

The Ark of His Covenant

by C.H. Spurgeon

The covenant of God is always near to Him, and it is seen by saints through faith, prayer, and the promises of God.

Scripture: Exodus 25:22, Psalm 89:34, Isaiah 54:10, Jeremiah 31:33, John 14:26, Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 2 Corinthians 1:20, Hebrews 8:6, Revelation 11:19

Topics: "Covenant", "Faithfulness of God"

Description

C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes the significance of the Ark of the Covenant, illustrating how it symbolizes God's unchanging promises and presence among His people. He explains that while believers may not fully grasp the depth of God's truth, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the covenant's richness and the assurance it brings. Spurgeon reassures that the covenant is always near to God, reflecting His eternal faithfulness and love, and encourages believers to see the covenant in their lives through faith and prayer. He contrasts the blessings of the covenant for believers with the dire consequences for those who reject God's mercy, urging all to seek refuge in Christ.

Transcript

I SHALL take the passage quite by itself. I do not fully understand its connection, whether it relates to that which goes before or that which comes afterwards; and happily, it is necessary for us to know this, for the passage stands complete in itself, and is full of valuable instruction. Dear friends, even we who believe have as yet failed to see much of the truth of God. We know enough to save us, to comfort us, and to help us on our way to heaven; but oh, how much of the glory of divine truth has never yet been revealed to our eyes!

Some of God's children do not fully know even the common truths as yet, and those who do not know them realize but little of their depth and height. From our text, it appears that there are certain things of God which as yet we have not yet seen there is need that they should be opened to us: "The temple of God was opened in heaven." When our Lord Jesus died, He rent the veil of the temple, and so He laid open the Holy of Holies but such is our dimness of sight, that we need to have the temple opened, and we need to have the Holy of Holies opened, so that we may see what is not really concealed, but what we are not ready to perceive by reason of the slowness of our understandings.

The two words for "temple" here may relate not only to the temple itself, but also to the Holy of Holies, the innermost shrine. Both of these, it seems, need to be opened, or else we shall not see what there is in

them. Blessed be the Holy Spirit that He does open up one truth after another to us. Our Saviour's promise to His disciples was, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." If we were more teachable, if we were more anxious to be taught, and waited upon Him more, He would, doubtless, lead us into many a truth which at the present moment we have not fully enjoyed.

It is a happy thing for you and for me when at any time we can say, "The temple of God was opened in heaven, so that we saw even that which was in the innermost shrine of the holy temple." The saints in heaven doubtless behold all the glory of God so far as it can be perceived by created beings; but we who are on the right way thither behold, as in a glass darkly, the glory of the Lord. We know only in part, but the part we do know is not so great as it might be, we might know far more than we do even here.

Some suppose that they can know but little, because they say that it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Yes, but why do you stop there? Half a text is often not true; go on to the end of the passage: "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"; and that which your eye cannot see, and your ear cannot hear, and the heart of man cannot imagine, can be revealed to you by the Spirit of the Lord.

Oh, that we were more conscious of the power of the Spirit, and that we waited upon Him for yet fuller instruction! Then I am persuaded that, in our measure and degree, it would be true to us, even as to the perfected ones above, "The temple of God was opened in heaven," and they saw that which was in the holiest place. What did they see when the temple was opened? When the secret place was laid bare to them, what did they see? That is to be my subject now. "There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant."

If we could look into heaven at this moment, this is what we should see, "the ark of his covenant." O sinner, thou thinkest that thou wouldst see an angry God, but thou wouldst see the ark of His covenant! O child of God, perhaps thou dreamest of many things that might distress thee in the glory of that sight; but rest thou content, this would be the main sight that thou wouldst see, Jesus, the incarnate God, the great covenant Surety! Thou wouldst see there, where, the Godhead shines resplendent, the ark of His covenant.

I. I shall begin by noticing. first, that THE ARK OF HIS COVENANT IS ALWAYS NEAR TO GOD: "There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant." Of course, the outward symbol is gone; we are not now speaking of a temple made with hands, that is to say, of this building. We speak of the spiritual temple above; we speak of the spiritual Holy of Holies. If we could look in there, we should see the ark of the covenant; and we should see the covenant itself always near to God. The covenant is always there.

