

## Study #9 The Holy of Holies

### Introduction

The Holy of Holies was the place the very presence of YHWH was to be found in the Tabernacle. It was the dwelling place of God and His presence was signified by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire at night (Fig 9.1). Every Israelite knew without question that God was “tabernacled” among them. The Holy of Holies was separated from the Holy Place, the place of fellowship with God, by the veil

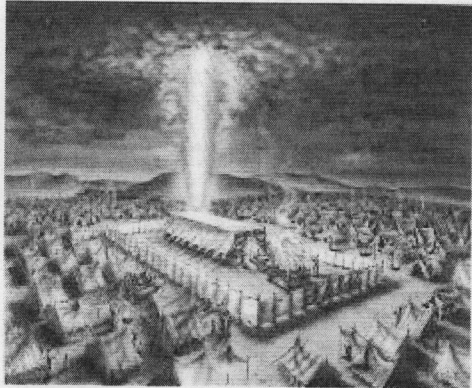


Fig 9.1 The presence of God in the Holy of Holies

### The furniture of the Holy of Holies

In this special room in the Tabernacle, a floor area of a mere fifteen feet square, was the Ark of Testimony, also known as the Ark of the Covenant (Fig 9.2) and the mercy seat (Fig 9.3). The Ark represented the Person of Christ and the mercy seat represented the Throne of God in the midst of His people.

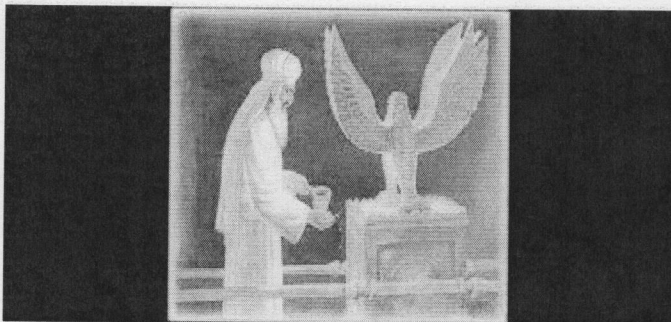


Fig 9.2 The Ark of Testimony

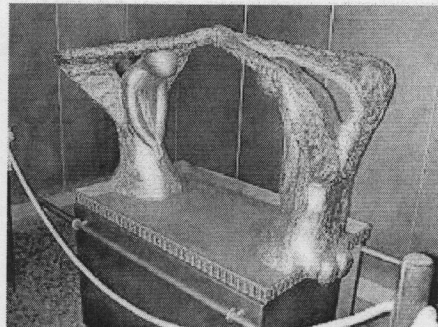


Fig 9.3 The mercy seat

The mercy seat also revealed the mercy that God could and would extend to sinful people if they came to Him in the prescribed way – sacrifice, then sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat. The sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat satisfied (propitiated) the righteous

and holy demands of God. While Paul tells us in no uncertain terms in Romans 3.23 that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, he goes on to tell us in verses 24-26 how the blood of Christ is set forth to be a propitiation through faith.

The sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat in the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement was a clear typology of God's satisfaction for sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. No man is capable of satisfying the demands of God other than Christ who by His death on the cross became the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2.2). Because Christ fully satisfied the holy demands of God for our sins, God is completely just in extending righteousness to the one who places faith in Christ. God did not overlook or minimize sin in any way; rather, His demands were fully satisfied once and for all time in the Person of Christ. This is otherwise known as imputed righteousness.

The Ark was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold to represent the two aspects of Christ – humanity and deity. The Ark was the symbol that God, through Christ, was dwelling amongst His people. It was the base of His throne and as such it was the most sacred and glorious instrument in the entire Tabernacle. In fact, the Tabernacle was purpose built to house the Ark so God could dwell amongst the Israelites. The Ark is the first piece of furniture mentioned after God told Moses "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell amongst them" (Exod 25.8). Thus the Ark becomes the most complete type of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in all the bible, for it was He who came to "tabernacle" among men.

In speaking of Jesus being with us, most versions say that Christ either "dwelt," "pitched His tent," or "took up residence." All these translations miss something very important. In the Greek, John says that Jesus "tabernacled" with us. There is only one English translation that puts it this way: "And the Word became flesh, and did *tabernacle* among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth." (*Young's Literal Translation*)

The word "tabernacled" gives a much fuller meaning of what Jesus did than does a word like "dwelt." The reason for this should be clear. When we hear "tabernacled," our minds immediately think of the Old Testament tabernacle which was the place of God's presence with His people.

The Ark points to the person of Christ while the mercy seat speaks of the work of Christ.

### **The Contents of the Ark**

The Ark of the Covenant contained three items: the golden pot containing manna, Aaron's rod that budded and the unbroken tables of the Law.

