

THE MERCY SEAT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Mercy Seat: Where God Meets With His Covenant People, Exo.25:1-22; Heb.9:1-5.
2. The song, "From Every Stormy Wind That Blows," is a beautiful song written many years ago by Hugh Stowell, which contains the following words:

"From every stormy wind that blows, from ev'ry swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, sure retreat, 'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.
There is a place where Jesus sheds the oil of gladness on our heads,
A place than all besides more sweet; it is the blood-bo't mercy seat.
There is a scene where spirits blend, where friend holds fellowship with friend;
Tho' sundered far, by faith they meet around one common mercy seat.
There, there on eagle's wings we soar, and sin and sense seem all no more,
And heav'n comes down our souls to greet, and glory crowns the mercy seat." – as quoted by Neal Pollard, POWER, May, 2001, Vol. Ten, Number Five, Southaven, MS
3. It has been said, with good reason, that to fully appreciate this song, one must understand what the mercy seat is.
4. In the broadest sense, the mercy seat is an O.T. institution where God met and communed with his covenant people, and which has a N.T. counterpart in Jesus Christ as our atoning sacrifice, our mercy seat.
5. This makes an understanding of the mercy seat of the O.T. significant for us under the N.T. dispensation, which is the burden of this lesson.
6. Robert C. Welch, Commentary on Hebrews, said: "People were called to an 'altar of prayer' among many denominational churches in the earlier days of our nation's history. Here the sinner was supposed to receive saving faith accompanied by some feeling as direct testimony that he was saved. In less sophisticated places this was called the 'mourner's bench.' Sometimes, in an attempt to give it a more sacred aura they would misapply an

article of furniture of the Old Testament tabernacle, calling it the 'mercy seat'."

II. DISCUSSION

A. THE MERCY SEAT IS OFTEN MENTIONED IN THE O.T., THUS IMPLYING ITS HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT PLACE IN THE LAW OF MOSES.

1. We are introduced to the mercy seat in Exo.25 just after God had made the covenant with Israel through Moses upon Mt. Sinai.
 - a. The people were to voluntarily give of their means for the building of the tabernacle and its furniture, to be built according to the pattern showed them in the mount, vv.1-9,40.
 - b. The pattern for the ark was given first, vv.10-16.
 - c. Instructions for the mercy seat followed, vv.17-22.(Read)
2. The mercy seat covered the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies in the tabernacle, Exo.26:34.
3. It was a place in the holy of holies of holiness, righteousness, and fellowship with God and instruction, Exo.25:22; Lev.16:1-15.
 - a. God told Moses, "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," Exo.25:22; cf. Exo.30:6; Num.7:89.
 - b. Not even Aaron, the High Priest, could come before the mercy seat without first offering a sin sacrifice for himself, Lev.16:1-14.
 - (1) God was there, appearing in a cloud over the mercy seat, vv.1,2.
 - (2) The ritual Aaron had to follow in offering a sin sacrifice for himself in order to approach the holiness of God there was extensive and is described in vv.3-14.
 - (a) Included in that was the placing of blood upon the mercy seat to make "atonement" for himself and for his household, vv.6,14.

- (3) The same thing was done to the mercy seat to make atonement for the people, Lev.16:15.
4. The mercy seat was so significant that in 1Chr.28:11 (9-11), the whole room called the Holy of Holies is called “the place (house) of the mercy seat.”
5. The mercy seat was the major seat of significance in the ritual on the annual Day of Atonement under the law of Moses, Lev.16:1-34; cf. Lev.23:26ff.
6. It was God’s throne of mercy under the law of Moses.
7. Other references: Exo.31:7; 35:12; 37:6-9; 39:35; 40:20; Heb.9:5.

B. THE PLACE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE MERCY SEAT.

1. The mercy seat was a cover of pure gold, two cubits and half long, one cubit and half wide, of unknown thickness, placed as a cover on the ark of the covenant, or the ark of the testimony.
2. The ark of the covenant contained the Sinaitic law, the Ten Commandment law, the two tables of stone, which was covered by the mercy seat, which was a solid plate of gold, which seat was overshadowed by two cherubim (the cherubim of glory) on the ends of it, formed out of the same piece of solid gold, with wings extended, and having each their face turned toward the other, and also toward the mercy seat, between which appeared the SHEKINAH, or the visible radiant symbol of the Divine Presence.
 - a. Cherubim are one type of angelic creature, and are frequently mentioned in connection with God’s throne, Ezek.1:22,26,28; 10:20-22; Cf. Rev.4:6-9, there referring to the highest order of created angelic beings.
 - b. The word cherub means a keeper, a guardian. These figures, as well as the cherubim of the veil and the lines curtain, were more likely symbolic of the angels who are sent to minister to the heirs of salvation of Heb.1:14.
 - c. “Shekinah” (*dwelling*) – Smith’s Bible Dict.:
 - (1) “This term is not found in the Bible. It was used by the later Jews, and borrowed by the Christians from them, to express the visible majesty of the divine Presence, especially

when resting or dwelling between the cherubim on the mercy-seat in the tabernacle and in the temple of Solomon...

- (2) “The idea which the different accounts in Scripture convey is that of a most brilliant and glorious light, enveloped in a cloud, and usually concealed by the cloud, so that the cloud itself was for the most part alone visible; but on particular occasions the glory appeared.
- (3) “The allusions in the N.T. to the shechinah are not unfrequent: Lk.2:9; Jno.1:14; Rom.9:4; Heb.9:5; and we are distinctly taught to connect it with the incarnation and future coming of the Messiah as type with antitype.”
– pp.613,614.

