

Deuteronomy 31:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

Analysis

Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God—the law-book was placed beside, not inside, the ark (which contained only the Ten Commandments tablets, Hebrews 9:4). The Hebrew *mi-tzad* (מִצֵּד) means 'on the side of' or 'beside.' **That it may be there for a witness against thee**—the book functioned as legal testimony in the covenant lawsuit between Yahweh and Israel. Its presence ensured Israel couldn't claim ignorance of covenant stipulations when judgment came.

The law-book's placement beside the ark symbolized several truths:

1. comprehensive revelation accompanies foundational covenant (Ten Commandments)
2. Scripture's authority derives from proximity to God's presence (the ark's mercy seat was God's throne)
3. covenant relationship creates accountability—the witness-document testified continuously.

The phrase 'against thee' suggests prosecutorial function—Scripture exposes sin and establishes guilt. Yet paradoxically, the same Scripture that condemns offers grace, pointing to the mercy seat atop the ark where blood atonement was made (Leviticus 16).

Historical Context

Implemented circa 1406 BC, just before Moses's death. The ark's construction followed the Sinai covenant (Exodus 25:10-22); now Moses placed his completed written law beside it. This arrangement continued through Israel's history. When Josiah's reforms led to temple renovation (622 BC), the rediscovered 'Book of the Law' was apparently this very scroll placed beside the ark (2 Kings 22:8). Its recovery sparked national repentance, demonstrating Scripture's power when accessed and obeyed.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Scripture function as 'witness against' humanity—exposing sin, establishing guilt, preventing excuse?
2. Why is the law-book beside (not inside) the ark significant? What's the relationship between Ten Commandments and comprehensive law?
3. How does Scripture's dual function (condemning sin, offering grace) resolve in Christ and the Gospel?

Interlinear Text

מִצֵּד	אֶת־וְשָׂמְתָם־	הַזֶּה־הַתּוֹכָה	סֵפֶר־אֶת־לְקַח־			
it in the side	and put	of the law	this book	Take		
H6654	H7760	H8451	H5612	H3947	H853	H2088
בְּךָ־	שָׁמָּה־וְהִיא־	אֱלֹהֶיךָ־	יְהוָה־	בְּרִית־	אֶרֶץ־וְ	
	your God	of the LORD	of the covenant	of the ark		
H0	H1961	H430	H1285	H727		

לְעֵד־

that it may be there for a witness

H5707

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 31:19 (Witness): Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.