

Witness Letter 2

Dear Christian Friend:

A current adventure film, “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” has focused attention on the Biblical Ark of the Covenant. It has also brought controversy in religious circles. A lawsuit has been filed against its producers and promoters, claiming the idea for the film was stolen from an unpublished manuscript and that they have “religiously degraded” the Ark and misled the public about its significance. “Raiders of the Lost Ark” has been described as a “mumbo-jumbo version” of the religious meaning of the Ark. The film by reducing God’s law to horror, vengeance and violence, “may fit into the theology of Hollywood, but certainly doesn’t fit the theology of the Bible.”

From McClintock and Strong’s Bible Encyclopedia: “What became of the Ark when the temple was plundered and destroyed by the Babylonians is not known, and all conjecture is useless. It was probably taken away or destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Orthodox Jews believe that it was concealed from spoilers and account it among the hidden things which the Messiah is to reveal. It is certain, however, that the old Ark was not contained in the second temple, and there is no evidence that any new one was made. The most holy place is therefore generally considered to have been empty in the second temple; or at most to have contained only a stone to mark the place which the Ark should have occupied.”

The Ark of the Covenant is described in the 25th chapter of Exodus. It was the only article of furniture in the “most holy” compartment of Israel’s tabernacle and later in Solomon’s temple. It was a rectangular box made of wood and overlaid with gold, having a lid or cover of pure gold called the Propitiatory or “Mercy Seat.” Upon it (and of the same piece) were two cherubim of gold beaten work. Within the Ark (under the Mercy Seat) were placed the golden bowl of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the two tables of the law. (Hebrews 9:4). Over the Mercy Seat a supernatural light appeared, shining out between the cherubim, representing the divine presence. This was the only light in the most holy.

The Apostle Paul explains that the tabernacle was “an example and shadow of heavenly things,” “a shadow of good things to come,” “but the body [substance, reality] is of Christ.” Hebrews 8:5; 10:1, Colossians 2:17

The Ark of the Covenant portrays God’s plan which He purposed in Himself, before the beginning of creation—before the minutest development of this plan had taken place. It represented the eternal purpose of God... the hidden riches of grace in Christ.

Aaron's rod that budded showed the elect character of all the members of the "royal priesthood"—Christ Jesus the Head, and the church, His body. "Ye are ... a royal priesthood." (1 Peter 2:9) The golden pot of manna represented immortality as one of the qualities of the divine nature (symbolized by gold). One peculiarity of this manna was that it was incorruptible. Our Lord refers to this when He said, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." (Revelation 2:17) The two tables of the law represented the righteous Judge. "The righteousness of the law" was actually fulfilled in Christ and is reckonedly fulfilled in all the "new creatures in Christ"—"who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."

The Shekinah glory represented God Himself, His wisdom, His presence. He is the Light of the universe, as Christ is the Light of the world. "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth." (Psa. 80:1) Humanity cannot enter God's presence. (1 Tim. 6:16) Therefore the royal priest, Head and body, represented by Aaron, must become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) before they can appear in the presence of that excellent glory.

The Mercy Seat represents the attributes of God's character. The slab of gold represented the underlying principle of God's character—Justice. On it the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices in the form of a cross, symbolizing the satisfaction of divine justice. The Apostle Paul uses the Greek word for Mercy Seat when referring to our Lord Jesus, saying, "Whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiatory (or Mercy Seat)... to declare His righteousness... that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Romans 3:25, 26.

The two cherubim represented two other elements of God's character—divine Love and divine Power. These attributes, Justice the foundation principle, and Love and Power, of the same quality or essence, and lifted up out of it, are in perfect harmony. They are all made of one piece; they are thoroughly one. Neither Love nor Power can be exercised until Justice is fully satisfied. Then they fly to help, to lift up and to bless. They are ready, but waiting; looking inward toward the "Mercy Seat," toward Justice, to know when to move.

Love led to the whole plan of redemption. It was because "God so loved the world that he sent His only begotten Son" to redeem it by paying to Justice the ransom price. So Love has been preparing for the redemption even before sin entered—from "before the foundation of the world." 1 Peter 1:20.

Love waits to see the result of its plan. "He [Jesus] is a propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins [the church during the Gospel age] and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world [after the church is complete and in glory with her Lord]." (1 John 2:2) Then comes the moment when Love and Power will act, and swiftly they will wing their

flight to bless the ransomed race, using the same agency—Christ, the Ark or safe depository of divine favors.

How beautiful the plan of God—and how beautifully it is illustrated in the Ark of the Covenant! For a more complete study of the symbolic meaning of Israel's tabernacle and how it relates to the Christian church, we invite you to send for the 128-page illustrated book, **TABERNACLE SHADOWS**.