

**THE MERCY SEAT -THE
COVERING FOR SIN
EXODUS 25:17-22**

NEED: A COVERING FOR OUR SINS

PROPOSITION: THE MERCY SEAT SYMBOLIZES THE PROVISION THAT GOD HAS MADE IN CHRIST FOR THE REMOVAL OF OUR SINS.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD INDIVIDUALS TO PLACE THEIR TRUST IN THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST ALONE FOR SALVATION.

INTRODUCTION:

Though the mercy seat sat on top of the Ark of Covenant, it was actually separate from the Ark.

It was made of one solid piece of gold along with the cherubim that looked down upon the mercy seat. Estimates that have been made stated that the gold in the mercy seat would cost in our day hundreds of thousands of dollars. It was a very expensive, beautiful, sacred part of the tabernacle.

We have saved it till last in our consideration of the articles of furniture in the tabernacle.

God actually put it first in the scriptures as He began revealing to Moses how the tabernacle was to be constructed. He began with the Ark of the Covenant at the mercy seat and moved outward. I have chosen to begin with the brazen altar and move inward.

The scriptures look at it from God's perspective. I have sought to look at it from man's perspective. With God it all began at the mercy seat but with us we come to the brazen altar before we approach the mercy seat. Understanding the place and significance of this

precious piece that set in the holiest place of all is extremely important in order to understand what God has done about your sin.

So that we can put the mercy seat in its proper context, there are other matters that we need to emphasize first.

I. THE LAW IN THE ARK.

As we looked at the Ark of the Covenant, or the sacred chest, we have already noticed that there was one item in the Ark of the Covenant originally. The only thing that Moses placed in the Ark of the Covenant in the beginning was the tablets that came from the mountain. On these tablets were written the Ten Commandments. We need to see their place in the Ark of the Covenant if we are to understand the significance of the mercy seat that set upon of the Ark.

1. The revelation of the character of God.

The Ten Commandments were to the people of God a revelation not only of what God demanded of man, but also a revelation of the God that made the demands. The character of God is revealed in those Ten Commandments. He is a holy and righteous being. Everything in these commandments emphasizes that our God is holy, just, and righteous in all of His ways. These two tablets were in that chest as a constant reminder to the people of Israel that the God revealed in that holy of holies was indeed the holy and eternal one.

2. The demands of the covenant with God.

Those ten words found on stone in the sacred chest embodied the demands that God placed upon His people when He entered into covenant with them. He Himself took responsibility to make them a nation and to bring them in to the land that He had promised. The demand that He placed upon them was that they would walk by the principles that were found in those Ten Commandments. Since He was a holy God, He must have a holy people. So, those words were constantly there under the mercy seat in the Ark of the Covenant as the voice of God making holy demands upon His people. We must never forget that God cannot expect less of us than holiness.

3. The bases of our condemnation.

The other significant detail that must be realized as we look at this Ark of the Covenant and mercy seat is that those tablets were a witness against the people. The Apostle Paul in his discussion of the place of the law sums it up in his letter to the Galatians: " All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.' Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because 'the righteous will live by faith.'" (Galatians 3: 10-11). Paul is reminding the Jewish people in that first century world that rather than being the means of their salvation, the law was the bases of their condemnation. The demand of the law was simple and clear - if you do all of it, you will live! Did you hear the words that Paul said? "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law." "Everything"! That is the word that gets us. Either you give complete obedience to everything that God has revealed in the law or you find yourself under a

curse for breaking the law. The presence of those ten words written on those tables of stone in the sacred chest, is a reminder to us that the human family is under a curse. No one has lived up to the standard that is established in that law.

II. THE GLORY ABOVE THE ARK.

The very glory of God was manifest in the holy place just above the mercy seat which set on the Ark of the Covenant.

1. The place of revelation.

The picture I want you to get in your mind is that the law of God was in the Ark of the Covenant. Over the Ark of the Covenant was the mercy seat. Above the mercy seat, there was the revelation of the divine essence, the divine glory. If man in that day was to experience a special revelation of God, it was most likely to take place there at the Mercy Seat.

2. The protection of the cherubim.

As a part of the mercy seat there were these two large cherubim that would spread wings, looked down on the mercy seat. We do not have as much information about the nature of the cherubim as we would like. About the best that we know is that they were angelic beings. They appeared first in scripture when God sent the man and woman out of the Garden of Eden. "After He drove the man out, He placed on the East side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life" (Genesis 3:24). The cherubim are ordinarily associated with the throne of

God and the presence of God. They appear in scripture in Ezekiel, and particularly in the book of the Revelation. Here they were as witnesses to the reality of the revelation of God among His people. These cherubim made of gold symbolized the reality of the interest and involvement of the angelic world in the redemption that would take place here at the mercy seat.

Fix it in your mind that it was above the mercy seat that the very glory of God Himself was revealed. These angelic beings carved of gold were there as witnesses to the activity that took place at the mercy seat.

III. THE COVERING OVER THE ARK.

What we called the mercy seat was actually a golden covering for the chest, the ark of the testimony. The words used for it in the Hebrew and then translated into the Greek are very helpful in understanding the purpose and the nature of the mercy seat.

