

## THE MERCY SEAT



(All Illustrations from Google Images)

What was the most important object or item in the tabernacle? We've talked in the past about how the physical rituals of the Old Testament all have spiritual meaning. The sacrifices all have meanings, the things the priests wore, the articles in the tabernacle, the various Holy Days; all of these were physical things with great spiritual meaning.

Today I want to focus on just one particular item in the tabernacle, the item around which the Day of Atonement ceremonies revolved – in fact the most important part of the tabernacle!



Exodus 25:17 (NIV) "Make an **atonement cover (KJV: mercy seat)** of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide (about 4' x 2').

The Hebrew word is kaphar (similar to the kippur in Yom Kippur = Day of atonement.) It means to cover, and it was the lid covering the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the 10 Commandments.

So it was a covering over the law.

Exodus 25:18-19 <sup>18</sup> "And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. <sup>19</sup> Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. "

Two cherubim were on it, made from the same piece of gold. These are some pictures of what it perhaps looked like.



Exodus 25:20-22 <sup>20</sup> "The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. <sup>21</sup> Place the cover on top of

the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you. <sup>22</sup> There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”

It was there that God met Moses. That’s one reason I say it was the most important part of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the place where God dwelt among the people, but the Mercy Seat or Atonement Cover was the actual place where God met and communicated with man.

Notice *commune* in Verse 22 KJV: “And there I will meet with thee, and I will **commune** with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.”

Numbers 7:89 “When Moses entered the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant law. In this way the LORD spoke to him.”

Psalms 99:1 “The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.”

2 Samuel 6:2 “He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark.”

This was the only chair or seat in the tabernacle. The priests had nowhere to sit in there. They couldn’t sit on this seat. It was God’s seat, or a throne – it pictured the throne of God. It was where God’s presence was.

You might think the Holy of Holies was dark; there were no lights in there. But they certainly didn’t need lights when the brightness of God’s presence, the Shekinah glory, appeared above the mercy seat – I’m sure it flooded the Holy of Holies with light!

Leviticus 16:2 “The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.”

That’s where God appeared.

The cherubim are right at the throne of God – they picture His presence and also have the sense of guarding His presence, and His throne.

Genesis 3:24 “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.”

So perhaps the presence of the cherubim reminded the priests of that event, of the fact that they were sinful and had to be careful coming into God’s presence.

The Day of Atonement was the only day in the year when the High Priest could come into the Holy of Holies and be there at the mercy seat. On that Day he had to bring offerings to atone for his sins and the sins of the people of Israel. How did he do this?

Lev. 16:13 “He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the tablets of the covenant law, so that he will not die.”

The atonement cover had to be concealed so he wouldn't die. This was the place of the very sacred presence of God. Aaron was about to do something so profound that even he himself couldn't look upon his own actions, so the cloud concealed his vision.

Verse 14 "He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover." Blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. This was the offering to cover his sins.

Verse 15 "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. The same for the sins of the people.

Verse 16 "In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness." This is how atonement was made.

I mentioned before that Kaphar means "cover," but it also has a deeper meaning. It means to "reconcile, appease, placate, cancel, annul, cleanse, forgive, pardon, purge away."

So as well as the atonement cover being a lid to physically cover the Ark of the Covenant, it also had the sense of being a place where sin was covered or forgiven or purged away, and that happened when blood was put on it on the Day of Atonement.

Now, let's move ahead into the New Testament and see what these things mean for us today!

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

All of us have sinned and need those sins to be covered or forgiven. So we need a mercy seat too, like they had in the tabernacle.

Verse 24 "and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Our sins are forgiven freely through Jesus Christ.

Verse 25 "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished".

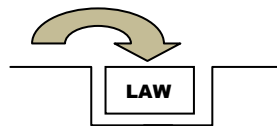
The word translated a "sacrifice of atonement" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "mercy seat" in the Old Testament. So this is saying "God presented Jesus Christ as our mercy seat."

1 John 4:10 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Jesus Christ is the mercy seat or atonement cover for our sins.

1 John 2:1-2 <sup>1</sup>"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. <sup>2</sup>He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

Jesus is the mercy seat, and He is also the one who shed His blood to put on the mercy seat, so our sins are covered and gone.

When you think of the Ark of the Covenant containing the 10 Commandments, we realise we fail to keep the law, we break the commandments. The mercy seat covers over the broken law.



No cover: we fall in!



We are covered!

Hebrews 9 talks about the spiritual meaning of the things in the tabernacle, and the meaning of the Day of Atonement rituals. It concentrates on the mercy seat or atonement cover – the most important item in the tabernacle, because that is the place where God meets man, where the barrier between God and man – our sins – is broken down, washed away, purged by the blood of Jesus.

Hebrews 9:5 “Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.”

It’s interesting that God calls His throne the mercy seat. This shows His key attribute is mercy. His mercy sets Him apart from all other gods. We are first introduced to His mercy in the Garden of Eden. Adam thought they would die when they ate the forbidden fruit. They hid in fear and shame. They deserved to die. But instead of vengeance they received a covering. God gave them clothes to cover their shame, and in His mercy He spared them from immediate death.

**Mercy = “When God does not give us what we deserve.”**

Hebrews 4:16 “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

For us, we can also approach the mercy seat to receive atonement. But notice that the “seat of mercy” has now become a “throne of grace.”

**Grace = “When God gives us what we do not deserve.”**

Notice the extra element there – as well as not being punished as we deserve, we are given great blessings we don’t deserve.

Hebrews 10:19-20 <sup>19</sup> “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body,”

We enter into the throne of God by a new and living way (the way it was done in the Old Testament was only a type pointing forward to Jesus Christ.)

Verses 21-22 <sup>21</sup> “and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

Let us do that! That is the meaning for today of the Day of Atonement. We can be at-one with God through Jesus Christ’s blood.

Verse 23 “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.” This causes us to hang in there as God’s people.

Verse 24 “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” And to spur one another on! Encourage one another positively!

Verse 25 “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

And of course it is important for us to look outward, and take this message to the world around us.

2 Cor. 5:18 “All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” God has met us at the mercy seat.

Verse 19 “that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

God has made us the mercy seat to the world – so the world can have a place to meet God.

Verse 20 “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Be at one with God, and help others around us to be reconciled. We are the priests of God, the place where others in the world around us can meet God. He makes His appeal to the world through us.

So the mercy seat was a very important aspect of the tabernacle. It was the place God met the High Priest in the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, and covered the sins of Israel.

But in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is our mercy seat – His blood cleans away all of our sins so we can approach Him boldly, not only for mercy but for grace.

Hebrews 4:16 “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

In the Old Testament, it was a throne of judgment and mercy. But the mercy seat is now the throne of grace.

Jesus doesn’t only want us to walk in forgiveness, He wants us to walk in grace – in blessing – in abundance of spiritual blessings, with His Holy Spirit in us leading us through our lives in

## **AT – ONE - MENT WITH GOD AND THOSE AROUND US.**

