

Jesus Our Mercy Seat
Exodus 25:17-22

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.

The brazen altar speaks to Christ's ultimate and final sacrifice for sin
 The brazen laver represents our never-ending forgiveness after salvation
 The lampstand points to Christ as the light of the world
 The table of shewbread reminds us that Jesus is the bread of life
 The altar of incense reflects Christ's intercessory ministry for us
 The ark of the covenant represents Jesus as the law-giver and law-fulfiller, the bread of life and the resurrection and the life
 The mercy seat represents Christ's atonement and all that flows from it

Everything about the Tabernacle points to Jesus who is its ultimate and final Truth.

The ark –

- a) 3' 9" long
- b) 2' 3" high
- c) 2' 3" wide
- d) Acacia wood
- e) Overlaid with gold
- f) Four gold rings, two in each side
- g) Two acacia wood poles overlaid with gold

Picture of Mercy Seat –



On it rested the mercy seat, a single piece of gold that served as a cover for the ark and was adorned with two cherubim with wings spread and looking down onto the mercy seat.

First: The Mercy Seat Itself

The ark and mercy seat are the first pieces of Tabernacle furniture God instructed Moses to build. The tabernacle is built from the inside out, from the central, inside piece to the outside, from the most valuable piece to those less valuable.

The mercy seat was a single sheet of solid gold and the most expensive piece of furniture in the tabernacle. This is because the mercy seat is the very place where God met Israel, represented by the high priest, one day every year, on the day of Atonement.

‘mercy seat’ = HB/*kapporet* = atonement covering. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the word is “propitiation.”

God said – v 22 – “*There I will meet with you...*”

This means the Holy of Holies was God’s earthly throne room and the mercy seat/ark was God’s earthly throne.

1 Chronicles 28:2 – *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,*

Psalm 80:1 - *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.*

Psalm 99:1 - *The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!*

Jeremiah 3:16-17a - *...in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. ¹⁷ At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem*

Does this mean that God was contained in and limited by the ark? No!

1 Kings 8:27-30 - *“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! ²⁸ Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. ³⁰ And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.*

Acts 17:24-25 - *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

God’s throne is in heaven (Ps 11:4; 123:1; Is 40:22) and the earth is his footstool (Is 66:1) yet, he visited Israel at the mercy seat.

Second: The Cloud of Glory

- a) When God first appeared to Abraham

Genesis 15:17b - *a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.*

- b) When God led Israel through the wilderness

Exodus 13:21-22 - *And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*

- c) When God descended among Israel

Exodus 19:11b & 16-18 - *For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people....On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.*

d) When God appeared in the tabernacle

Exodus 40:34-38 - *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.*

Leviticus 16:4 - *...I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.*

Unlike the gods that Elijah mocked –

1 Kings 18:27-29 - *And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” ²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.*

Unlike those gods...

Isaiah 63:7-9 - *I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸ For he said, “Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.” And he became their Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

This is how the writer to the Hebrews summarizes it –

Hebrews 4:15-16 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we*

are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Third: The Mercy Seat & Propitiation

Remember God's specific instructions about approaching him -

Exodus 30:6-9 – *And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. ⁷ And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, ⁸ and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations. ⁹ You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it.*

Leviticus 10:1-3 - *Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.*

How can an unholy people approach a holy God?

Leviticus 16:1-3 - *The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, ² and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. ³ But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place...*

Let's talk about propitiation –

On the day of atonement two animals were 'sacrificed to God' –

- a) One was sent into the wilderness – *expiation = to take away*

Leviticus 16:20-22 – *And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. ²² The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.*

- b) One was killed – *propitiation = to cover*

Leviticus 16:15-16 - *...he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over*

the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

This is propitiation. The mercy seat is where atonement is made for sin and God is propitiated.

Propitiation = covering Propitiated = satisfied

The word *propitiation* carries the basic idea of appeasement or satisfaction, specifically toward God. Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to him.

