

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 296

Exodus 25, Part 1

November 2, 2019

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Episode Summary

Exodus 25 begins the book's description of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. The most prominent item is the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 25:10-22). In this episode, we briefly discuss some of the preliminary comments about the Tabernacle (Exod 25:1-9) before turning our attention to the Ark's nature and purposes.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 296: Exodus 25, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. Busy. Our move is really sneaking up on us here, even though we've had 10 months or whatever it was. We're just feeling the pressure.

TS: Yeah. And you say Drenna is on her way to look at a house, hopefully?

MH: Yeah, she is. At the time of this recording, she is probably still on the plane. So I'm letting her pick the house. I don't need to be there. Of course I'll need to be there to sign papers and all that stuff. But yep, that's what she's doing. So Lord willing, she'll come back with something really concrete. That's pretty sweet.

TS: You're only months away, Mike, from being a Jacksonville Jaguar.

MH: Yeah... no. [laughter] I don't think that's going to happen. [laughs]

TS: Are you watching the World Series going on? Any comments on it?

MH: I've watched a little bit of both games. So I'm kind of shocked...

TS: Ugh, very disappointing.

MH: ...Washington. Are you disappointed?

TS: At the time... I root for all Texas teams, so Astros...

MH: Yeah, well, I'm hoping the Astros... Yeah, I like them too. But I guess if Washington wins, it's not awful because I kind of like to see teams win that haven't won either ever or for 100 years, or whatever it is. But yeah. I'm just kind of surprised at the way it's going.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. And did we mention last show what the outcome of our Fantasy Football between you and I was?

MH: No, we didn't.

TS: No, this is the first time. Yeah.

MH: I'll let you mention it.

TS: No, please, the honor is... The glory is yours.

MH: The Pugnacious Pugs finally picked up a win against Trey.

TS: Barely. It was a close one. It came down to...

MH: It wasn't like micro-points. I don't know. It was, what, 10 points or something like that?

TS: It was 10 points. It was pretty close. Considering I was up by 3 points going into Monday night. I had Edelman, too. And he did good, but your running back had three touchdowns that night. It was rough.

MH: Yep. Sony Michel. I picked the right guy. So yeah, I'll take it. It might be the only other win I have this year. But that would be a good win. [laughs]

TS: Well, Mike, did you do your homework that I assigned to everybody, which was to watch *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?

MH: I did not watch *Raiders*, but people *will* see a picture of me wearing my jacket. And maybe even the hat.

TS: Well, I'm excited, because we're going to get into the face-melting Scripture part of the Bible, right?

MH: [laughs] Right. Yeah, in Part 1 we're going to talk about what the Ark was and its purposes. And I know I've got face-melting somewhere here in the notes. So yeah, that'll be today.

TS: We're going to be here for a little bit, right? There's going to be three parts of this.

MH: Yep. We're going to have three parts in Exodus 25. So today we're going to begin the discussion of the tabernacle and the items in it, but specifically we're going to start with the Ark of the Covenant. The next episode is going to be the Ark of the Covenant again. And that episode is going to be the whole question of, "Are there ancient Near Eastern parallels or antecedents to the Ark" (other arks in ancient Near Eastern cultures)? And then the third part will be the rest of the furniture. So we have Ark, Ark, and then the rest of the stuff [laughs] coming up in three parts.

We're not going to talk—either today or any of those other episodes—about what happened to the Ark. We're not going to do that at all. The reason is, we already did that. We've already done that on the podcast. That's an earlier episode—Episode 158 for people who want to hear that sort of thing (theories as to what happened to the Ark of the Covenant). Was it destroyed or not? Where is it? All that stuff. So we're not going to repeat that here. That is Episode 158.

5:00 So let's jump in to Exodus 25 here. I'm going to read the first nine verses. There are a few things to say here before we actually get to the Ark in verse 10. The Ark stuff is verses 10-22. So let's just read Exodus 25:1-9, and then I want to say a few things before we actually get into the Ark of the Covenant.