God never forgets it; it is ever before Him: "There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant." Why is this? Is it not because the covenant is always standing? The Lord said concerning His people of old. "I will make with them an everlasting covenant," of which David said, "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." If God has made a covenant with you, it is not simply for today and tomorrow, nor merely for this life, but for the ages of ages, even forever and ever.

If He has struck hands with you through the great Surety, and He has pledged Himself to you, remember, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Jehovah hath said, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." What He hath said He will stand to forever. He will keep His Word. He

said to His Son, "I will preserve thee. .and give thee for a covenant of the people"; and He will never revoke the gift.

This covenant stands secure. Though earth's old columns bow, and though my spirits sink, and flesh and heart fail me, yet this covenant shall bear me up even to the end. The covenant of grace is forever the same, because, first, the God who made it changes not. There can be no change in God. The supposition is inconsistent with a belief in His deity. Hear what He says: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The sun hath his changes, but the Father of lights is without variableness, or shadow of turning.

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" God has never to alter His purposes; why should He? Those purposes are always infinitely wise. He knoweth the end from the beginning; so His covenant, which He made with such deliberation in the councils of eternity, that covenant which is sealed with the most precious things He ever had, even with the blood of His only-begotten Son, that covenant upon which He stakes His eternal honor, for His glory and honor are wrapped up with the covenant of grace--that covenant cannot be changed because God Himself changeth not.

Then, next, the Christ who is its Surety and Substance changes not. Christ, the great Sacrifice by whose death the covenant was ratified, Christ, the Surety, who has sworn to carry out our part of the covenant, Christ, who is the very sum and substance of the covenant, never alters. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." If we had a variable Saviour, brethren, we should have a changeable covenant. Look at Adam; he could change, and therefore he was a poor representative of the human race.

Our first federal head soon fell because he was a mere man; but the Surety of the new covenant is the Son of God, who, like His Father, faileth not, and changeth not. Though He is of the substance of His mother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and therefore can stand as man's Representative, yet is he Light of Light, very God of very God, and so He standeth fast and firm, like the unchanging God Himself. In this great truth we do and we will rejoice. The covenant is always before God, for Christ is always there.

He, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, makes the covenant always to be close to the heart of God. And, beloved, note you this. The covenant must always be near to God because the love which suggested it changes not. The Lord loves His people with a love which has no beginning, no end, no boundary, no change. He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-Kindness have I drawn thee." When the love of God's heart goeth forth toward the believer, it is not changeful like the love of man, sometimes high and sometimes low, sometimes strong and sometimes weak; but, as it is said of our Saviour, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end," so can it be said of the great Father that His love is evermore the same; and if the love which dictated the covenant is always in the heart of God, depend upon it that the covenant which comes of that love is always there in the secret place of the Most High.

Reflect also, beloved brethren, that the promises contained in the covenant change not. I quoted to you, just now, one passage about the promises, and that is enough: "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." Not one single promise of God shall ever fall to the ground unfulfilled. His Word in the form of promises, as well as in the form of the gospel, shall not return unto Him void. O souls, you may

hang your whole weight upon any promise of God! You need not fear that it will break.

Though all the vessels of the King's house were hung on one nail made by Him, that nail would bear them all up, as well as the fagons as the vessels of smaller measure. Heaven and earth may hang upon a single promise of God. The voice that rolls the stars along, and keeps them all in their orbits, is that voice which spoke even the least of the promises, and therefore every promise of God stands secure forever. And once more, not only the promises, but the force and binding power of the covenant change not.

All God's acts are done with a reference to His covenant, and all His covenant has a reference to His covenanted ones. Remember what Moses said of old, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." Everything that He does follows the line and rule of His covenant. If He chastens and afflicts, it is not in anger, but in His dear covenant love.

When first that covenant came into full action with the redeemed, it was all powerful; but it is just as powerful still. All that God doeth is still guided and directed by His eternal purpose and His covenant pledges to His people. Stand still, then, and when thou lookest up, if thou canst not see that temple because thine eye of faith is dim, if thou scarcely darest to look within into the secret place which is the holiest of all, yet know thou of a surety that the covenant is still there, and always there, whether thou seest it or seest it not.

