands of Israel" (Num. 10:32-36).

It is of importance to notice here that the ark with its contents was fully owned as the symbol of Jehovah's presence, containing in itself every memorial of past deliverance and pledge of victory and blessing for Israel in the future: so that to such an one as Moses, when the ark set forward, it was Jehovah going before them; and when it rested, Jehovah was welcomed back to the many thousands of Israel. That the ark was, in a very special way, a type of Christ, the Leader of His people, appears evident in the early days of Israel when about to enter upon the possession of the land of their inheritance which God gave them. For Josh. 3 and 4 read in the light of Col. 2 and 3, show that the passing over of the ark of the covenant before the children of Israel into, and its

coming out of, Jordan, was a prefiguring of the death and resurrection of Christ in its power to bring the believer now as having died with Him, into "the heavenlies" where we have our conflict with the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:10-20). It was the only way open to them and it was strange to them. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." It was for Christ Himself the path of life, i.e. through death and resurrection. "Thou wilt show me the path of life" (Psa. 16). For His people it constitutes the only way into the heavenly position of which Canaan was a figure. With the knowledge that Christ has died for my sins, and borne the judgment upon the cross, I cheerfully and deliberately identify myself with Him in His death, "that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). We are called to make good our title to be in "the heavenlies" by death and resurrection. It is thus that death, man's greatest enemy, becomes one of the possessions of the believer, who thereby finds escape from that place and state to which God's judgment applied. Previous to this the ark had no typical association with resurrection, but henceforth it was to be, in the minds of the people, connected inseparably with that mighty power of God working for their complete deliverance from the sorrows and toils of the wilderness, and bringing them into ultimate rest in the heavenly inheritance.

Moreover, as their deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 12,14.) was to be had in perpetual remembrance, and the passover to be observed by an ordinance forever, so were the twelve stones taken up from the midst of Jordan and set up in Gilgal, to be a perpetual witness of the power of Christ working on behalf of His people. "And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What [mean] these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land" (Josh. 4:20-22). Their right and title to be in Canaan at all was found in this, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan." Victory and triumph were theirs, because Jehovah, the living God, was in their midst.

(continued from p. 199)

(To be continued)

The Ark and Its Contents: 7. Ark of God

If we have been enabled in some little measure to apprehend the true spiritual significance of what is set before us in the verses we have been considering, we shall be the more ready to appreciate the divine purpose in the instructions so precisely given to Joshua for their faithful observance by the priests, the Levites, and all the people (or, at least the fighting men), on the occasion of their first conflict with the enemy (Josh. 6).

We must not consider the ark apart from either the things which it contained, or apart from its normal cherubic associations.

It is characteristic of God's early revelation of Himself in the unfolding of His purpose of putting the world to come under the Second man, the Lord Jesus, that the figures or symbols referred to (however indirectly) in the later pages of the Holy Scriptures suppose, for their proper understanding, a full acquaintance with the truth and light connected with their origin. We see the proof of this in the Apocalypse, the closing book of Holy Writ. And when we find, as here, that what had hitherto found a place in the sanctuary of God, is now seen as in the midst of the hosts or armies of Jehovah, there should be no difficulty in understanding the reason.

Does not Josh. 5:10-12 afford a beautiful picture of Christ, in the midst of His people now passed through death and resurrection into the heavenly position, ministering to their blessing and refreshment in every way suited to them? But the blessing was to prepare and strengthen them for the work and conflict before them. For "the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." It was the only celebration of the passover that was connected with the manna, and the old corn of the land. They had no "manna" in Egypt and no "old corn of the land" in the wilderness (Num. 9). But here Christ in all the fullness of His grace was set before them as the divine provision for their blessing. Christ the paschal lamb, Christ the manna, Christ the old corn of the land; the risen One victorious over death and the grave. "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched [corn] in the selfsame day" (ver. 11).

