

THE ARK OF GOD

“The ark of God was a sacred chest, made to be the depository of the Ten Commandments, which law was **the representative of God himself**. This ark was considered **the glory and strength of Israel**. The token of Divine presence abode upon it day and night. The priests who ministered before it were sacredly consecrated to the holy office. They wore a breast-plate bordered with precious stones of different materials, the same as compose the twelve foundations of the city of God. Within the border were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, graven on precious stones set in gold. This was a very rich and beautiful work, suspended from the shoulders of the priests, covering the breast.

“At the right and left of the breast-plate were set two larger stones, which shone with great brilliancy. When difficult matters were brought to the judges, which they could not decide, they were referred to the priests, and they inquired of God, who answered them. If in favor, and if he would grant them success, **a halo of light** and glory especially rested upon the precious stone at the right. If against, a vapor or cloud seemed to settle upon the precious stone at the left hand. When they inquired of God in regard to going to battle, the precious stone at the right, when circled with light, said, Go and prosper. The stone at the left, when shadowed with a cloud, said, Thou shalt not go, thou shalt not prosper.

“When the high priest entered within the most holy once a year, and ministered before the ark in the awful presence of God, he inquired, and God often answered him with an audible voice. When the Lord did not answer by a voice, he let the sacred beams of light and glory rest upon the cherubim upon the right of the ark, in approbation or favor. If their requests were refused, a cloud rested upon the cherubim at the left.

“Four heavenly angels always accompanied the ark of God in all its journeyings, to guard it from all danger, and to fulfill any mission required of them in connection with the ark. Jesus the Son of God, followed by heavenly angels, went before the ark as it came to Jordan, and the waters were cut off before his presence. Christ and angels stood by the ark and the priests in the bed of the river until all Israel had passed over Jordan. Christ and angels attended the circuit of the ark around Jericho, and finally cast down the massive walls of the city, and delivered Jericho into the hands of Israel.

“When Eli was high priest, he exalted his sons to the priesthood. Eli was alone permitted to enter the most holy once a year. His sons ministered at the door of the tabernacle, and officiated in the slaying of the beasts, and at the altar of sacrifice. They continually abused this sacred office. They were selfish, covetous, gluttonous, and profligate. God reproved Eli for his criminal neglect of family discipline. Eli reproved his sons, but did not restrain them. And when they were placed in the sacred office of priesthood, Eli heard of their conduct in defrauding the children of Israel in their offerings, also their bold transgressions of the law of God, and their violent conduct, which caused Israel to sin.

“Their crimes were known to all Israel. Eli reproved them. He presented before them the enormity of their sin. It was not like a sin against each other, which officiating priests could atone for. But if the priests themselves sin against God, and show open contempt for his authority, who should atone for them? They regarded not the counsel of their father. Eli was judge, and also high priest, in Israel, and he was responsible for the conduct of his sons. He should have at once removed them from the priesthood, and judged them as their case deserved. He knew if he should do this they must suffer death for their abominable example to Israel. Permitting them, loaded with guilt, to occupy the relation of priests to Israel, would lead the people to lightly regarded crime, and to despise the sacrificial offerings.

“The Lord by his prophet sent a reproof to Eli. ‘Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation, and honorest they sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore, the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me forever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.’

“Eli’s undue affection for his sons made him a partial judge. He excused sins in them which he would have condemned in others. The Lord informed Eli by his prophet that because he had thus suffered his sons to remain in sacred office, while they were compelling Israel to sin, and because of their transgressions of his law, he would cut off both his sons **in one day**. As Eli had neglected his sacred duty, God would punish them, and they should both perish.

“Here is a standing rebuke to parents, professed followers of Christ, who neglect to restrain their children, but merely entreat their children, like Eli, and who say, ‘Why do ye so wickedly?’ but who do not decidedly restrain them. Such suffer God’s cause to be dishonored, because they do not exercise that authority which belongs to them in order to restrain wickedness.

“The Lord made known to the child Samuel the judgments he would bring upon Eli’s house because of his negligence. ‘And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which **both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle**. In that **day** I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever.’

“The transgressions of Eli’s sons were so daring, so insulting to a holy God, that no sacrifice could atone for such willful transgression. These sinful priests profaned the sacrifices which typified the Son of God. And by their blasphemous conduct they were trampling upon the blood of the atonement, from which was derived the virtue of all sacrifices.