The LORD said to Moses, ²“Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. ³And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, ⁵tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, ⁶oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. ⁸And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. ⁹Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

So that's the first nine verses of Exodus 25. It's kind of odd that it mentions the ephod and the breastpiece, because the reader wouldn't know what those are, because they're not made yet. That's going to be *afterwards*. But you get one of these little anachronistic kinds of things going on, and we've encountered this in the book of Exodus a number of places. But other than that, there are a few things that I want to note real briefly.

The wording of “take for me”... It's very clear from Exodus 25 that the materials

that are being gathered are for holy use. God's the speaker and he says, "This is for me. This stuff is for me." The things are referred to as a contribution. The Hebrew word here is *terumah*, which is elsewhere translated and basically generally means "gift." So it's something given. And of course, if it's a gift, you're not expecting to take it back. It's not a loan; it's a gift. So these are things that are for the Lord. They're given freely by the people and with no expectation that they were going to be using these things again. They are for the Lord.

Sarna combines those two thoughts that I just mentioned this way. He says that:

Terumah is a technical term referring specifically to that which is set aside by its owner and dedicated for sacred use.

That certainly fits the context here. We had a reference to gold, silver, and bronze. Sarna notes in his commentary that:

The metals are listed in descending order of value. This, in turn, determines their use for various objects; the closer the object is to the Holy of Holies, the more valuable the metal of which it is made. [MH: That's intentional.] Iron is notably absent, either on account of its great rarity at this time or because its utilization for more efficient weapons of death made it incompatible with the spiritual ends that the sanctuary was intended to serve.

I thought that was an interesting observation because we had this in Leviticus on a number of occasions, where the presence of God is associated with life and not death. So Sarna is suggesting, "Hey, maybe the exclusion of iron, since that's going to be a warfare metal... Maybe that's why it's excluded—because it's associated with death implements." It's possible. We don't know for sure. But it's a coherent possibility. There's another reference in verse 4 to "blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood." I'm going to read another excerpt from Sarna here. He says:

These are the most expensive dyed yarns of antiquity. The sequence, once again, reflects their relative value and thus the degree of sanctity that attaches to the objects in which they are used, starting with the Holy of Holies. The dyes were all obtained from animal sources, and the yarns were to be used for the Tabernacle hangings and coverings and for the priestly vestments...

In the Bible, Hebrew *tekhelet* is frequently paired with Hebrew *'argaman*, purple, both being dyes produced from the murex, a marine snail termed *hillazon* in rabbinic tradition. This creature exudes a yellow fluid that becomes a dye in the red-purple range when exposed to sunlight. [MH: This is how it's made.] The desired shade was obtained by varying the species of murex and by adding other

ingredients. *Tekhelet* was probably closer to a violet tint, while *'argaman* had a more reddish hue.

So there's your blue, purple, and scarlet. Or at least blue and purple.

10:00

The Phoenician coast was famous for its dyeing industry. Immense quantities of marine-snail shells dating to the fifteenth century b.c.e. have been found at Ugarit. Modern attempts to reconstruct the process have shown that it required thousands of snails to produce sufficient dye for one robe. This, together with the intensity of the labor and the superiority of the dye's richness and stability, made the products very costly. Hence, possession of *tekhelet*-dyed or *'argaman*-dyed fabrics were marks of wealth, nobility, and royalty.

Then Sarna comments on the word "crimson" (or "scarlet" in the ESV). The Hebrew here is *tola 'at shani*.

The first word means "a worm" [MH: believe it or not]; the second signifies the color. The combination designates the brilliant red dye produced from the eggs of scale insects of the Coccidae family that feed on oak trees.

You can add that to your Bible trivia now.

fine linen Hebrew *shesh* is a very early term, borrowed from Egyptian [MH: same consonants] *šš*, used for cloth of exceptional quality.