Then in the next chapter we read, "And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before Jehovah, and blew with the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah followed them. And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rearward came after the ark" (chap. 6:8, 9). It was now no longer necessary to maintain the measured space of two thousand cubits as in chap. 3:4, for other truths were receiving illustration. Christ was alone in His death, and in resurrection "the firstfruits." Not even could His disciples in the days of His flesh, realize the necessity for either, until the events were accomplished and the Lord opened their understanding (Luke 24:21, 25, 45). It is only when the value of Christ's death and resurrection has been made good in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, that we enjoy closeness of intimacy with that blessed One who went alone into death for us, and has become in resurrection "the firstfruits of

them that slept.” For have we not been “quickened together with Christ, raised up together and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”? And if this indeed be true of us before God, everything in walk and testimony should be in consistency with, and depends upon our holding fast, this truth. If John 16:1-8 makes this clear as to fruitbearing, so does Mark 15:20 as clearly for testimony.

In this daily procession compassing the doomed city, God was instructing His people in faith, endurance, and dependence upon Himself. It was also an excellent discipline for Joshua and Caleb, who had never doubted the sufficiency of God's power to bring them in and to overcome their enemies. “And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Now that they were actually in the land, the sword must wait upon the word. “Ye shall not shout.... until the day that I bid you shout.” Patience must have its perfect work, and Israel must learn that power belongeth unto God. Moses in Deuteronomy had warned them again and again of that spirit of self confidence to which he knew they were prone. Sometimes, as in the case of Samson, God was pleased to make use of human strength, but then it must be used in Nazarite consecration to God; for we see that no sooner was the secret surrendered to the enemy, than power departed from Samson, and he became as any other man.

More frequently, however, God was pleased to work for the deliverance of His people in such a way as to humble the pride of man— “lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judg. 7:2).

Here was then a perfect testimony in the full power of consecration (the seven trumpets of rams' horns) to the right of Jehovah, as “Lord of all the earth,” to give the land of Canaan to whomsoever He would. This testimony was in its duration synonymous with the seven days' feast of unleavened bread which followed the passover of which they had just partaken. It was maintained by those who had access to God in the sanctuary, who offered whole burnt offerings upon God's altar, and who burned, incense before the veil. It was a testimony which increased in intensity and earnestness as the execution of judgment drew nigh. It produced no apparent results, but we may well believe that its repetition drew forth ridicule and abuse, and emboldened the guilty citizens of Jericho in their senseless opposition to God and His people. Every trumpet blast shortened the time of respite, and brought judgment nearer. When that full and perfect testimony to the rights of Jehovah over all the earth had sounded for the last time, then every barrier to judgment was withdrawn. God withdrew the restraint He had placed upon His people, gave permission to strike, and the work of destruction was completed. We cannot doubt that the mercy extended to Rahah and her family would also have been extended to any or all who should have submitted to the righteous judgment of God. There was the opportunity at any moment during that solemn week, of submission to Israel's God, and of finding mercy at His hands.

All this bears a close analogy to the present day of grace, but with this important difference—neither mercy, nor repentance were preached to the men of Jericho. But now both are in presentation. The Lord's servants who would maintain in the power of the Holy Ghost a testimony to Christ dead and risen, are required to walk in holiness of life and consecration of heart—to eschew all that savors of mere worldly wisdom, and to maintain a spirit of constant dependence upon God. He who has committed to His servants the ministry of reconciliation,

requires that there should be faithfulness in its exercise (2 Cor. 5:18-20). God is glorified thereby, the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified, the righteousness of God revealed, grace presented, and sinners saved eternally. The Israelites were not required to make a precedent of what took place in connection with the destruction of Jericho. So far from this, we learn how, at a later day, the people sinned grievously in bringing the ark upon the field of battle when they were discomfited by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). It witnessed indeed to the low moral condition of the people, and to the shameful indifference of the priests to the holiness of the God who dwelt amongst them. The ark had become to them an object of superstitious regard. The truth was lost. An idol would have answered their purpose as well. How different the spirit of such an one as David, who gave himself no rest until he had connected himself and his kingdom with God by means of the ark! "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

G.S.B.

(concluded from p. 220)

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