“Samuel told Eli the words of the Lord, ‘and he said, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.’ Eli knew that God had been dishonored, and he felt that he had sinned. He submitted that God was just in thus punishing his sinful neglect. **The word of the Lord to Samuel was made known by Eli** to all Israel. In doing this, he thought to correct in a measure his past sinful negligence. The evil pronounced upon Eli was not long delayed.

“The Israelites made war with the Philistines, and were overcome, and four thousand of them were slain. The Hebrews were afraid. They knew if other nations should hear of their defeat, they would be encouraged to also make war with them. The elders of Israel decided that their defeat was because the ark of God was not with them. They sent to Shiloh for the ark of the covenant. They thought of their passage over Jordan, and the easy conquest of Jericho, when they bore the ark, and they decided that all that was necessary was to bring the ark to them, and they would triumph over their enemies. They did not realize that their strength was in their obedience to that law contained in the ark, which was a representative of God himself. The polluted priests, Hophni and Phinehas, were with the sacred ark, transgressing the law of God. These sinners conducted the ark to the camp of Israel. The confidence of the men of war was restored, and they felt confident of success.

“And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel **shouted with a great shout**, so that the earth rang again. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, **Woe unto us!** for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. **Woe unto us!** Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Quit yourselves like men, and fight. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent. And there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel **thirty thousand** footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.’

“The Philistines thought this ark was the Israelites’ god. They knew not that the living God, who created the heavens and the earth, and gave his law upon Sinai, sent prosperity and adversity according to the obedience or transgression of his law, contained in the sacred chest.

“There was a very great slaughter in Israel. Eli was sitting by the wayside, watching with a trembling heart to receive news from the army. He was afraid that the ark of God might be taken, and polluted by the Philistine host. A messenger from the army ran to Shiloh and informed Eli that his two sons had been slain. He could bear this with a degree of calmness, for he had reason to expect it. But when the messenger added, ‘And the ark of God is taken,’ Eli wavered in anguish upon his seat, and fell backward and died. He shared the wrath of God which came upon his sons. He was guilty in a great measure of their transgressions, because he had criminally neglected to restrain them. The capture of the ark of God by the Philistines was considered the greatest calamity which could befall Israel. The wife of Phinehas, as she was about to die, named her child Ichabod, saying, ‘The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken.’

“God permitted his ark to be taken by their enemies to show Israel how vain it was to trust in the ark, **the symbol of his presence**, while they were profaning the commandments contained in the ark. God would humble them by removing from them that sacred ark, their boasted strength and confidence.

“The Philistines were triumphant, because they had, as they thought, the famous god of the Israelites, which had performed such wonders for them, and had made them a terror to their enemies. They took the ark of God to Ashdod, and set it in a splendid temple, made in honor of their most popular god, Dagon, and placed it by the side of their god. In the morning the priests of these gods entered the temple, and they were terrified to find Dagon **fallen** upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. They raised Dagon and placed him in his former position. They thought he might have accidentally fallen. But the next morning they found him **fallen** as before upon his face to the ground, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were cut off. The angels of God, who ever accompanied the ark, prostrated the senseless idol god, and afterward mutilated it, to show that God, the living God, was above all gods, and before him every heathen god was as nothing. The heathen possessed great reverence for their god, Dagon, and when they found it ruinously mutilated, and lying upon its face before the ark of God, they were sad, and considered it a very bad omen to the Philistines. It was interpreted by them that the Philistines and all their gods would yet be subdued and destroyed by the Hebrews, and the Hebrews’ God would be greater and more powerful than all gods. They removed the ark of God from their idol temple, and placed it by itself.

“The men of Ashdod began to be greatly afflicted. The Lord destroyed them, and they remembered the plagues brought upon Egypt, and their mutilated god, and they were convinced that it was because they kept the ark of God that these distressing afflictions came upon them. God would evidence to the idolatrous Philistines, and also to his people, that the ark was strength and power to those who were obedient to his law, and to the disobedient and wicked it was punishment and death.

“When the men of Ashdod were convinced that it was the God of the Hebrews who caused their afflictions, because of his ark, they decided that the ark of the God of Israel should not abide with them. ‘For,’ say they ‘his hand is sore upon us and upon Dagon our god.’ The great men and rulers consulted together, relative to what they should do with the ark of the God of Israel. They had taken it in triumph, but knew not what to do with the sacred chest; for instead of its being a power and strength to them, it was a great burden, and a heavy curse. They decided to send it to Gath. But the destroying angels carried on their work of destruction also in that place. Very many of them died, and they dared not retain the ark longer in Gath, lest the God of Israel should consume all the people by his curse.

