



Lake Wales
Church of Christ
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33898
www.lakewalescoc.com
(863) 676-4114

VOL. XXIX
NO. 19
May 11, 2014

Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

The Meaning Of the Mercy Seat

For the last six weeks, and concluding today, we have been learning about the travels of the Ark of the Covenant throughout the Bible. We have learned some interesting lessons, including the things that God wants His people to treasure forever, God’s willingness to defend His holiness, and God’s reminder that He cannot be reduced to a good luck charm but instead remains divinely enthroned above the heavens regardless of what happens to the box.

But we have never considered the reason that God instructed the children of Israel to construct the Ark of the Covenant in the first place. This seems like a fitting place to end the series.

In Exodus 25, God gave Moses the blueprint for the tabernacle, a place of worship where the children of Israel were to approach Him (rather than on every high hill and under every green tree, as the heathens did). Interestingly, it was a tent, a portable place of worship, which could be taken down and carried with the children of Israel as they traveled through the wilderness and on toward the Promised Land.

Part of this blueprint was the instruction for various pieces of furniture, which were to accommodate the actual worship within the tent. These included—from outside to inside—the bronze altar of sacrifice, the washbasin, the seven-branched lampstand, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and finally, out of sight behind the veil, in the holiest place, the Ark of the Covenant.

This ark was a box a little less than four feet long, and a little more than two feet wide, made of acacia wood, and overlaid with pure gold, with rings and poles for transporting it. We have already described what was in the box. What was on top of the box was even more important.

And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (Exodus 25:17–22).

Clearly, the blueprint for the ark evokes God's throne room in heaven, an earthly representation of a spiritual reality. In passages where prophets beheld God, He is seated on a throne, shrouded by glory, and surrounded by the cherubim (Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Revelation 4). Of course, God wasn't literally reducing Himself to a voice in a box, but rather, in "a copy and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5, *cf.* 9:24), He was providing a situation that accommodated the needs of the people while reflecting certain truths about His majesty.

Once the children of Israel under the direction of Moses finished building the tabernacle and positioning its furniture, God took up His place upon the mercy seat.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel (Exodus 40:34–38).

It is fitting that God would call the place where He met with His people the seat of “mercy.” God revealed His will to Moses here, for the presence of God and the will of God cannot be separated. But God also provided forgiveness and redemption here. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the holiest place, after making the extensive and careful preparations described in Leviticus 16, and sprinkle blood on and in front of the mercy seat. This was “to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year” (v. 34). That way, God forgave the people’s sin.

The presence of God upon the mercy seat also showed God’s desire to dwell amongst His people. God wanted to be with His people. Moses pointed out, “What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him?” (Deut. 4:7). Indeed, what other nation on earth could claim that God led them with His own presence, and guided their footsteps, and guarded their pathways, and fought their battles? None! God truly showed that He had chosen Israel.

And yet, all this merely prefigured the reality of God’s dwelling with the church. Jesus entered the real throne room of God and brought His blood within the veil, so that we could have true fellowship with God. Now the church is the very temple of God! The New Testament says,

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

You ... are of God's household ... having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22).

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:5–10).

In the Old Testament, God dwelt with His people above the ark. In the New Testament, God dwells in the temple of His church, the body of Christ. We should appreciate the fellowship that we have with our God. We enjoy a closeness with God that the nation of Israel could only dream about! We should behave in such a way as brings glory and honor to His name, as the very expression of His nature upon the earth, "for we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" (2 Cor. 6:16). We should take seriously our duty to bear the good news of salvation throughout the world, as a people called out of the darkness to proclaim the excellencies of His salvation!

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

"Go through life chin up, knees down."

—*author unknown*