

Sanctuary Gifts for Mercy and Meeting God (Exodus 25:1-22)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton May 12, 2024 (www.gcb.church)

Please turn in God's Word to Ex 25 and we come to something new and huge in this book.

- God for the first time in over 2,500 years since Eden will dwell among His people again.
- Before this, God had temporarily appeared at times to their fathers, Moses at a bush, etc.
- Now God says He will continually dwell in their midst in a place all can see all the time.
- A *shekinah* glory cloud they saw in the heavens will now reside on earth in a holy house.
- God's special presence and power over Mount Sinai would now be over a mercy seat.
- His covenant grace will now appear in a covenant place over the ark of the covenant.
- On Israel's level, among them, in their camp is a residence where Yahweh will encamp.
- In the middle of their tents where they dwelt, God will have a tent for His own dwelling.
- As Israel moves through the wilderness, His visible presence will always go with them.
 - o This is the first house of God for worship, He calls it a 'sanctuary.'

This is God's Word from Mt. Sinai to Moses: Ex 25:8 *let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.* ⁹ *Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.* ¹⁰ *"They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height.* ¹¹ *You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it.* ¹² *You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it.* ¹³ *You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.* ¹⁴ *And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them.* ¹⁵ *The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.* ¹⁶ *And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.* ¹⁷ *"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.***

Ex 40 ends with God's glory in the tent and a cloud with fire resting on it for all their journeys

I want to start with the big idea of the sanctuary as a place of mercy and meeting God.

- And we started our service reading Gen 3 where sinful man first needed mercy.
- Adam and Eve in Eden could meet with and speak with God in the cool of the day.
- He was in their midst of that garden sanctuary (safe place for all creatures).
- But sin meant people can't dwell with God like that anymore, so humanity was driven out
- God placed cherubim at the entrance of paradise to keep sinners away from God's place.
- Now God tells Israel to place 2 carved cherubim over the ark of His presence for mercy.
 - o And He'll provide a way for man to approach in this life and paradise in the next.
 - o Sinful humanity driven out will be drawn near as God again dwells among people.
- And in Gen 3 God pictured atonement covering and promised Christ to crush the serpent.

God mercifully made coverings of animals skins for Adam and Eve, same word in Ex 25:5

Now there's a holy place and a most holy place for the ark covered by skins and a veil.

- Ex 25 shows God's gifts in many ways but it starts asking Israel for sanctuary gifts.

To build this special tent of meeting and mercy seat required specific materials.

³ *And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze,* ⁴ *blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair,* ⁵ *tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood,* ⁶ *oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense,* ⁷ *onyx stones...* [listen to Gen 2:12 in Eden 'gold from that land is pure...and onyx' HCSB]

- There's echoes of Eden all over Ex 25, onyx stones, and pure gold for pure worship.
- All the beautiful colors of paradise and creatures and created things will be in this place.
 - o This is a big step in God's plan to restore what sin lost in Gen 3.
 - o Ex 25 looks back and forward to the gospel

One scholar calls this sanctuary section 'the goal and high point of the book of Exodus'¹

We'll look at the materials and how they're used for the sanctuary in later sermons.

- In this text, the structure of the worship center isn't detailed, just the centerpiece ark.

Our structure/outline:

- 1. The model of the ark and heaven (v. 8-16)**
- 2. The mercy of atonement (v. 17-21)**
- 3. The message for God's people (v. 22)**

⁹ *Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.*

- God showed Moses an exact pattern or model of the furniture starting with the ark.

God doesn't first submit architectural plans for the whole, just the ark, a golden chest on poles.

- It seems God gave Moses a vision from heaven, possibly even a vision of heaven.
- Covering their faces with wings, cherubim falling down before Him (holy, holy, holy).

Heb 8 quotes Ex 25 and says Jesus '*in heaven...serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man...* [it says Jewish priests] *serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown..."* [Heb 9 calls it a model of] *an earthly sanctuary...and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover...*' (NIV).