“They of Gath decided to send the ark to Ekron. And as the idolatrous priests bore the ark of God to Ekron, the people of Ekron were greatly alarmed and cried out, ‘They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.’ The Ekronites were also afflicted, and great numbers of them died. They went to their gods for help, as the cities of Ashdod and Gath had done, but they obtained no relief. They had humbled themselves to cry to the God of Israel to whom the ark belonged for relief from their affliction. ‘So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place that it slay us not, and our people; for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city. The hand of God was very heavy there. And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.’

“The ark of God was kept by the Philistines **seven months**. They had overcome the Israelites, and had taken the ark of God, wherein they supposed their power consisted, and thought that they should ever be in safety, and have no more fear of the armies of Israel. But in the midst of their joy at their success, a wailing was heard all over the land, and the cause was at length credited to the ark of God. It was borne from place to place in terror, and destruction from God followed its course, until the Philistines were greatly perplexed to know what to do with it. Angels who accompanied it, guarded it from all harm. And the Philistines did not dare to open the chest, for their god, Dagon, had met with such a fate, they feared to touch it, or to have it near them. They called for the priests and the diviners, and inquired of them what they should do with the ark of God. They advised them to send it back to the people to whom it belonged, and to send with it a costly trespass-offering, which if God would be pleased to accept, they would be healed. They should also understand that God’s hand was upon them because they had taken his ark, which belonged alone to Israel.

“Some were not in favor of this. It was too humiliating to carry back the ark, and they urged that no one of the Philistines would dare venture his life to carry the ark of the God of Israel which had brought such death upon them. Their counselors entreated the people not to harden their hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh had done, and cause still greater afflictions and plagues to come upon them. And as they were all afraid to take the ark of God, they advised them, saying, ‘Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them. And take the ark of the Lord, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass-offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us. And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.’

“The Philistines knew that the cows would not be induced to leave their young calves at home, unless they should be urged so to do by some unseen power. The cows went direct to Beth-shemesh, lowing for their calves, yet going directly from them. The lords of the Philistines followed after the ark, unto the border of Beth-shemesh. They dare not trust that sacred chest wholly to the cows. They feared if any evil happened to it, that greater calamities would come upon them. They knew not that angels of God accompanied the ark, and guided the cows in their course where it belonged. The people of Beth-shemesh were reaping in the field, and when they saw the ark of God upon the cart, drawn by the cows, they were greatly rejoiced. They knew that it was the work of God. The cows drew the cart, containing the ark, to a large stone, and stood still of themselves. The Levites took down the ark of the Lord, and the offering of the Philistines, and they offered the cart and the cows which had borne the sacred ark, and the offering of the Philistines, unto God as a burnt-sacrifice. The lords of the Philistines returned to Ekron and the plague was stayed.

“The men of Beth-shemesh were curious to know what great power could be in that ark, which caused it to accomplish such marvelous things. They looked upon the ark alone as being so powerful, and were not accrediting the power to God. None but men sacredly appointed for the purpose could look upon the ark, divested of its coverings, without being slain, for it was as though looking upon God himself. And as the people gratified their curiosity, and opened the ark to gaze into its sacred recesses, which the heathen idolaters had not dared to do, the angels attending the ark slew above **fifty thousand** of the people.

“And the people of Beth-shemesh were afraid of the ark, and they said, ‘Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? And to whom shall he go up from us? And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, saying, ‘The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord. Come ye down, and fetch it up to you.’” The people of Kirjath-jearim brought the ark of the Lord to the house of Abinadab, and sanctified his son to keep it. For twenty years the Hebrews were in the power of the Philistines, and they were greatly humbled, and repented of their sins, and Samuel interceded for them, and God was again merciful to them. And the Philistines made war with them, and the Lord again wrought in a miraculous manner for Israel, and they overcame their enemies.

“The ark remained in the house of Abinadab until David was made king. He gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, **thirty thousand**, and went to bring up the ark of God. They set the ark upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, drove the cart. David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of musical instruments. ‘And when they came to Nachon’s threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.’ Uzzah was angry with the oxen, because they stumbled. He showed a manifest distrust of God, as though he who had brought the ark from the land of the Philistines, could not take care of it. Angels who attended the ark struck down Uzzah for presuming impatiently to put his hand upon the ark of God.