The presence of the manna was in itself a miracle. God had told the Israelites to take all they wanted, but what they did not use could not be stored because it would quickly spoil. Each day they had to trust God that there would be more manna on the ground when they awoke and they were to collect what they needed for that day. Since the manna had sustained the

lives of the Israelites physically, it is a fitting symbol of Jesus Christ who sustains us spiritually. It was a sign of God's faithfulness in caring for His own.

When Jesus emphasized that He was the Bread of Life (John 6) He contrasted Himself with the manna that came down in the wilderness in that those who ate the manna eventually died, but those who eat of the Bread of Life live forever. Therefore, the manna in the golden pot represents Christ as the great provider and sustainer of life. As we consider that Christ was Prophet, Priest and King, the manna in the golden pot represents Him as Prophet. A Prophet gave God's Word to others and in John 6 Christ is presented as the Word to be eaten, even as the manna foreshadowed.

Also placed in the Ark was Aaron's rod that budded (Heb 9.4). Since Aaron was a High Priest, representing the people to God, this rod speaks of Christ as our High Priest, representing us before God the Father. Numbers 17 records the incident when Aaron's authority was challenged and God caused his rod to produce almond blossoms as proof that His blessing was on Aaron and his descendants.

The final item in the Ark was the tables of the Law. When God first gave the Law to Moses in the mount he came down to the people only to find them idol worshipping and in anger he threw the stone tables down and broke them. This is a picture of how man has rebelled against the commands and standards of God's righteousness and broken the Law. In time, God called Moses back up on the mount, gave him the Law inscribed on new tables (Deut 10.2) and told him to place them in the Ark, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ who kept the Law perfectly. Because He kept the Law perfectly and is come as Lord of all, the tablets of the Law represent Him as our King.

Man's attempt to lower the standards of God to match his own behaviour is a totally futile exercise. It does not work because God's standards are prescribed in Law and He does not lower them for anyone (Heb 12.14).

### **The Mercy Seat**

Sitting on top of the Ark of the Covenant was the mercy seat which was made of solid gold with two gold Cherubim (cf Fig 9.3), one at each end with their wings almost touching (Exod 25.17-18). God then clearly instructed Moses to place the mercy seat upon the Ark, and that He would meet Moses from above the mercy seat between the two Cherubim (Exod 25.21-22).

The mercy seat, being made of pure gold represented God's dwelling among sinful people. Being placed on top of the Ark, the mercy seat revealed that God could cover the Ark which contained the Law revealing His standards of holiness – and show mercy. So here demonstrated is the way that God could cover man's great sin in breaking the Law and extend mercy to mankind. God had to remain just and righteous, without lowering His standards of holiness but still extend mercy because of the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat. Today, the sacrificial blood of Jesus stands between God and the Law (Heb 10.3-4 & 12) and satisfies completely the holy standards demanded by His righteousness (Rom 3.26).

In His life the Lord Jesus Christ magnified the Law and made it honourable by keeping it perfectly. In His death He became the propitiation which God allowed to extend mercy to mankind. In this sense, Jesus Christ was our mercy seat for we must come through the cross to receive His grace and therefore His righteousness.

## **The Meaning of the Mercy Seat**

The typical meaning of the mercy seat is divinely explained in Romans 3.25. Concerning Christ Paul said: "Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" (NASB). The Greek word which is translated "propitiation" in this verse is exactly the same word translated "mercy seat" in Hebrews 9.5 which says: "Over it, the Cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat." By comparing scripture to scripture, it is plain that Jesus Christ was the fulfilment in the flesh of that which the mercy seat pointed towards. Christ is the mercy seat because He propitiated God for our sins; thus He is our propitiation. In I John 2.2 and 4.10, He is indeed declared outright to be our propitiation.

Christ's sacrifice fully paid the penalty for sin and satisfied the holy demands of God, so it was not necessary for God to lower His standards of righteousness in order to justify sinful man. Any person who trusts Jesus Christ as their Saviour receives the righteousness of Christ Himself – an act on God's part termed "imputation." Propitiation is very pointedly defined in Hebrews 10.11-12 where the author compares the repetitive work of the OT priest to the one-time sacrifice of Christ.

The mercy seat represented the place of rest for God because it looked ahead to the time when there would be complete rest in the finished work of Christ. In this case, the word rest does not refer to obtaining relief from weariness but to a defense attorney resting his case in a court proceeding. This rest which is found in Christ Jesus is referred to in Hebrews 4 – He is the end of the struggle for everyone who believes in Him and walks by faith, a precious truth that is summed up in the chorus of the well-known gospel song "It Is Finished:"

It is finished, the battle is over  
It is finished, there'll be no more war  
It is finished, the end of the conflict  
It is finished and Jesus is Lord