Now I wanted to include this comment about Egyptian being one of the terms here—this term for fine linen. We're going to see other Egyptian terms in this chapter, and they're going to contribute to next week's episode about a possible antecedent or parallel object. It's going to be from ancient Egypt. That's the most coherent parallel. So there are Egyptian things (Egyptian-isms) in this chapter. And of course the context (this is Moses and the Exodus)... That shouldn't be a surprise. But I just want to put that on the radar for right now, and we're going to be dealing with it more specifically next time.

Now the ESV "goatskins" is kind of interesting. The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh English translation (believe it or not) renders the Hebrew here as "dolphins' skins." Dolphins! Why does it do that? Well, the Hebrew term here is Hebrew *teḥashim* (singular *taḥash*), and Sarna writes that:

...with one exception, always refers to the coverings of the Tabernacle. Its exact meaning is uncertain. In rabbinic times the *taḥash* [MH: that's the singular form] was invested with mythical association and identified with the unicorn. Because of the similarity with Arabic *tuḥas* [MH: remember, the Hebrew is *taḥash*], *duḥs*, which denote both the dolphin and the dugong [MH: think of the manatee—that

might be a more familiar term for you] found in the Red Sea, modern scholars have variously identified the biblical creature with one or the other [MH: dolphin or dugong]. A suggestion to equate the term with Akkadian *dušu* (= *taḥšia*), the name of a precious stone of either yellow or orange color, seems more plausible [MH: so Sarna's not going to go down the dolphin and the dugong road, even though other scholars do] since that word is also used to describe leather that is dyed and tanned the color of the stone. Significantly, only the hides of goats (and sheep) were so treated.

So this term (what the ESV has as “goatskins”) might be dolphin skins or dugong skins. That's possible. But you have to take the Hebrew term and then make Arabic its cognate here. “And you can find these species in the Red Sea, so maybe that's what we're talking about.” But Sarna opts for a term that's used of a particular stone that's used to color leather. And he thinks that's more plausible. It probably is, but I just wanted to point out the other possibilities. Let's mention acacia wood. Sarna notes that:

Other than in Isaiah 41:19, Hebrew *shittim* always refers to the timbers used in the construction of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances... The Hebrew *shittah* may well be an Egyptian loan word.

So we have an Egyptian loan word for the linen. We have an Egyptian loan word for the acacia wood. These little things are going to accumulate and provide some context for what we'll be talking about next time, specifically. Now in verse 8, God says,

Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

Just a real brief note from Sarna here. He says:

Careful analysis of the language used here is essential for a proper understanding of the underlying concept and role of the sanctuary. First, the text speaks of God dwelling not “in it,” that is in the sanctuary, but “among them,” that is, among the people of Israel (v. 2). Then, the verb “to dwell” is not the common Hebrew stem *y-sh-v* [MH: that's to sit or to dwell] but the rarer *sh-k-n*, which has a different connotation. This verb conveys the idea of temporary lodging in a tent and characterizes the nomadic style of life. That is why the structure is called a *mishkan* [MH: It's from the verb *shakan*.] (e.g., v. 9) and why the verbal form is frequently used together with *'ohel*, the common word for “a tent,” and in connection with nomads. The noun *mishkan* is often employed in synonymous parallelism with *'ohel*, and the other designations of the wilderness Tabernacle are the “Tent of the Pact” [MH: the tabernacle actually gets called a tent] and the “Tent of Meeting.”

15:00

Thus, the sanctuary is not meant to be understood literally as God's abode, as are other such institutions in the pagan world. Rather, it functions to make perceptible and tangible the conception of God's immanence [MH: his nearness], that is, of the indwelling of the Divine Presence in the camp of Israel, to which the people may orient their hearts and minds. A postbiblical extension of this usage of the verb *sh-k-n* is the Hebrew term *shekhinah* [MH: pronounced correctly sheck-heen-AH, not sheck-INE-ah] for the Divine Presence.