1. The gold speaks of the preciousness of God's mercy.

We have already learned in our consideration of the precious metals used in the tabernacle that gold symbolizes deity. Since that is true, it is also true that it symbolizes that which is very precious. Scholars through the years have seen in the gold that made up the mercy seat a sure sign of just how precious the attribute of divine is. It is especially precious to those of us who recognize ourselves to be under the curse and condemnation for our sins. Is it not a tremendous encouragement that it is not a seat of justice that covers the chest? It is not a seat of righteousness that covers the chest. It is a

seat of mercy. It is a symbol of the mercy of God intervening to protect sinful man from his righteousness and justice and wrath against those who have broken the law. Oh, how we need to celebrate in witness and in song the mercies of the Lord.

2. The name means propitiatory covering.

The word that is actually translated mercy seat in the Hebrew and the Greek means a propitiatory covering. Some of our newer versions of the scriptures, including the New International Version have removed the word propitiation from their translation. They did because they thought modern man no longer understood the word. They may well be right about modern man not having an understanding of the word but the words they have put in its place do not quite suggest the same thing that the word propitiation presents. The word itself has in it the idea of that which satisfies the demand of God. It is that which takes the place of human condemnation and makes it possible for God to deal with man and mercy. So the basic root idea that is in this word is important for us, and we will see just how important as we explore the truth further.

IV. THE BLOOD ON THE MERCY SEAT.

Those of you who are familiar with the rituals of the Old Covenant will remember the Day of Atonement. It is the Jewish holiday, Yon Kippur, in our day. The name Kippur comes from the same Hebrew word that is associated with the mercy seat. It means the day of covering. You will recall from the book of Leviticus that it was on that day that the priest selected two goats that were without spot and without blemish. Both of these goats were used in the ritual. One of the goats had the sins of the nation confessed over it

as the priest leaned upon it and it was carried out into a wilderness and turned loose as a scapegoat. The second was slain and its blood was taken by the appointed high priest into the holy of holies and was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The truth embodied in that ritual is so essential in God's saving plan.

1. The blood of a substitute.

Hebrew scholars tell us that this very idea is in the word that is translated mercy seat. It has in it the idea that an innocent one has died that the guilty may go free. It is obvious that the goat that was slain on Yon Kippur had not been guilty of breaking any of the Ten Commandments. A goat is not capable of breaking the Ten Commandments. It is so important that we understand that the blood that really made the difference when it was sprinkled on the mercy seat in heaven was the blood of the innocent, sinless, pure, acceptable son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the blood of the substitute was sprinkled on the mercy seat on that high and holy day. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, was sprinkled on the mercy seat in heaven.

One of the great statements in all of scripture about this event and this truth is found in the Roman Letter. In explaining God's great work of redemption Paul writes: "God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed before hand unpunished-He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just in the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:25-26). The word that is translated in the NIV "A sacrifice of atonement" is the Greek word used in the

Septuagint version of the Old Testament for the Mercy Seat. It was literally the propitiatory sacrifice, or the mercy seat. So, when you read this statement you are to understand that what the blood of that Goat was when it was sprinkled on the mercy seat in the holy of holies, the blood of Jesus Christ is to the whole of the human family. The blood of that goat according to this text only delayed the judgment until the true sacrificial one could come and His blood could be sprinkled on the mercy seat in heaven.

In a real sense, Jesus Christ is all of that and more to us. He is the priest who ministered on the Day of Atonement; He is the propitiatory sacrifice offered on the Day of Atonement; and he is the altar on which the sacrifice was offered. It is all summed up in Him so that now when you or I place our faith in His finished work as the mercy seat, we can have the assurance that our sins have been covered.

2. The blood of atonement.

I have already emphasized this word, but it bears emphasis again. Understand that in this word atonement there is a propitiatory offering that makes atonement possible. Atonement carries the idea of reconciliation with God because the sin that has offended God has been removed. So that instead of receiving the wrath of God which our sins so justly deserve, we receive the mercy of God in forgiveness and redemption.

Do you understand this truth? Do you see that Jesus Christ is indeed our mercy seat? Do you really believe that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, covers all our sins? I trust that you do! The only bases is in the understanding of the work of the mercy seat.

One of the great hymn writers of the past has left in his memoirs a witness to the power of this truth in his own heart. William Cowper was a very sensitive and gifted man. He struggled with religious doubt and fear for many years. He writes in his memoirs, "The happy period which was to afford me a clear opening of the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw was the twenty fifth verse of the third Romans, "Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed, through the forbearance of God."

"Immediately I received strength to believe it and the full beams of the Son of Righteousness shown upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement that He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In an instant, I believed and received the peace of the gospel. Unless the Almighty Arm had been under me, I think I should have died in gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears; transports choked my utterance. I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, over whelmed with love and wonder. But the work of the Holy Ghost is best described in His own words: "It is joy unspeakable and full of glory."

It is no wonder that Cowper later wrote:

There is a fountain filled with blood

Drawn from Immanuel's veins;

And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains;
Lose all their guilty stains, Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away;
Wash all my sins away, Wash all my sins away,
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away,

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power;
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more:
Be saved, to sin no more, Be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

E'er since by faith, I saw the stream

Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die;
And shall be till I die, And shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.