“‘And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite.’ David knew that he was a sinful man, and he was afraid that, like Uzzah, he should in some way be presumptuous, and call forth the wrath of God upon himself. ‘And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, **three months**, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household.’

“God would teach his people that, while his ark was a terror and death to those who transgressed his commandments contained in it, it was also a blessing and strength to those who were obedient to his commandments. When David heard that the house of Obed-edom was greatly blessed, and that all that he had prospered, because of the ark of God, he was very anxious to bring it to his own city. But before David ventured to move the sacred ark, he sanctified himself to God, and also commanded that all the men highest in authority in the kingdom should keep themselves from all worldly business, and everything which would distract their minds from sacred devotion. **Thus should they sanctify themselves for the purpose of conducting the sacred ark to the city of David.** ‘So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings.’

“David laid off his kingly attire, and clothed himself with garments similar to the priests, which had never been worn before, that not the least impurity might be upon his clothing. **Every six paces** they erected an altar and solemnly sacrificed to God. The special blessing of the Lord rested upon king David, who thus manifested before his people his exalted reverence for the ark of God. ‘And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, **Michal**, Saul’s daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart.’

“The dignity and pride of king Saul’s daughter was shocked that king David should lay aside his garments of royalty, and lay by his royal scepter, and be clothed with the simple linen garments worn by the priest. She thought that he was greatly dishonoring himself before the people of Israel. But **God honored David in the sight of all Israel by letting his Spirit abide upon him.** David humbled himself, but God exalted him. He sung in an inspired manner, playing upon the harp, producing the most enchanting music. He felt in a small degree that holy joy that all the saints will experience at **the voice of God when their captivity is turned, and God makes a covenant of peace with all who have kept his commandments.** ‘And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord.’

“After Solomon had finished building the temple, he assembled the elders of Israel, and the most influential men among the people, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David. These men consecrated themselves to God, and with great solemnity and reverence, accompanied the priests who bore the ark. ‘And they brought up the ark of the Lord, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude.’

“Solomon followed the example of his father David. **Every six paces** he sacrificed. With singing, and with music, and great ceremony, ‘the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered the ark and the staves thereof above.’

“A most splendid sanctuary had been made, according to the pattern showed to Moses in the mount, and afterward presented by the Lord to David. The earthly sanctuary was made like the heavenly. In addition to the cherubim on the top of the ark, Solomon made two other angels of larger size, standing at each end of the ark, representing the heavenly angels always guarding the law of God. It is impossible to describe the beauty and splendor of this tabernacle. There, as in the tabernacle, the sacred ark was borne in solemn, reverential order, and set in its place beneath the wings of the two stately cherubim that stood upon the floor.

“The sacred choir united their voices, with all kinds of musical instruments, in praise to God. And while the voices in harmony, with instruments of music, resounded through the temple, and were borne upon the air through Jerusalem, **the cloud of God’s glory took possession of the house, as it had formerly filled the tabernacle.** ‘**And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.**’

“King Solomon stood upon a brazen scaffold before the altar and **blessed the people.** He then knelt down, and with his hands raised upward, poured forth earnest and solemn prayer to God, while the congregation were bowed with their faces to the ground. After Solomon had ended his prayer, **a miraculous fire came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice.**

“Because of the sins of Israel, the calamity which God said should come upon the temple, if his people departed from him, was fulfilled some hundreds of years after the temple was built. God promised Solomon, if he would remain faithful, and his people would obey all his commandments, that that glorious temple should stand forever in all its splendor, as an evidence of the prosperity and exalted blessings resting upon Israel for their obedience.

“Because of Israel’s transgression of the commandments of God, and their wicked acts, God suffered them to go into captivity to humble and punish them. Before the temple was destroyed, God made known to a few of his faithful servants the fate of the temple, which was the pride of Israel, and which they regarded with idolatry, while they were sinning against God. He also revealed to them the captivity of Israel. These righteous men, just before the destruction of the temple, removed the sacred ark containing the tables of stone, and with mourning and sadness, secreted it in a cave where it was to be hid from the people of Israel, because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hid. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.” *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 4, 101–115.