So his point here is that the terminology points to the temporary nature of God's presence in or with this tent (among the people). That's going to become more permanent when we get the temple, because a temple is a permanent structure. But a tabernacle isn't. So Sarna sort of uses that as a trajectory for understanding a little bit more about how the tabernacle would have been thought about or conceived. Verse 9 says,

Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

Next time, we're going to spend a few minutes focusing on that verse and also verse 40, which essentially says the same thing. God gives Moses a pattern (a *tavnit* is the Hebrew word) for these things (for the tabernacle and the furnishings). So just to plant the question in your mind for next time, if God gave Moses a design, is it theologically troublesome if there's an ancient Near Eastern parallel to either the Tabernacle or the Ark or some other item of furniture in the Tabernacle? Is that problematic? Tune in next time. For now, we're just going to get into the furniture, specifically the Ark, for the rest of the episode.

So what was the Ark? I'm going to read Exodus 25:10-22 just so that we are familiar with what the text actually says here. Beginning in verse 10, God says to Moses:

¹⁰ "They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. ¹² You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. ¹³ You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. [MH: We know that the Ark's made of acacia wood now. That's an Egyptian term.] ¹⁴ And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. ¹⁵ The poles shall remain in the rings

of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. ¹⁶ And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

¹⁷ “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ¹⁸ And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. ¹⁹ Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. ²⁰ The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. ²¹ And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. ²² There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

20:00

That’s the end of the Ark section, so that’s the end of our selection for today. So what is this thing? Parts of the description are kind of clear. We should note right away... This is verses 10-22 of Exodus 25. Verses 10-16 are about the Ark and verses 17-22 are about the lid. I know ESV has “mercy seat,” which is a bit misleading. We’ll get to that in a moment. But the section is actually divided neatly into two sub-sections: the Ark and then the lid. So I want to read a little bit of something from the *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the Pentateuch volume. This is by Dick Averbeck at Trinity. Dr. Averbeck spends a lot of time in Leviticus and this sort of literature. I know him. He’s a good guy. He’s had a long career as a scholar, and this is sort of his sweet spot. But he writes this:

The Ark was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle. It was placed in the inner sanctum of the tent called “the most holy place.” The cover on top of the Ark was called the “the atonement seat” (*kappōret*, from the verb *kipper*, “to make atonement”) overshadowed by two gold cherubim. According to Leviticus 16:2, the Lord said to Moses, “I will appear in the cloud over the atonement seat,” so he was to make clear to Aaron that the high priest must not enter there except once a year on the Day of Atonement. With regard to Moses, however, the Lord would “meet” with Moses there and “speak” to him all the commandments so that he could deliver them to the Israelites (Ex 25:22). In fact, the Ark was the depository of the two stone tablets of the *law, which the Lord was about to give Moses on the mountain (Ex 25:16; cf. Ex 24:12; 34:28; Ex 40:20; Deut 10:5; 1 Kings 8:9). Thus the Ark is sometimes called “the Ark of the testimony” (*’ārōn*

hā 'ēdut, e.g., Ex 25:22; or “the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord,” *'ārōn bē'rît yhw̄h*, e.g., Num 10:33).

Those are actually related because the testimony being referred to are the tablets (which we've spent enough time already talking about), and the tablets were at the core of the covenant that God is making with the people of Israel. So that's why the Ark is called what it is. These tablets (the testimony—the *adut* in Hebrew) are stored inside the Ark, so the Ark becomes known as the Ark of the testimony or the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. Back to Averbek:

The Ark itself was a rectangular box made of acacia wood overlaid inside and out with pure gold plating, 2½ cubits long (c. 3 feet 9 inches), 1½ cubits wide (c. 2 feet 3 inches) and 1½ cubits high. There are many species of acacia, most of which are thorny bushes or shrubs, but a few have trunks from which timber could be cut. It is a very hard and durable wood that is also lightweight. The term *acacia* (*šittîm*) is of Egyptian origin. Gold molding ran along its edges, and two gold rings were attached to each long side so that acacia wood poles overlaid with gold could be inserted along both sides for carrying the Ark without touching it. The poles were to remain in the rings permanently.