Fourth: Jesus as our Mercy Seat

How does propitiation happen, and atonement occur? In Christ, God has satisfied his own anger through the death of Jesus, his Son, making Christ the only way to the Father –

Isaiah 1:11 - “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

Hebrews 10:1-10 - For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Romans 3:22b-25a - For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Hebrews 2:14-17 - Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might

become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

John 2:2 - He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 4:10 – In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 2:1-2 - My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Hebrews 10:26-31 - For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Conclusion: Look at the picture of the mercy seat

1 Peter 1:10-12 - Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

It isn't just those two angels above the mercy seat. All heaven looked forward to Christ and wondered how God would reconcile a fallen world.

Ever since the first promise –

Genesis 3:15 - I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Heaven and earth have been looking for God's redeemer

Ephesians 3:7-12 - Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known

to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

Colossians 1:24-27 - Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim...

The mercy seat and everything else in the Tabernacle points to one Person –

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

Community Groups

1. Read the text.
2. What about the Tabernacle has most changed your view of Jesus?
3. What about the Tabernacle do you most appreciate?
4. Describe the mercy seat.
5. How was it utilized?
6. How would you describe it as God's throne on earth?
7. How would you describe propitiation?
8. How would you describe expiation?
9. How does Jesus both propitiate and expiate our sins?
10. How was the mercy seat used on the Day of Atonement?
11. How does the mercy seat point to Jesus?

Daily Devotion

Mon, the 11th. Read Ex 25:17-22, 1 Chron 28:2 & Ps 139:23-24. The mercy seat was God's throne on earth. But since Pentecost, Christ dwells in you by his Holy Spirit. This makes you the place where people see/meet God. Think about your heart as God's throne room. Are there any secret closets? Are there any 'dust bunnies,' that need cleaning? Live today in the knowledge that your life is God's throne and ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify you as such.

Tues, the 12th. Read Lev 16:15-16, 20-22; Ps 103:12 & Col 2:13-15. Define propitiation and expiation to yourself. What do these two doctrines/truths say about God's love for you? Why didn't David use "north and south" in his metaphor? What specific words does Paul employ to restate the same truth? How do these doctrines give you assurance? Do your best to memorize these thoughts/texts and use them to share with someone who is unsure about salvation.

Wed, the 13th. Read Lev 16:30 & Eph 1:3. The effect of the atonement, (covering and cleansing from sin) is 'at-one-ment.' By Jesus's sacrifice, you are 'in Christ' and 'at one' with God. This makes all God's blessings available to you. In other words, what Jesus has done is so complete that you are forever united to God, being in Christ and God's blessings are your in Jesus. You don't need a 'second' blessing when the Blesser indwells you and you are in Him. Instead, you are blessed every moment with innumerable blessings. Take a moment right now to count your blessings and then, in moments of worry, doubt or heartache, remember them.

Thurs, the 14th. Read Heb 1:1-10 & 1 John 2:1. Instead of a wooden box overlaid with gold, God prepared a flesh-and-blood body for Jesus to do completely and permanently what the blood of an animal could never do. All the OT sacrifices pointed to him. Does your sin ever overwhelm you? Does it make you feel distant from God? Does it make you feel unsaved? Don't look at your sin. Look to Christ! How strong is he? How sufficient in his salvation? Whenever your sin seeks to drown you, sing, *"Upward I look, and see Him there, Who made an end of all my sin...for God the Just is satisfied, to look on Him and pardon me."*

Fri, the 15th. Read 1 Ptr 1:10-12 & Eph 3:7-12. Peter says the OT prophets served you in all their symbols, types, and metaphors about Jesus. And Paul says the result of seeing Jesus in the OT is "boldness and access with confidence" toward God. Why? Because only Jesus could, and has, perfectly fulfilled the OT prophecies of the long-awaited Messiah. These verses serve to increase our joy during the Christmas season. And perhaps we should sing, "He came, He came, Immanuel" because Jesus is God with us and he did come to rescue us from our sin; a far greater redemption than then Exodus. So think on the Tabernacle as you celebrate Christmas, remember that Jesus is the fulfilment of it all and then, sing!