I will tell thee when perhaps, thou wilt best know that the covenant is there; that is, when the storm-clouds gather the most thickly. When thou shalt see the black masses come rolling up, then remember that the Lord said to Noah, "I do set my bow in the loud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." Then shalt thou know that Jehovah remembereth His covenant; thou mayest even be half glad of a black cloud, that the sun of the divine love may paint upon it the many-colored bow, that God may look on it, and remember His covenant.

It is good for thee to look on it; but what must it be for Him to look on it, and to remember His covenant? Be thou glad that the covenant is always near to God, as our text declares, "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant." II. Now, secondly, **THE COVENANT IS SEEN OF SAINTS:** There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant." First, we see it when, by faith, we believe in Jesus as our Covenant-head. By faith we know that God has entered into covenant with us.

He that believeth in Christ Jesus is in covenant with God. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "He that believeth on Him is not condemned." He that believeth in Him is at peace with God, he has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. Thou art in covenant with God, believer. Wipe thy weeping eyes, ask God to take the dust out of them, that thou mayest see that there is an unchanging covenant made with thee tonight and forever. Next, we see this covenant when, by faith, we perceive it in God's actions toward us.

Faith may see the covenant of God in all His actions. Do you not remember how the old Scotch woman blessed God for her porridge, but she blessed Him most of all because the porridge was in the covenant? God had promised bread and water, and therefore it was sure to come to her. God sent her bread to her in the form of porridge, and she blessed the Lord that it was in the covenant. Now, I thank God that food is in the covenant, and that raiment is in the covenant. It is written, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass," so they are in the covenant Life is in the covenant and death is in the covenant: "To die is gain."

Everything that is to happen to us is in the covenant; and when faith sees it so, it makes like a happy one. Am I chastened? I say to myself "Well, the rod was in the covenant, for the Lord said that, if His children disobeyed Him, He would chasten them with the rod of men. If I never had the rod, I should be afraid I was not in the covenant." Is it not written, "In the world ye shall have tribulation?" That is a part of the covenant, you see; so that, when you get it, say to yourself, "The God who is evidently keeping this part of His covenant will keep the rest of it to me, His child."

Brethren, we get, perhaps, the best sight of the covenant when by prayer we plead it. In that hour of our wrestling, in the time of our inward craving of mercies from the hand of God, we come at last to this. "Lord, thou hast promised; do as thou hast said." I love to put my finger on a promise, and then to plead it with the Lord, saying, "This is thy Word, my Father; and I know that thou wilt not run back from it. O God, I believe in the inspiration of this Book, and I take very word of it as coming from thy lips.

Wilt thou not seal it to my conscience, my heart, my experience, by proving it to be true?" Have you ever found the Lord's promises fail you? I remember one who had put in the margin of her Bible in several places, "I and P"; and when she was asked what those letters meant, she said, "That they mean, 'Tried and Proved.' As I go through life, I keep trying and proving the promises of God, and then I put a mark in the margin of my Bible against every one I have tested, that I may not forget it the next time I have to plead it."

That is the way to see the covenant at the right hand of God, when you plead it in prayer. And there are some of us, I think, who can say that our experience up till now proves that God does not forget His covenant. We have wandered, but we have been able to say, "He restoreth my soul." for He has restored us. We have needed many things, and we have gone to Him in prayer, and pleaded that word, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," and He has listened to the cries of His servants.

He said He would do so: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." He has remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth forever; and some of us who are no longer young can set to our seal that God is true because of many experiences of His faithfulness. If they tell us that there is nothing in the Bible, and nothing in God, and nothing in the gospel of Christ, we laugh them to scorn. We have now for many a year lived upon the faithfulness of God, and we cannot be driven into a distrust of Him.

He is faithful, and His mercy endureth forever. Do you not also think that, when we arrive in heaven, we shall have a wonderful retrospect, and that retrospect will all come to this: "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant?" Miss Hannah More very prettily puts it that, often, we do not see the right side of things here. She went into a carpet manufactory, and she looked at what the workmen were doing, and she could see nothing that looked like beauty of design.