So look at the description we have of the Ark. We have another Egyptian term because it's made of this particular kind of wood. That's going to be an item for next week because we're going to see that there are lots of other Egyptian things that are like the Ark—quite a bit like the Ark. But we'll save that for next time. We're going to be exploring at that point an article that I'm going to refer to here because there's something in the article I want to cite in this episode. It's an article by Scott Noegel. I believe this might be online. It's “The Egyptian Origin of the Ark of the Covenant.” So right away, it tells you where he's coming from. It's in a book called *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective* (2015). So Noegel basically goes through the dimensions of the Ark, just like we just read with Averbek and so on and so forth. And he talks about the contents of the Ark. Now listen to this. He says the contents of the Ark were...

...the tablets of the law (Deut 10:1–5, *'aron hab-berith*; Exod 25:22, *'aron ha-eduth*), a jar of manna (Exod 16:33–34), and possibly the rod of Aaron (Heb 9:4, cf. Num 17:10).

Now the reason why he's cautious there we'll get to in a moment, because there's something kind of odd here going on. Noegel is cautious (I'll just telegraph it now) because when Josephus is writing about the Ark, he actually says that the Ark was empty. That's in *Jewish Wars*, Book 5, paragraph 219. But that's Josephus. Josephus can more or less say what he wants. But there's actually a biblical passage that appears very clearly contradictory to what Noegel has just referenced. Let me just go back to it. So you've probably been taught

that there were three things in the Ark. You have the tablets. That's the easy one. That's very obvious. Jar of manna. That's Exodus 16:33-34. And then Numbers 17:10 for the rod of Aaron. You probably have been taught that any number of times. But there's a problem because... Let me just read you 1 Kings 8:9.

⁹There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

I bet you don't remember 1 Kings 8:9. [laughs] You probably remember things you've been *taught* about the Ark. But what's going on there? We'll get to that in a moment. But just store that away, because there are actually a lot of things to discuss here.

Now going back to Noegel a little bit, he also lists or discusses what he views as what the Ark did or what the purpose was. He says:

In addition to serving as a reliquary [MH: in other words, a place that you put stuff in], texts attribute two other functions to the Ark. Most prominently, it served as the symbolic presence of Yahweh. In times of war, Yahweh led as the Lord of Hosts, seated upon the kerubim, surrounded by standard bearers preceding him. Each standard was topped with a banner representing an Israelite tribe or family line (Num 2:1–34, 10:35, Ps 132:8). As the symbolic presence of Yahweh, the Ark was connected to miracles and oracles. Thus, when the priests carried the Ark into the Jordan River the waters parted (Josh 3:8–17), and Moses, Phinehas, Samuel, Saul, and David each received divine direction from the Ark (Exod 25:22, 30:6, Num 7:89, Judg 20:27–28, 1 Sam 3:3, 1 Sam 14:18, cf. 2 Sam 2:1, 5:19, 11:11, 15:24).

So the Ark, if we could summarize this... What was the Ark and what did it do?

1. In a nutshell, the Ark is a box made of wood. It's plated with gold. It has a solid gold lid. The wood that it's made of is acacia wood (*shittim* in Hebrew—a term that is quite possibly of Egyptian origin).
2. The Ark and its lid were associated with God's presence. "Mercy seat" is a bit misleading, because the Ark is elsewhere going to be described as the footstool of God. The term (*kapporet*) actually doesn't mean mercy seat. There's no inherent "mercy" meaning in *kapporet* or even the verb *kpr* ("to atone"). We'll come back to that thought as well.
3. God dispensed information to Moses when meeting with him at or upon the Ark. So the point is, the Ark had some sort of oracular function. It was not a conduit for divine revelation, but it was associated with an appearance of God in

the cloud, when God dispensed divine information. It wasn't like a radio or a transmitter. (This is internet theology now.) It was the place where God would meet Moses or some of these other individuals and dispense information, revelation.