So that's what was in the ark, and it was a copy of a heavenly model in glory above

Heb 9:23 *It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.* ²⁴ *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.*

- So the presence of God over the sanctuary ark in Ex 25 is a little piece of heaven on earth

Rev 11:19 *'God's sanctuary in heaven was opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His sanctuary'*²

So as we read Ex 25 keep in mind it's all a model of the true real one seen in heaven

Ex 25:10 measures like footstools of ancient thrones (over 2x2ft x 3.75ft). Think a king's seat:

- Jer. 17:12 *A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.*
- 1 Sam 4:4 says Israel brought '*the ark of the covenant of the LORD...who is enthroned on the cherubim*'
- Ps 99:1 *'The LORD reigns...He sits enthroned upon the cherubim...the King...worship at his footstool!'*
- Ps 132:7-8 (NLT) *Let us go to the sanctuary of the LORD; let us worship at the footstool of his throne ...with the Ark, the symbol of your power* (or NKJV has 'the ark of Your strength...Your resting place')

But they didn't put God in a box, it was a symbol of strength for weak sinners

In Ex 25:11 it's lined with pure gold fit for a king, not just on the outside, on the inside.

- It holds the royal law written in stone personally by the finger of the King of heaven.
 - o Inside is the bread of heaven that supernaturally fed Israel for 40 years.
- And the rod that did miracles to defeat the Egyptians and showed God's mighty power.
 - o That same mighty power will keep repeating itself:

- Num 10:35: *whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered..."*
- As Israel crosses the Jordan to face enemies in Canaan, the ark of the covenant went first
- Just like the Red Sea parts by a rod, a river parts by an ark with a rod so Israel can cross
- The same power and presence that defeated Egypt at the sea travels with Israel in the ark!
- Joshua, the mentor of Moses, will march the ark around Jericho 6x and walls will tumble
- When Philistines captured the ark, their God Dagon tumbled before it and lost body parts
- On its way back even some Israelites lost their lives superstitiously looking inside the ark
- Some of you can picture some Nazi's dying also when it opened (but Indiana didn't look)

TV documentaries won't find a lost ark (I wasted time on a wooden bowl in Ethiopia). Jer 3:16 *'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...* [i.e., presence not in a relic of the past].

- No reason to think it's needed in the future, if not destroyed or in a govt. warehouse.
- Whether its gold was melted by Babylonians or not, we're to worship God, not a box.
 - o There is no magic in it or glory left if it was left.
- Years ago our family visited a life-size tabernacle model and entered the holy of holies.
 - o One of our kids touched the ark replica and some thought he'd die!
 - o True story: transporting the ark, Uzzah touched it and did die.
- That's why v. 12-16 detail the rings and poles so it could be carried without touching it.
 - o Before the exile God did dwell with the ark, and even the high priest wasn't safe.
 - o God's presence is holy so men need His mercy...

Which leads to the 2nd aspect of the ark in this passage: The mercy of atonement (v. 17-21)

- 8x in 6 verses it uses the phrase 'mercy seat' (or some translations 'atonement cover').
- In v. 17 the dimensions are the same as the ark, it's a removable cover over the whole top
- v. 16 and v. 22 say God put His testimony in it so it's called *ark of the testimony* in v. 22
- Aka book of the covenant on tablets of stone, but they'll break that law and need mercy
- So in v. 18-19 with hammered gold Israel was to make cherubim over the ark mercy seat
- Cherubim is plural of cherub, but these aren't cute chubby babies, they're angel warriors
- They have flaming swords in Genesis and fiery coals in Ezekiel with faces like animals³
- But in v. 20 they're apparently face down, no face to worship, they're worshipping God
- Like in Isa 6 covering their faces from God with wings, head down toward a mercy seat
- Their focus and our focus isn't them, it's mercy for sinners in the shadow of their wings

I think of 1 Pet 1:12 'things into which angels long to look'?

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* [i.e., a gaze at the place of atonement].