"There were tags and ends hanging out, and she said to the men, "I cannot perceive any design here," and they answered, "No, madam, for you are on the wrong side of the carpet"; but when she went round to the other side, she saw the beauty of the workmanship. Alas! we are at present on the wrong side of God's work; we must get to heaven to see it perfectly, and when we get there, we shall--

Sing, with wonder and surprise,

His loving-kindness in the skies.

and we shall say, It was all right; it could not have been better.

Every dark and bending line

Meets in the centre of his love.

God hath not erred. He has not gone about the longest way to do His work, but He has done in the wisest and most prudent manner all that was for the best and highest interests of His dear covenanted ones. Thus, I have shown you that sometimes, and it should be always, God's people do see that glorious covenant of grace which is in the temple above. III. Now I want to have your attention while I say briefly, in the third place, that THE COVENANT CONTAINS MUCH THAT IS WORTH SEEING.

Let us think of what was in the ancient ark of the covenant, for all that was in that ark as a type is to be seen in Christ our heavenly covenant ark above. In that ark, if you and I could have gone into the holy place, and have had our eyes strengthened to look, we should have seen, first, God dwelling among men. What a wonderful thing! Over the top of the lid of that sacred coffer which was called the ark, there shone an amazing light which was the index of the presence of God.

He was in the midst of the camp of Israel. He that filleth heaven and earth, the infinite Jehovah, deigned to make that place His special dwelling-place, so that He is addressed as, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims." Here is a part of the new covenant: "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." It is marvelous that God does speak with men. He whom you heard thundering, last night, as He drove His chariot through the sky, that God in infinite condescension speaks with us, and has come down to us, and taken us into relationship with Himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is at once the fellow of the Almighty, and the brother of the sons of men.

O beloved, rejoice in the covenant, that God is no longer divided from men! The chasm made by sin is filled, the gulf is bridged, and God now dwells with me, and manifests Himself to them; and "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Next, in that ark you would have noticed, if you could have seen into it, God reconciled and communing with men upon the mercy-seat. Over the top of that ark, as I have told you, was a golden lid, which fitted it, and covered it exactly, and that golden lid was called the mercy-seat, the throne of grace.

There God spoke with men. He sat there, as it were, enthroned as the Friend of men. Now, it is a part of the covenant that God hears prayer, that God answers our petitions, that He meets us in a way of reconciled love, that He speaks to us in tones which the spirit can hear though the ear cannot. Thank God for a blood-besprinkled mercy-seat. What should we do if we had not that as our meeting-place with the thrice-holy Jehovah? Then, within the ark, underneath the lid, if we could have looked in, we should have seen the law, the two tables of stone, which represent law fulfilled in Christ, and henceforth laid up in His heart, and laid up in our hearts, too, if we delight in the law of God after the inward man.

Now, this is our joy, that the law of God has nothing against the believer. It is fulfilled in Christ, and we see it laid up in Christ, not to be a stone to fall upon us to grind us to powder, but beautiful and fair to look upon as it is in the heart of Christ, and fulfilled in the life of Christ. I rejoice in the covenant which contains in it stipulations all fulfilled, and commands all executed, by our great Representative. Together with those tables of the law there was laid up a rod, a rod which had originally been a dry stick in the hands of Aaron, but when it was laid up before the Lord it budded, and blossomed, and brought forth almonds.

So, in the covenant of grace, we see the kingdom established and flourishing in Christ, and we rejoice in it. Oh how pleased we are to bow before His fruitful sceptre! What wonderful fruit we gather from that blessed rod! Reign, reign, Jesus, reign! The more Thou dost rule us, the more Thou art absolute Sovereign of our hearts, the happier shall we be, and the more shall we delight ourselves in Thee. There is no liberty like complete subjection beneath the sway of Jesus who is our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Then, by the side of that rod there was laid up the golden pot full of manna, the provision made for the wilderness. Let us rejoice that there is in the covenant all the provision that we need. God has laid up for us in Christ all our spiritual meat, all the food that we shall ever need between here and heaven. "Feed me till I want no more," we cry to our blessed covenant Representative, and He will do so. Then, over the top off the ark, sat the cherubim with outstretched wings, as, I think, representing how the angels are in league with us, and with the angels all the forces and powers of the universe.