4. Because God was present with or upon the Ark, it at times was present to lead Israel in battle. Now there's no evidence at all in the Bible that the Ark was some kind of weapon. This is Hollywood. This is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The Ark doesn't shoot death rays. There's no passage like that. It's not a weapon. But it was brought out into battle or onto the battlefield. Why? Because the presence of God was associated with it.

5. As God's throne, the lid of the Ark was accompanied by cherubim (or kerubim), which are stylized throne guardians—divine throne guardians. If you've read *Unseen Realm* or heard me lecture on cherubim and different terms for heavenly host, that should be old information. But this was a throne guardian—a supernatural entity that protected sacred space from defilement. That's what a cherub was.

6. I think this is important, too. The Ark did not "contain God." In other words, God did not live in the Ark. This is contra Graham Hancock and a whole bunch of other people. Rather, the Ark contained the tablets (at least). According to 1 Kings 8:9, that's all it contained. But then you have these other verses about the pot of manna and the rod of Aaron. We'll come back to that in a second.

Sarna writes this:

30:00

God is never said [MH: in the Hebrew Bible] to reside in it or to speak from it [MH: as though he were inside], only to communicate with Moses from above it (v. 22).

Exodus 25:22:

There I will meet with you from above the mercy seat between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the testimony.

God is never said to reside in it or to speak out of it (from it).

It is therefore likely that the Ark represented the footstool of God's throne, which was imagined to be situated above it. In fact, it is metaphorically so described [MH: as the footstool] in 1 Chronicles 28:2.

1 Chronicles 28:2:

Then King David rose to his feet and said, "Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant

of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building.”

Aside from all that, the main purpose of the Ark was the place of God’s presence and its role in the Day of Atonement. The lid is the *kapporet*. That’s the noun form of the verb *kpr*, which is typically translated “to atone” or “to make atonement.” To wrap our heads around the Ark and the Day of Atonement, we need to talk about the mistranslation of “mercy seat.” Let’s get into that. Sarna writes this about the *kapporet* (the lid, which many translations have as “mercy seat”):

A solid slab of pure gold is to be placed above the Ark, which was open at the top. [MH: This solid slab is the lid.] The dimensions of the slab correspond exactly to those of the Ark. This object is called in Hebrew *kapporet*, a word that has traditionally been rendered “mercy-seat” in the English versions. This is based on the Septuagint and Vulgate translations, which mean “an instrument of propitiation,” and follow the usual sense of the Hebrew stem *kpr*, “to atone, make expiation.” This understanding would appear to be strengthened by the instruction in Leviticus 16:15–16 that at this spot in the Holy of Holies the High Priest is to perform expiatory rites on the Day of Atonement. Nevertheless, “mercy-seat” is not a satisfactory translation of *kapporet*, since the aspect of “mercy” is an interpretation and is not inherent in the word.

Back in our series on Leviticus, I quoted, when we were doing the episodes there... Specifically, it’s episode 66, if you wanted to go back and listen to all of that. I quoted this same section from Sarna to make the point that the Hebrew term translated “mercy seat” (*kapporet*) simply means “lid.” That’s what it is. You have to understand what’s happening and not happening with *kpr* (to make atonement). You could go back and listen to the whole episode, but I’m going to try to summarize it here, at least maybe quote part of it based on the transcript from episode 66. But this verb (to atone) is not about satisfying a deity—appeasing a deity. It’s about purgation. It’s to purge. I used the phrase in the episode a lot, “to decontaminate.” Because if you go back and read Leviticus 16, the blood that gets sprinkled there in the Holy of Holies and the sanctuary, the inner sanctum, and on the *kapporet* (on the lid), the blood is never applied to people—*ever*. At no part of the Day of Atonement is the blood ever applied to any person. What it was about was about purging the Ark and the inner sanctum there. Wherever the blood touched, it was about purging it from defilement. And since you did this once a year, you were essentially hitting the reset button. You were restoring the sanctuary (the most holy objects and the most holy places) to their original use. You hit the reset button. Everything goes back to where it was when the priesthood and the sacrificial system essentially began. Think of it as a reset button. So I said this in the episode:

35:00

The lid and the ritual (more importantly—the Day of Atonement) ensures decontamination. It's like creating a clean room, for those of you in engineering or maybe that work in computers. That's the idea that you just cleanse and decontaminate, you protect, you insulate the specific area (in this case, sacred space) from some person bringing the offering. That includes even the high priest—a person entering sacred space. The system was designed to purge sacred space from defilement. When it gets to the innermost sanctuary, where only the high priest is allowed in on the Day of Atonement, it still has the same purpose. It still has that purpose. The term *kpr* comes from the Akkadian *kuppuru*, which means to wipe off or to wipe clean, to cleanse. It refers to the act of cleansing or wiping away impurity, wiping away contamination.

So that is the purpose for the Day of Atonement. You can summarize Leviticus 16 that way. Leviticus 16 is essentially hitting the reset button, where everything associated with the sacrificial system and the sacred space of Yahweh is reset to the original conditions. You do that once a year. It takes the sanctuary, the holy instruments, the vessels associated with service in the sanctuary, the holy place, and even the people, and restores it as though it were all made new again. That's the purpose of the ritual. So it's not about individual forgiveness of sins or anything like that. It's not about obtaining mercy. That's why the term “mercy seat” is not a good translation for the lid of the Ark. That's all it is. It's just the *lid*. *Kapporet* is the lid (if you want to say “the atoning lid”), because this is the place where the blood on that day would get sprinkled (the only time of year) and you hit the reset button. It restores everything to its pristine, original state. That was the rationale for what's going on.

So before we end... That's essentially what the Ark *is*. That's essentially what the Ark *does*—that list that I gave you. To go through it really rapidly, it's a box with a solid gold lid. The box is plated with gold. It's made from acacia wood. It's associated with God's presence. God appears above the lid to speak with Moses, so it has an oracular function. It's not a radio. It's not a machine. There are no dials on it or something like that. This is internet theology. God is never said to be *in* the box. He's never said to be *in* the Ark. He is never said to speak *out of* or *from* the Ark. He appears *above* the lid, above the wings of the cherubim that are affixed to the lid. So the Ark doesn't *contain* God.

Now back to the idea of containment, since I mentioned this. I want to unpack this a little bit. 1 Kings 8:9, do we have a contradiction here? So we'll end the episode with this. We've been taught (I was taught this) that the Ark contains three things: the tablets, the pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron. We know for sure that it has the tablets in it because it says that point-blank in a number of places. (Here in Exodus 25, and we had a reference in Deuteronomy I cited a few minutes ago.) And we actually have alluded to this idea already before when it came to the giving of the Law. Because it was typical in the ancient Near East that when a king made a covenant with another country, you would take a copy

of the covenant and you would put it under the throne, or there would be some repository place under the throne, as if to remind everyone of the covenant agreement. So I'm going to read a little bit from Sarna here. He writes this:

The sole function of the Ark is to house the tablets of stone. [MH: I would say that's its major function. But it still is the place where the reset button is hit.] According to the testimony of 1 Kings 8:9, in the Solomonic Temple "there was nothing inside the Ark but the two tablets of stone that Moses placed there at Horeb, when the Lord made [a covenant] with the Israelites after their departure from the land of Egypt." The practice of depositing legal documents in a sacred place was quite widespread in the ancient Near East. It symbolically underscored the importance of the document and projected the idea that the presiding deity witnessed and guarded it and oversaw its implementation. The disposition of such legal instruments in this manner is exemplified by, among others, the treaty of nonaggression and mutual assistance contracted between King Mattiwaza of Mitanni in Upper Mesopotamia and the Hittite monarch Suppiluliumas (ca. 1375–1335 b.c.e.)... Thus, when Moses deposits in the Ark the tablets of stone that contained the fundamentals of the covenant between God and Israel, he is following an ancient and widespread Near Eastern legal tradition.

