

הַאֲרוֹן בְּרִית

Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the covenant was a special box which HaShem commanded Moses and the children of Israel to make in order to be the special place where He revealed His shining glory (called by our Sages “Shekinah”). It was about 2 1/2 feet wide, 2 1/2 feet tall, and a little more than 4 feet long. The box was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, both inside and out. It had a removable top (called the “mercy seat”) to which was attached gold figures to represent Cherubim, the angels of HaShem who guard His presence. Then, with rings attached on the sides of the Ark, poles were inserted so that the Cohenim (priests) could carry it as the people of Israel travelled to the Promised Land.

The Ark of the Covenant was housed in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle and represented the presence of G-d among His people. Over the top of the Ark were two Cherubim facing each other, symbolic of how G-d’s angels protect the place of G-d’s dwelling. The Ark was to be carried and moved only by the tribe of the Levites. Inside the Ark were three objects: the tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Words (commandments), the rod of Aaron that budded, and a pot of manna. Each of these were symbols of the covenant G-d had made with Israel, and the manner in which He had remained faithful to the covenant. However, the children of Israel were not faithful to maintain their obedience to the covenant. In fact, in each case represented by the symbols of the covenant, Israel had acted in unfaithfulness. She had worshipped a golden calf at the giving of the Torah, she grumbled about the manna, and she failed to follow G-d’s appointed leaders, the family of Aaron. This is why it was necessary to apply the blood to the cover of the Ark, the mercy seat. The blood covered the nation’s sins, and allowed G-d to dwell in her midst.

Even the Ark itself was misused. During Saul’s reign, the Ark was used as a “good luck charm,” taken into battle, and lost! Yet in spite of Israel’s sin, the Ark was maintained by G-d’s power and returned to Israel. Finally, David brought it to Jerusalem, and finally, Shlomo, David’s son, brought it into the Temple.