- On the day of atonement, the atonement cover/mercy seat had blood on it to cover sin. Lev 16:15 *'Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood... 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 ...[v. 34] atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.'*
 - o So 1x a year, 1 man at the 1 and only mercy seat

The high priest on the ark cover made blood atonement to cover their sin

That's the mercy of atonement--this mercy seat is where God's mercy meets sinners.

- When the Hebrews later translated the OT into Greek, it's the NT word for propitiation.
- The same word translated 'mercy seat' in Heb 9 is translated 'propitiation' in Rom 3:25.

- It says God put Jesus *'forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.'*
- Jesus is presented as the mercy seat, put forward as God's atonement cover with blood.
- By faith we receive Him as Savior and bow to His Lordship like those cherubim do.

Same root word in 1 Jn 2:2: *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

- John ministered to the Jews but is saying Jesus is the mercy seat, not only for Jews.
 - o He's offered to the world, all receiving Him by faith.

He saves us, not by our 'works of righteousness...but according to his mercy' (Titus 3:5)

His mercy seat is in Lk 18, a Pharisee and publican praying outside the holy place.

- The Pharisee prays to himself, thankful he's not like others, especially that tax collector.
- But the publican is like the cherubim, head down, bowing before the place of mercy.
- Near the holy place of the ark and atonement he prays *'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*
- Same root word for mercy seat, it's literally *'God, be mercy-seated to me, the sinner.'*
- Or *'be propitiating me / an atonement cover for me with sprinkled blood for this sinner.'*
- He beats his chest, humbly repents and Jesus says he goes home justified/right with God.
 - o If you haven't yet, today can be a day of atonement

Beg 'Lord, be the ark of covenant mercy for me, a propitiating sacrifice for my sin!'

The ark kept the law in tablets Israel broke; Jesus keeps the law for us, never breaking it.

- In the ark was manna, bread of heaven, but Jesus said *'I am the true bread of heaven.'*
- Aaron's rod in the ark had showed sinners who was with God, Jesus showed us He is.
- He's the true High Priest who brought true atonement the day He said *'It is finished.'*
- The 1 man Christ Jesus died 1x for all, His own atoning blood for all who trust Him.
- He's the mercy seat of atonement for all who believe, not just covering, but forgiving sin.
- Uncleanness, transgression – all of it for all God's people is taken away by the cross!
 - o He died and rose and is seated enthroned over real cherubim!

The Lord is on His throne above, come worship and bow down like the cherubim

[The ark is about a model of heaven, mercy of atonement, and #3. The message for God's people](#)

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.*

This sanctuary / holy place was also called a tent of meeting (vs. tabernacle outer walls).

- It was where God met His people in a special way and spoke to them despite their sin.
- Ps 73:17 says I was envious, *'until I went to the sanctuary of God. Then I discerned their end.'*
 - o Coming to the sanctuary transformed his bitter inner spiral as he met God.
- The house of God today isn't the same in appearance, but I've had the same experience.
 - o Corporate worship changes us as God meets us.

Rom 12:2 'be transformed by renewing your minds' in context of spiritual worship (v. 1)

Ps 77 is written by a weeping grieving soul. He says *'My soul refused to be comforted...I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed...I am so troubled that I cannot speak...Will the Lord cast off forever?...Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?... [the turning point is v. 13:] Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary... You have declared Your strength among the people...Surely I will remember...And talk of Your deeds...'* (v. 11-12 NKJV)

- In the sanctuary God's way is on display and His strength declared among His people.

- Believers on their own can wonder if God has forgotten and can be too troubled to speak.
- But in the place of meeting and mercy, believers remember and go out talking about God.
- It's a support and help in Ps 20:2 *May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support...*
- Ps 68:17: *the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary...³⁵ Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people.*

In the sanctuary, wings overshadowing the ark's mercy seats symbolize how God meets us.