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We referenced this "Why are there two tablets, two copies?" all this kind of stuff. So we've had this before. But that begs the question: why the wording of 1 Kings 8:9 when it says this was all that was in the Ark (the covenant)? The covenant was all that was in the Ark. It's the Ark of the Covenant. It's not the Ark of the Manna. It's not the Ark of Aaron's Rod. It's the Ark of the Covenant. Look at Numbers 17:10 and Exodus 16:33. Listen carefully as I read this.

¹⁰ And the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die."

What does the text say? The staff of Aaron isn't said to be put *in* the Ark. It's *before* the Ark (like in its presence, somewhere in the room). Exodus 16:33:

³³ And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations."

It's never said to be put in it. It's *before* the Lord. So there's no contradiction with 1 Kings 8:9. 1 Kings 8:9 is quite clear. That's the only thing that was in it (the tablets). You have to ask yourself, "What about Hebrews 9:4 in the New Testament?" Let me read you that.

³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, [MH: this is a description of the tabernacle] ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.

Hebrews 9:4 very clearly has the stuff in, but 1 Kings 8:9 denies that. And the Old Testament verses about the jar of manna and Aaron's rod certainly don't require... In fact, they don't even say that they were put in. So what do we do with Hebrews 9:4? Well, in the phrase... We're going to have a little grammar spasm here. The phrase in Hebrews 9:4 "in which was a golden urn..." It's the Greek preposition *en*, which can, of course, be translated "in" as in location—the locative sense of the preposition *en* in Greek. So is there any other way that this preposition can be translated? Well, lo and behold, there is! If you've had Greek before, this is going to be a familiar book: Dan Wallace's book on Greek syntax. It's *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics in Exegetical Syntax in the New Testament*. He lists 10 semantic possibilities for the Greek preposition *en* in the dative (which is what we have here in Hebrews 9:4): spatial, temporal (having to do with time), association, cause, instrumental, reference, respect, manner. There are a whole bunch of ways that you would translate *en* or the way you would understand the Greek preposition *en*. I think the one that is most important here is just the simple "association." So the Greek writer can use this preposition to create an association between two things (or more than two things).

So if we take that back to Hebrews 9:4, "having the golden altar of incense and the Ark of the Covenant covered on all sides with gold, which was associated with a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's staff that budded." Well, it sure was. Because those objects were said to be placed *before* (in the presence of) the Ark. So you don't have to see a contradiction here in Hebrews 9:4 either. You just have to be thinking about the semantic possibilities for this little preposition.

So with that, we're going to wrap up our episode. This was a simple introduction to the Ark. We found out what the Ark was and what it did, but we dropped some breadcrumbs all along the way here to get us to think about, "Okay, here we have this object (this box). We know what it's for. God meets with Moses above it. He gets information. So it's an oracle of some kind. It's intimately associated with the Day of Atonement ritual. It holds the tablets of the covenant. It might be taken out to the battlefield because the presence of God was associated with it. It's not a weapon. It's not a radio. It's not a transmitter." All this kind of stuff. The text never affirms these ideas. So we've covered today what the text *does* affirm, and the next time we're going to talk about, "Okay, is this like anything else that Moses would have seen or known especially? Is there a parallel antecedent to the Ark in ancient Near Eastern religion or civilization?" So we'll talk about that next time, because basically the answer is, "Yeah, there is." So we have to be

able to think well about that, especially when Exodus 25:9 and 40 had God giving Moses the template—the pattern—for it.

TS: Okay, Mike, but you left out the laser beams shooting out of it, clearly.

MH: Yeah, I don't have a verse for that. I have a Hollywood script for that, but I don't have a verse for it. [laughs]

TS: For some reason, I'm getting let down here, Mike. But that's okay.

MH: It's kind of lame, right? I know. Yep.

TS: That's alright. Well, we'll be looking forward to Part 2 next time. And we're going to have three parts on this, correct?

MH: Yep.

TS: We'll be looking forward to that. We'll let everybody go with that. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.