This day, the beasts of the field are our friends, and the stones of the field have ceased to be our foes. Child of God, you may travel by land or sea; you may go where you will; for everywhere you are in your Father's house. All that you see about you is a friend to you, since you are a friend to God. I often wonder that the earth bears up ungodly men. It must groan beneath the weight of a swearer; it must want to open and swallow him up. But with the gracious man, the man who fears God, all things are at peace; and we may know it to be so.

"Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." We do not often enough realize, I think, the friendship of all God's creatures to those who are His children. St. Francis, thought he was a Romish monk, yet had a true idea when he used to regard the sparrows and other birds of the air, and even the dogs in the street, as his friends and his brothers, and talked to them as such.

And Luther was much of the same mind when he opened His window, and listened to the chirpings of the robins in the early spring, and felt that they had come to teach the theological doctor some lesson which he had not learned. Oh yes, oh yes, we are quite at home anywhere, now that God is our God! True, the earth travaileth, and is in pain, and the creation suffers and will suffer till Christ comes again; but still her travail is our travail, and we are in sympathy with her, and when she doth reflect the glory of her God she is our looking-glass in which we see our Father's face.

Thus, I think, I have shown you that there is much to be seen in the ark of the covenant. God give us grace, like the angels, to fix our eyes upon it! "Which things the angels desire to look into." We have more to do with the ark of His covenant than they have; let us be more desirous even than they are to look therein. IV. I close with this fourth point. THE COVENANT HAS SOLEMN SURROUNDINGS. Listen: "There were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."

When the people entered into covenant with God on Sinai, the Lord came down upon the top of the mount, and there were thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake. There were all these tokens of His presence, and God will not leave the covenant of His grace without the sanctions of His power; that thunder, that lightning, that storm--all these are engaged to keep His covenant. When they are wanted, the God who smote Egypt with great hailstones, the God who made the Kishon to sweep his enemies away, the God who made the stars in heaven to fight against Sisera, will bring all the overwhelming forces that are at His command to the help of His people, and the fulfilling of the covenant which He has made with them.

O you who are His people, fall back in confidence upon the God who has treasures of snow, and hail, and the dread artillery of storms and tempest! Most of you, my hearers, have never seen a great storm yet, nor heard in its majesty the thunder of God's power. You must be in the tropics to know what these can be, and even then you would have to say, "These are but parts of His ways." Oh, how the Lord can shake the earth, and make it tremble even to its deep foundations when He pleases!

He can make what we call "the solid earth" to be as weak as water when He doth but lift up His finger. But all the power that God hath--and it is boundless--is all in that right hand which has been lifted high to heaven in the solemn oath that He will save His people. Wherefore, lean upon God without the shadow of a doubt. He may well put all your fears to rest even by the thunder of His power. Then reflect that there is another side to this truth. You who are not in covenant with God, you who have not believed that Jesus is the Christ, you who have never fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you, you who refuse the divine mercy which comes to you through the bleeding person of the suffering Christ, do remember that there will be for you the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voices, and the earthquake, and the great hail, for these set forth the terrors of eternal law, overthrowing God's adversaries.

You have no conception of what God will do with the ungodly. False teachers may smooth it down as much as they like, but that Book is full of thunderbolts to you who refuse God's mercy. Listen to this one text: "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Can you sport with that? Listen to another: "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies!" What will you say to that, or to this? "And again they said Alleluia.

And her smoke rose up forever and ever." "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark; of his name." That they talk as if we invented these terrible words, but we do not; we merely quote the Scriptures of truth, and they are terrible indeed to the wicked.

That they should make men start in their sleep, and never rest until they find a Saviour. A Universalist once said to a Christian man that, whatever he did, God would not punish him, and the other replied, "If I spit on your god, I suppose he will not punish me. If I curse him, if I defy him, it will all come right at last?" "Yes," said the Universalist. "Well," answered the other, "that may be the character of your god; but don't you try that kind of thing with my God, the God of the Scriptures, or else you will find that because He is love He cannot, and He will not, suffer this world to be in anarchy, but he will rule it, and govern it, and He will punish those that refuse His infinite compassion."

So I beseech you, my hearers, fly to Jesus at once; weary, and heavy-laden, look to Him, for He saith especially to you, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." The Lord add His blessing to the truth I have tried to preach to you, the sweet and the terrible alike, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/the-ark-of-his-covenant/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net