God speaks in the psalms how He meets needs in His holy place:

- In Ps 63:2 David's faint weary soul looks to the sanctuary to behold power and a love better than life.
- v. 7 may be the ark's wings: *'you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy'*
- 61:4 *'Let me live forever in your sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of your wings!'* (NLT). Both psalms connect the sanctuary where the ark was to the wings where God's presence and power met His people
- Ps 36 talks about God's house, right before says *'men put their trust under the shadow of your wings'⁴*
- God has no physical wings, but David saw in God's house wings overshadowing a mercy seat on an ark
- When he was fearful and hiding for his life from Saul, he prayed Ps 57:1 *'Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge...'*
- Ps 17:8: *'hide me in the shadow of your wings'* and *'keep me as the apple of your eye'* (special focus)

Safety, strength, help, refuge, joy – all of that sings in this metaphor of wings

God's special presence, power and protection is symbolized in overshadowing wings.

- And He'll meet and speak to His people and give them more (v. 22 *'all that I will give you'*).
 - o Isaiah 8:14 says Messiah *'will become a sanctuary...'*
 - o The person of Christ is where the glory and Godhead dwells.

God's message to speak and place to meet His people is given more in Christ.

- Today we can meet the Lord every day and hear Him speak to us in His complete Word.
- New covenant grace writes His law not on tablets of stone, on new hearts to obey Him.
- Testimony is now a word we take up to tell others how our merciful Savior met us in sin.
- The OT mercy seat was made of solid gold from earthly riches Egyptians gave them.
- In the NT, God who is rich in mercy seats us with Christ in heavenly places, Eph. 2.
- OT Jews met God in a sanctuary limited to 1 place, the church meets Him worldwide.
 - o And individuals can speak directly to Him in prayer always

John Newton: Approach, my soul, the mercy seat, Where Jesus answers prayer;

There humbly fall before His feet, For none can perish there.

Thy promise is my only plea; With this I venture nigh;

Thou callest burdened souls to Thee, And such, O Lord, am I!

Bowed down beneath a load of sin, By Satan sorely pressed,

By war without and fears within, I come to Thee for rest.

Be Thou my shield and hiding-place, That, sheltered near Thy side,

I may my fierce accuser face, And tell him Thou hast died. O wondrous love!...⁵

1 Jn 4:10 applies that love: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation [mercy seat] for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

- That's part of the message to God's people, Christ's propitiation is the definition of love.
- In light of His love, we ought to love one another, sacrificially, mercifully, how can you?
- In light of His atonement covering, who can you love more, covering a multitude of sins?
- In light of His mercy seat, where do you need to more mercifully speak? In your home?
- In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy, consecrated to God.

‘Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee ...
Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne’ (not the seat on the ark, my heart)

In light of His giving, His people should give. Ex 25:1 *The LORD said to Moses,* ² “*Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.*” ³ *And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze...*

We’ll sing ‘Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold’

- NIV has offering ‘*from each man whose heart prompts him to give,*’ NKJV ‘*willingly with his heart...*’
- God gives this sanctuary to support His people who He calls to give to support it, by their resources
- Our church building has had a lot of extra expenses and repairs last 2 years, to consider as you give
- Ex 25 isn’t the later law of tithes, this is offerings by grace, above and beyond for this special project
- I think of our special building project for Joyce Owen to rebuild her mission house after the typhoon
- As your heart moves you, give to that project, contribute more to missions on top of church giving
- Israel had mandatory giving of 10% of various crops, this was voluntary extra gifts for the sanctuary
- Church buildings where we meet for worship look different, but the NT applies this same principle
- 2 Cor 9 uses that word ‘contribution’ for grace-motivated offerings (v. 14-15 ESV). It applies it ‘*be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation...*’ ⁷ *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver* (v. 5, 7 NKJV).

By His love, let’s give cheerfully and generously, not under compulsion. Not just our treasures, let’s give our time and talents to serve others, all we are or have. Sing take my hands, my feet, my voice, my lips, my intellect, my will, my love, all for Thee. If that’s your heart, say amen

¹ Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, p. 155.

² HCSB.

³ See Ezekiel 10, which seems to link the cherubim there to the vision in chapter 1.

⁴ Psalm 36:7-8 NKJV.

⁵ John Newton, “Approach My Soul, the Mercy Seat!”