3. Jehovah is expressly spoken of as “dwelling” (Psa.80:1) and even as “sitting” (Psa.99:1) between the cherubim. Cf. 1Sam.4: 4; 2Sam.6:2; 2Kgs.19:15; Isa.37:16.
4. In the Bible this Divine Presence – *SHECHINAH* – the word for it used among the Jews, seems to be referred to as his glory, which appeared above the mercy seat between the cherubim.
5. When the tabernacle was finished, it said: Exo.40:34,35.
(Read)

C. THE MEANING, PURPOSE AND EFFECT OF THE MERCY SEAT IN GOD’S PLAN UNDER THE LAW OF MOSES.

1. Strong, the Hebrew noun, “Kapporeth (kap-po’-reth) – mercy seat”, is from the verb “kaphar”, kaw-far’, meaning:
 - a. “to cover; fig. to expiate...to placate or cancel: - appease, make (an) atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge (away), put off, (make) recile (-liation).”
2. It literally means “lid or to cover,” but is not used in the O.T. with the limited meaning of lid or cover, as over a box. It is derived, according to Strong, from the very kaphar (kaw-far’) found 113 times in the O.T., which by far most frequently means “to make atonement.”
3. The idea with which mercy seat is connected is not merely that of “mercy,” but of formal atonement made for the

breach of the covenant (Lev.16:1-16) which the ark of the covenant contained in its material vehicle – the two tables of stone.

4. Therefore, mercy seat is an apt translation of the Hebrew word *kap-po'-reth*, having both the ideas of *covering* and of *atonement* for sins.
5. Also, the Latin *propitiatorium* is a good rendering, meaning “a place of propitiation.”
6. From this covering on the ark of the covenant where God met with and communed with his covenant people, and from which he was wont to give forth his gracious responses (Exo.25:22; Num.7:89) it hence obtained the name *PROPITIATORY* or Mercy Seat.
7. What then was COVERED by the functions of the mercy seat under the law of Moses?
 - a. Their souls, Exo.30:6.
 - b. Their sins, Exo.32:30; Psa.32:1.
 - c. They were, Lev.23:28.
8. Thus the *covering* or the *atonement* provided by the mercy seat was very significant and a comprehensive *covering*.
9. Remember: God's presence was there! That was the place where God met with and communed with his covenant people!
10. It was that whereon the blood of the yearly blood atonement was sprinkled by the high priest, both for himself, his family and for the people of the covenant.

D. JESUS CHRIST IS OUR MERCY SEAT UNDER THE N.T., WHERE GOD MEETS WITH AND COMMUNES WITH US, HIS COVENANT PEOPLE, IN THIS DISPENSATION.

1. There is ample N.T. proof that Jesus Christ has for us the same functions as the mercy seat had for the Israelites under the law of Moses.
2. In Heb.9:5, the Greek rendering of the Hebrew noun *kapporeth* term is *hilasterion* – *hil-as-tay'-ree-on* – and is translated “mercy seat” and refers to the mercy seat of the O.T.: “And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat...”
 - a. Strong defines it as he does in the O.T. usages as “an expiatory (place or thing), i.e., (concr.) an atoning victim...mercy seat; propitiation...”

3. Then, most importantly, in Rom.3:25, the same identical Greek term is translated “propitiation” and applied to Jesus Christ.
 - a. KJV: “Whom God hath set for the be a propitiation (hil-as-tay’-ree-on) through faith in his blood...”
 - b. Berry’s lit. translation of the passage: “whom God set forth a mercy seat...”
 - c. Remember: This is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew noun kap-po’-reth – translated mercy seat in the O.T.
4. Again, in 1Jno.2:2 and 1Jno.4:10 we have a related Greek term *hilasmos* (hil-as-mos’), translated “propitiation,” referring to Jesus Christ, which Strong defines as:
 - a. “Atonement, i.e., (concr.) an expiator: -- propitiation.”
 - b. 1Jno.2:2: “And he (Jesus Christ) is the propitiation (hil-as-mos’) for our sins...”
 - c. 1Jno.4:10: “...but that he (God) loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation (hil-as-mos’) for our sins.”
5. These usages of words show that Jesus Christ has for us under the N.T. the same functions as the mercy seat had for the Israelites under the law of Moses. He is our Mercy Seat!

III. CONCLUSION

1. The mercy seat on the ark of covenant in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle is where God met with and communed with the Israelites, his covenant people, under the law of Moses.
2. Since Jesus Christ is our Mercy Seat (Rom.3:25) under the N.T. dispensation, that is the place, and the only place, we can meet with and commune with God today!
3. He, and he alone, is our high priest who has made the atonement for us at the “mercy seat” in heaven before God’s glorious presence, Heb.9:11-14,24-26.
4. With this assurance, we are beacons: Heb.4:14-16; 10:19-23.
5. By his sacrifice, and his alone, we are made alive and right with God, Rom.5:8-11; Eph.2:1-5.
6. When we come to understand the place, meaning, purpose and divine significance of the mercy seat of the O.T., we can then

fully appreciate the N.T. verses speaking of “propitiation,” “atonement,” and “reconciliation.”

- a. These N.T. words describe God’s justice and wrath being satisfied in some way.
 - b. That “some way” is Jesus’ blood sacrifice on the cross, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, and entered not into the holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us, Heb.9:11-16.
7. 2Cor.5:19 explains this by saying “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them...”
8. And Eph.1:3 declares that “all spiritual blessings are in Christ.”
9. But how do we get into Christ and thus into the presence of the glory of God at the mercy seat in order to experience this benefit made possible by Jesus Christ, our mercy seat? Heb.11:6; Jno.3:16; cf. Jas.2:24.
- a. Mk.16:15,16; Ac.2:36-38; Rom.6:3-6; Gal.3:26,27; Col.2:12.
 - b. Ac.22:16; 1Pet.3:21.
 - c. Rom.3:19-28; 6:16-18.